Leadership practice in small asylum seeker and refugee charities

Sally Vivyan

Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership, Department for Public Leadership and Social Enterprise, Open University Business School

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

May 2022
Abstract

This thesis explores leadership practice in small asylum seeker and refugee charities. It draws on a single in-depth case study of a charity based in the North East of England. Fieldwork was conducted over 14 months employing a range of qualitative data collection methods. A Leadership-as-Practice (L-A-P) theoretical lens was adopted and reflexive thematic analysis used to generate findings that provide an in-depth and holistic account of leadership practice. Leadership practice at the charity is conceptualised as containing collective and collaborative elements. The relational dynamics of this leadership practice are brought to the fore, including how people interact across social and organisational boundaries and with their material environment to set the direction of work. The context of the UK asylum system and trends in the UK voluntary sector are also shown to have a tangible impact on leadership practice at the charity both at the day to day level and on an organisational scale. The L-A-P lens brings a distinctive understanding of materiality to the analysis, which is expressed through evocative vignettes. It also enables the use of post heroic and critical leadership theories as a toolbox from which concepts can be drawn to form a holistic account of leadership practice. This approach may be particularly suited to the study of small charities which are heavily influenced by factors that are not the focus of traditional heroic theories of leadership. Overall, this thesis furthers our understanding of leadership in voluntary sector settings and helps to develop L-A-P as an approach to leadership research. The insights it generates into the UK asylum system and voluntary sector also make this thesis of relevance to literature focused on these fields.
Acknowledgements

I have truly enjoyed working on this PhD and that is in no small part due to the people who have been with me on the journey. I’d like to thank my excellent supervisory team, Nik Winchester, James Rees and Carol Jacklin-Jarvis who have consistently given me the level scrutiny and encouragement I needed as well as a really good balance of views and expertise. I would also like to thank the OU community, particularly colleagues at the Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership and the administrative team at FBL for their support and inclusivity. I must thank my children for being the enforcers of work life balance and a continual reminder of life beyond academia. My husband has been a constant presence and a very patient sounding board on many a lunchtime walk and lockdown meltdown. Having the whole family behind me and ready to help, especially our parents with childcare where lockdowns and geography allowed, has made this project much more possible and rewarding that it may otherwise have been.

Most importantly I would like to thank the inspiring and life affirming people I met during my fieldwork without whom this project wouldn’t exist. This PhD is dedicated to all those people who maintain a sense of humanity as their driving force in life, irrespective of circumstance. Most especially it is dedicated to one of the first and greatest of these people in my life, Nich Kumah, who was taken from us too early in the Covid-19 pandemic.
# Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. 2  
Acknowledgements ............................................................................................................................... 3  
List of tables ........................................................................................................................................... 9  
List of figures ......................................................................................................................................... 9  
List of Vignettes ..................................................................................................................................... 9  
List of abbreviations ............................................................................................................................... 10  
Chapter One- Introduction ...................................................................................................................... 11  
1.1. Research focus ................................................................................................................................... 11  
1.2. Research context ............................................................................................................................... 13  
1.3. Contribution ...................................................................................................................................... 14  
1.4. Thesis structure ................................................................................................................................. 16  
1.5. Conclusion to the chapter .................................................................................................................. 19  
Chapter Two- Leadership studies literature review ................................................................................ 20  
2.1. Chapter Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 20  
2.2. Locating L-A-P in the field ............................................................................................................... 21  
2.2.1. Heroic leadership ......................................................................................................................... 23  
2.2.2. Post heroic leadership .................................................................................................................. 25  
2.2.3. Critical leadership studies .......................................................................................................... 27  
2.3. Leadership- as- Practice (L-A-P) ...................................................................................................... 29  
2.3.1. Definition ..................................................................................................................................... 30  
2.3.2. L-A-P’s origins and account of leadership .................................................................................... 30  
2.3.3. The blurry boundaries of L-A-P and closely related traditions .................................................... 32  
2.3.3.1. Relational Leadership ............................................................................................................. 33  
2.3.3.2. Collective Leadership ............................................................................................................. 34  
2.3.3.4. Collaborative leadership ......................................................................................................... 36  
2.3.4. Materiality, Mundanity and the distinctiveness of the L-A-P approach ............................................ 37  
2.3.5. Power, agency and the unit of analysis in L-A-P ........................................................................... 39  
2.3.6. L-A-P as an approach to development ......................................................................................... 41  
2.3.7. L-A-P as an approach to research ................................................................................................. 42  
2.4. Themes to illuminate leadership practice: Place, Practices and People .............................................. 46  
2.4.1 Articles Exploring Place ............................................................................................................... 47
2.4.2 Articles Exploring Practices .................................................................................. 48
2.4.3. Articles Exploring People..................................................................................... 49
2.5. The theoretical lens for this study ............................................................................ 51
2.6. Chapter conclusion ................................................................................................. 51
Chapter Three- Voluntary Sector Studies Literature Review ........................................ 55
3.1. Chapter Introduction .............................................................................................. 56
3.2. Introduction to the field of UK Voluntary Sector Studies ....................................... 57
3.3. Leadership studies and the UK Voluntary Sector .................................................... 60
  3.3.1. Leadership Development ..................................................................................... 61
  3.3.2. Leadership Research .......................................................................................... 62
    3.3.2.1. Studies of leaders .......................................................................................... 62
    3.3.2.2. Studies of leadership .................................................................................... 63
3.4. The research agenda .............................................................................................. 64
3.5. Small charities in the UKVSS literature ................................................................ 65
  3.5.1. Charities ............................................................................................................. 66
  3.5.1. Small charity independence .............................................................................. 67
3.6. ASR organisations in the UKVSS literature ............................................................. 71
  3.6.1. ASR charities and the influence of policy ......................................................... 72
  3.6.2. ASR groups and organisational development .................................................. 74
3.7. Chapter Conclusion ............................................................................................... 75
Chapter Four- Context ................................................................................................. 76
4.1. Chapter Introduction .............................................................................................. 76
4.2. Immigration and asylum in the UK ....................................................................... 77
  4.2.1. Definitions ......................................................................................................... 77
  4.2.2. Asylum policy .................................................................................................... 78
    4.2.2.1. The politicisation of asylum ......................................................................... 82
    4.2.2.2. ASR lives in the UK .................................................................................... 83
4.3. The Asylum Seeker and Refugee Sub Sector .......................................................... 87
  4.3.1. The role and make-up of the ASR sub sector .................................................... 87
  4.3.2. Types of ASR VSOs ........................................................................................ 89
4.4. The place of study .................................................................................................. 90
  4.4.1. The City ........................................................................................................... 91
  4.4.2. The charity ....................................................................................................... 93
4.5. Chapter Conclusion .............................................................................................. 96
Chapter Five- Methodology ......................................................................................... 97
5.1. Chapter Introduction ............................................................................................. 97
5.2. Research Philosophy .................................................................................................................. 97
  5.2.2. Ontology ................................................................................................................................. 98
  5.2.3. Epistemology ............................................................................................................................ 99
  5.2.4. Axiology .................................................................................................................................. 99
5.3. Case study approach .................................................................................................................... 101
5.4. Research design .......................................................................................................................... 104
  5.4.1. The scoping study ...................................................................................................................... 104
  5.4.2. Access and chronology of fieldwork ......................................................................................... 106
  5.4.3. The research question .............................................................................................................. 108
  5.4.4. Types of data collected ............................................................................................................ 109
    5.4.4.1. Semi structured interviews ................................................................................................. 111
    5.4.4.2. Document review ............................................................................................................... 113
    5.4.4.3. Observation ....................................................................................................................... 113
  5.4.5. Ensuring the reliability and validity of data ............................................................................ 115
5.5. My position as researcher ........................................................................................................... 117
5.6. Data analysis ................................................................................................................................ 118
  5.6.1. Unit of analysis ......................................................................................................................... 118
  5.6.2. Thematic Analysis ................................................................................................................... 119
  5.6.3. My approach to thematic analysis .......................................................................................... 121
5.7. Reflexivity ..................................................................................................................................... 126
5.8. Ethical considerations .................................................................................................................. 127
5.9. Chapter Conclusion ...................................................................................................................... 131
Chapter Six- Beyond the border; exploring leadership practice that transcends organisational
boundaries .............................................................................................................................................. 132
6.1. Introduction to the findings ........................................................................................................ 132
  6.1.1. Definitions that underpin the findings ....................................................................................... 132
  6.1.2. The use of data in the findings ................................................................................................ 133
  6.1.3. Terminology in the findings .................................................................................................... 134
  6.1.4. The research site ..................................................................................................................... 135
6.2. Theme One- Collaboration in leadership practice ...................................................................... 136
  6.2.1. Theme introduction ................................................................................................................ 136
  6.2.2. Leading and co-ordinating collaborative work ................................................................. 137
  6.2.3. Seeking synergy in key relationships ...................................................................................... 142
  6.2.4. Building relationships for collaboration ................................................................................. 145
  6.2.5. Practising through place-based tensions ............................................................................... 150
  6.2.6. Theme summary .................................................................................................................. 152
6.3. Theme Two- Client driven leadership practice .......................................................... 152
  6.3.1. Theme introduction ......................................................................................... 153
  6.3.2. Responsive relationships .............................................................................. 154
  6.3.3. Developing responsive capacity ................................................................. 156
  6.3.4. Responsive practice beyond the immediate .................................................. 159
  6.3.5. Mission nudge vs mission drift ..................................................................... 163
  6.3.6. Theme Summary ......................................................................................... 167
6.4. Chapter conclusion .............................................................................................. 168
Chapter Seven- Looking within; exploring leadership practice inside organisational boundaries ... 169
  7.1. Introduction to the chapter ............................................................................... 169
  7.2. Theme Three- Collectivity in leadership practice ............................................. 169
    7.2.1. Theme introduction ...................................................................................... 169
    7.2.2. Leadership through partnership ................................................................... 170
    7.2.3. Sharing duties across leadership structures ............................................... 173
    7.2.4. Reshaping leadership structures ................................................................. 176
    7.2.5. Distributing authority between staff and trustees: a relational dance ........ 179
    7.2.6. Theme Summary ......................................................................................... 182
  7.3. Theme Four- The relational shaping of leadership practice ............................ 182
    7.3.1. Theme introduction ...................................................................................... 182
    7.3.2. Volunteer led vs staff led ............................................................................ 183
    7.3.4. Ambiguity in voluntary practice .................................................................. 187
    7.3.5. Boundaries and burnout ............................................................................. 193
    7.3.6. Flexibility in volunteer roles ....................................................................... 197
    7.3.7. Theme Summary ......................................................................................... 199
  7.4. Conclusion to the findings ................................................................................ 200
Chapter Eight- Discussion ......................................................................................... 203
  8.1. Chapter Introduction ........................................................................................ 203
  8.2. Answering the Research Question; a conceptual discussion ......................... 204
    8.2.1. Collaboration in leadership .......................................................................... 204
    8.2.2. Client Driven leadership practice ............................................................... 207
    8.2.3. Collectivity in leadership practice ............................................................... 209
    8.2.4. Relational shaping of leadership practice .................................................... 210
    8.2.5. Cross cutting ideas ...................................................................................... 211
      8.2.5.1. Interactions as the unit of analysis .......................................................... 212
      8.2.5.2. Materiality .............................................................................................. 212
      8.2.5.3. The mundane ........................................................................................ 214
8.2.5.4. Context.................................................................................................................. 215
8.2.5.5. Power..................................................................................................................... 218
8.2.5.6. The dark side of leadership................................................................................... 219
8.2.6. Answering the research question; a conceptual summary ..................................... 220
8.3 Developing an account of leadership ........................................................................... 222
8.3.1. Conceptualisation of leadership in the findings ....................................................... 222
8.3.2. L-A-P as a way of looking ....................................................................................... 224
8.3.3. Understanding leadership practice in small charities ............................................. 225
8.4. This study as a Voluntary Sector study ...................................................................... 227
8.4.1. Small charities ........................................................................................................ 227
8.4.2. The ASR sub sector ............................................................................................... 229
8.5. Chapter Conclusion ................................................................................................. 233
Chapter Nine- Conclusion ....................................................................................... 235
9.1. Chapter Introduction .............................................................................................. 235
9.2. Answering the research question ............................................................................. 235
9.3. My contribution ...................................................................................................... 237
  9.3.1. Leadership Studies: developing the L-A-P lens ...................................................... 237
  9.3.2. Voluntary Sector Studies: understanding leadership and new insights ................ 239
9.4. Reflections on the methodology and limitations of the study ................................ 240
  9.4.1. The impact of COVID-19 .................................................................................... 241
  9.4.2. Limited generalisability ....................................................................................... 243
  9.4.2. Limits to the L-A-P approach .............................................................................. 244
  9.4.3. Application to practice ....................................................................................... 245
9.5. Potential for future research .................................................................................... 247
9.6. Chapter Conclusion .............................................................................................. 249
Bibliography .............................................................................................................. 250
Appendix i Participant information sheet and consent form ........................................ 268
Appendix ii Interview schedule .................................................................................... 272
Appendix iii Interview questions July 2020 ................................................................. 274
Appendix iv Data Management Plan ............................................................................ 275
Appendix v Extract from report to ‘the charity’ May 2021 .......................................... 277
List of tables

Table 1- Policy milestones and government initiatives relating to asylum seekers and refugees...... 80
Table 2- Type of VSOs which make up the UK ASR sub sector ................................................................. 88
Table 3- Chronology of fieldwork .............................................................................................................. 1077
Table 4- Summary of data collected ........................................................................................................... 1100

List of figures

Figure 1- Asylum seeker location by local authority 2016 (GOV.UK, 2016) .................................................. 79
Figure 2- Number of people claiming asylum in the UK 1979-2019 (Migration Observatory, 2020) .. 81
Figure 3- Where asylum seekers and settled refugees are in the UK (Migration Observatory, 2020) 91
Figure 4- How the organisation types in the ASR sub sector relate to the case study charity ........ 955
Figure 5- Illustration of data analysis ......................................................................................................... 1244
Figure 6- Division of responsibilities at the charity .................................................................................... 1366 & 184
Figure 7- Ambiguous roles at the charity ................................................................................................. 18787
Figure 8- Answering the research question ............................................................................................. 2211

List of Vignettes

Vignette 1- The drop-in ............................................................................................................................ 13737
Vignette 2- The welcome pack .............................................................................................................. 1433
Vignette 3- Stuff ....................................................................................................................................... 1566
Vignette 4- Hello hands .......................................................................................................................... 1600
Vignette 5- Formation of ‘The Three’ ..................................................................................................... 1766
Vignette 6- Abel ......................................................................................................................................... 18989
Vignette 7- The Mug ............................................................................................................................. 197
List of abbreviations

ASR- Asylum Seeker and Refugee
CVSL- Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership
EU- European Union
LAASLO- Local Authority Asylum Liaison Officers
L-A-P- Leadership- as- Practice
LS- Leadership Studies
NRPF- No Recourse to Public Funds
OU- Open University
RCO- Refugee Community Organisation
TA- Thematic Analysis
UKVSS- UK Voluntary Sector Studies
VS- Voluntary Sector
VSO- Voluntary Sector Organisation
Chapter One - Introduction

1.1. Research focus

This thesis explores leadership practice in small Asylum Seeker and Refugee (ASR) charities. The research question for the study is: how is leadership practiced in a small asylum seeker and refugee charity? My motivations for the study began as a mix of the personal and the professional and my choices about the study became increasingly driven by theoretical and academic learning as the process went on. Having worked with and for small charities for 17 years prior to starting the PhD I was passionate about the positive role they can play in complex social problems and frustrated by the difficulty involved in carving out time and resources for understanding the dynamics that enable and challenge that role. On a personal level I was concerned with how, as a society, we are struggling to respond in an adequate and humane way to the complex issue of asylum. Where I live in the North East of England, which is home to several dispersal areas for asylum seekers, this is a substantial focus for the voluntary sector. Putting these two concerns together at the heart of my study felt a good fit and as I researched the voluntary sector and leadership literature further, I realised that small asylum seeker charities barely featured in existing research. Similarly, leadership research into UK charities was underdeveloped. My research question and particular approach is a response to these gaps and my intention for the output of this PhD is that it helps to develop researcher and practitioner understanding of how leadership practice actually happens in the real world setting of a small asylum seeker and refugee charity.

The answer to the research question comes in the form of an in depth and holistic exploration of leadership practice at a small ASR charity which I have viewed through a Leadership-as- Practice (L-
A-P) lens (Raelin, 2016a). Leadership practice at the charity is conceptualised using a combination of ideas from post heroic and critical leadership theories including L-A-P, collective, collaborative and relational leadership and the dark side of leadership (Crevani, 2015; Ospina et al., 2020; Raelin, 2016a; Tourish, 2013; Vangen and Huxham, 2003). The primary research for the study centres on a single charity based in the North East of England. I spent 14 months studying this charity between 2020-21, employing a range of qualitative data collection methods and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun et al., 2019; Hartley, 2004; Yin, 2017). The fieldwork phase of this study coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and spanned two national lockdowns and a series of local restrictions. This affected both the structure and pattern of my fieldwork and the type of data collected. Insights into how this context impacted the study are provided in the Methodology chapter (5) and throughout the thesis. Ultimately I feel this context, challenging as it was, enabled a richer and deeper study of leadership practice at a single organisation than I may have hoped for at the outset.

This thesis is part of the emerging L-A-P approach to leadership research and development which is championed by Joseph Raelin and has come about as part of the practice turn in Leadership Studies (LS) (Carroll et al., 2008; Raelin, 2016a). In L-A-P, leadership is understood as the process of setting or changing the direction of activity, which happens through the interactions between people and the environment they work in (both human and non-human) (Raelin, 2016a). I have defined leadership practice at the charity studied as; the everyday interactions and working customs that enable the charity to improve ASR welfare in the city where it operates. This definition has been central to guiding me through the research process. It has framed what I should be looking at as interactions and what I should be looking for as interactions that influence the direction, or mission, of the charity’s work.
1.2. Research context

Understanding the context in which ASR charities work is necessary to appreciating both leadership practice in these organisations and the contribution my study makes. Most notable in the UK policy context is the process of dispersal which was introduced by New Labour at the turn of the millennium (Alonso and Andrews, 2020). This policy sees people who arrive in the country and apply for asylum sent to live in dispersed cluster areas whilst their application is considered (Home Office, 1998). Services for ASRs have become increasingly fragmented and the rights of people seeking asylum have been steadily reduced in the years since. This is so much so that some researchers suggest the immigration system intentionally impoverishes and marginalises asylum seekers (Allsopp et al., 2014; Coddington et al., 2020; Sales, 2002). The voluntary sector has a historical role in supporting ASRs in Britain (Wren, 2007). As well as drawing existing national ASR charities and local welfare VSOs into this work, a newer generation of local ASR focused charities have emerged since dispersal began (Findlay et al., 2007). My case study focuses on one of these charities which, thanks to their localised and emergent nature, are often small, and are under-researched (Garkisch et al., 2017).

The charity is based in one of the first dispersal areas in the UK. It is a coastal city in North East England which, as a region, has the highest concentration of asylum seekers per head of the population in the UK (Migration Observatory, 2020). The charity has an income of under £100k per year and a single employee. It has a broader group of volunteers which boosts its capacity and its services reach approximately 500 people including the whole of the asylum-seeking population in the city. ASRs have often suffered complex trauma and face difficulties linked to the UK
government’s national immigration policy known as the “hostile environment” (Wilcock, 2019, p. 141) which aims to discourage them reaching and settling in the UK. The city has been a focal point for far-right activity in recent years and there is a seam of racist and anti-immigrant feeling among a minority of the settled population (Bowler and Razak, 2020). The local authority has limited engagement with the support or management of asylum seekers who cannot work or vote and are housed by a private company which is contracted by central government (Darling, 2016a). So, the context in which the case study operates can be particularly challenging, but the work of its staff and volunteers is an example of the warmer response and commitment to ASR welfare shown by parts of the settled community and ASRs themselves.

1.3. Contribution

My thesis spans two literatures; Leadership Studies (LS) and UK Voluntary Sector Studies (UKVSS). In LS, L-A-P is a very new approach which is being developed incrementally by every piece of research adopting an L-A-P lens (Kempster et al., 2016). In UKVSS, the study of leadership is “embryonic” (Macmillan and McLaren, 2012, p. 5) and there is a call for greater sector specific research (Terry, et al., 2020). My contribution is therefore to extend our understanding of leadership practice in charities as a subset of the UK voluntary sector, and this helps move academic thinking forward in both LS and UKVSS.

In the case of LS, my study shows that as a theoretical lens for research, L-A-P allows a researcher to explore practice in a holistic and in-depth way making it a promising new ‘way of looking’ at leadership that may be valuable to future research. In particular, as Jacklin-Jarvis and Rees have done for grassroots associations, I make the case that the L-A-P lens may be useful in studies of small
charities which tend to have ambiguous borders and roles and are particularly impacted by their context including the physical environment (Jacklin-Jarvis and Rees, 2021). L-A-P’s flexibility suits studying this type of organisation where direction setting may happen in non-traditional ways and in different orientations across the organisation. My thesis further develops L-A-P as a theoretical lens by making a case for the toolbox approach of drawing together the L-A-P concepts with those from related leadership theories. It also calls for greater consideration of the role of place in leadership practice and for us to better develop our understanding of how clients or beneficiaries of an organisation’s work may be seen as an integral element of leadership practice. My study also begins to answer the concerns of critics of L-A-P (Collinson, 2018; Ford, 2016), by demonstrating that the impact of macro social power structures can be understood and expressed as significant influences on micro level practice in an L-A-P study. The findings demonstrate this particularly by evoking the way in which UK immigration policy and voluntary sector trends affect the day to day activity and direction of the charity’s work.

In the case of UKVSS, this study extends our understanding of leadership practice in a voluntary sector setting through use of collective notions of leadership (which are consonant with L-A-P) as has been called for by scholars in the field (Terry, et al., 2020). My thesis also provides a range of insights that resonate with the findings of scholars whose interests overlap with small ASR charities. This includes adding weight to Billis and Glennerster’s idea that, thanks to the ambiguous roles of people involved in them, small welfare focused charities have a comparative advantage over other service delivery organisations which may be more removed from their clients (Billis and Glennerster, 1998). It adds further nuance to the idea that smaller charities are qualitatively different to larger ones and can offer alternative narratives and deliver good outcomes through voluntary action (McGovern, 2017; Milbourne, 2013; Rochester, 2013). In some respects my study reinforces this idea but also suggests that developing a more hybrid approach which uses both paid staff and volunteers may be
more sustainable. My study also resonates with the challenges for ASR organisations identified in earlier literature including the difficulty of formalising organisations that meaningfully incorporate lived experience in their leadership and the challenge of both working with and being against government agencies on asylum policy (MacKenzie et al., 2012; Phillimore and Goodson, 2010; Tonkiss, 2018). The richness of my findings provide a depth of understanding that can be used to help develop broader studies of small charities and ASR organisations.

Having provided an overview of where my thesis sits and what it offers to the wider literatures of LS and UKVSS, the remainder of this chapter will summarise the content of the thesis chapters.

1.4. Thesis structure

**Literature Review**

This thesis spans two literatures and as such the literature review is divided into two chapters.

**Chapter Two- Leadership Studies literature review**

This chapter locates my thesis in the broader field of LS beginning with an overview of heroic, post-heroic and critical leadership theories and an exploration of how leadership is defined. Next it drills down to introduce the key theories and texts that influence my research approach and inform the discussion of findings. L-A-P literature is explored critically and in-depth here alongside texts from relational, collective and collaborative leadership traditions. Finally, I explain the use of L-A-P as a theoretical lens in this thesis and what that means in terms of research design and my approach to data analysis.
Chapter Three- UK Voluntary Sector Studies literature review

This chapter first provides a brief overview of UKVSS in order to locate the emergence of leadership research and my thesis within it. Next it reviews the limited research that exists on three key areas that relate to my study. These are leadership studies of the UK voluntary sector, studies of small charities in UKVSS and studies of asylum seeker and refugee charities. I highlight what this literature suggests may be relevant to the case study charity and outline the gaps in research this thesis contributes to filling.

Chapter Four- Context

Chapter four sets the scene for the primary research of this study by describing the social and policy context. It outlines immigration and asylum policy in the UK with a particular focus on how it has developed since the policy of dispersal was introduced in 1999. Next it discusses the asylum seeker and refugee sub sector of the UK voluntary sector and locates my case study organisation within that. Finally, it provides a brief overview of the city and the charity which form the site of my study.

Chapter Five- Methodology

This chapter sets out how the original research conducted as part of my thesis was planned and carried out and how the data collected was analysed. It covers the case study approach I have taken, the detailed research design, data collection activities and the process of reflexive thematic analysis. It also reflects on my underlying philosophical position and reflexive approach.

Findings

The findings are split into two chapters which cover two related themes each.
Chapter Six- Beyond the border; exploring leadership practice that transcends organisational boundaries

This first findings chapter introduces how the four themes will be presented and reminds the readers of the definitions that underpin the data presented. Using a mix of analytical narrative, quotes, vignettes and diagrams, I then go on to present the first two themes. The first, ‘Collaboration in leadership practice’, looks at how the charity’s people work with a wide set of agencies and stakeholders to create a welfare safety net for ASRs. The second, ‘Client driven leadership practice’, looks at how the demands of the charity’s clients set the direction of work on a day to day and longer term basis. These findings deal, in the main, with the relational dynamics of leadership practice which occur across the organisational boundaries of the charity.

Chapter Seven- Looking within; exploring leadership practice inside organisational boundaries

The second findings chapter presents the second two themes, the first of which, ‘Collectivity in leadership practice’ looks at how the dynamics of collective leadership play out as the context and pressures on the charity’s people change over time. The second theme, ‘The relational shaping of leadership practice’ looks at the ambiguity of roles and the interaction of paid and volunteer roles in leadership practice at the charity. These findings deal, in the main, with the relational dynamics of leadership practice that occur within the organisational boundaries of the charity. The chapter ends by summarising all four thematic areas and setting the scene for the discussion in the following chapter.

Chapter Eight- Discussion

This chapter explores the findings in relation to the literatures discussed in chapters two and three in order to answer the research question. It first talks through each of the themes in relation to the leadership theories they have drawn most heavily on for insight and to which they contribute. This
First discussion ends with a consideration of cross cutting ideas that feed into all of the themes and are drawn primarily from L-A-P with the addition of the dark side of leadership, and a conceptual summary of leadership practice at the charity. The chapter then moves on explore how I developed an account of leadership and the usefulness and limitations of L-A-P as a theoretical lens for doing this. Next the chapter looks at this study as a voluntary sector study discussing how it draws on and helps to develop existing literature on small charities and the ASR subsector.

Chapter Nine- Conclusion

First this chapter revisits and further discusses my conceptual summary of leadership practice at the case study charity. It then outlines the contribution my thesis makes both in terms of developing the L-A-P lens and extending our understanding of leadership practice in an under researched setting, relating these back to LS and UKVSS. It then reflects on the methodology, outlines the key limitations of the study and highlights potential areas for research that stem from it.

1.5. Conclusion to the chapter

This chapter has introduced the thesis, locating it in the fields of LS and UKVSS. It has provided a brief overview of the context and the contribution the thesis makes as well as its limitations and ideas for further research that it generates. It has also provided an outline of the structure of the remainder of the thesis. The next chapter begins reviewing the relevant literature for this PhD, beginning with the field of leadership studies.
Chapter Two- Leadership studies literature review

2.1. Chapter Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to locate my thesis in the existing literature on leadership. It will also demonstrate how my specific approach to research, which adopts a Leadership-as- Practice (L-A-P) lens, has developed out of that literature. The overall thrust of my thesis is to understand leadership practice in a particular context in order that it can help researchers and practitioners develop a deeper and more holistic understanding of the dynamics that constitute leadership practice in the voluntary sector. In the course of the thesis, I employ L-A-P as a theoretical lens that provides me with a way of looking at practice that focuses on particular things including the role of material objects and the working environment. This use of theory as a lens is fundamental to how I inhabit and understand the work of the charity being studied. This approach has been formed by developing my understanding of, and work to become part of, the L-A-P approach to leadership thought and research. The structure of this chapter is intended to guide the reader through the journey I went on to arrive at this point, by considering the broader relevant leadership literature and bringing them to the point of understanding what L-A-P is and why it provides the appropriate theoretical lens for this study. As a practice focused approach sitting within the broad category of post heroic leadership, L-A-P can be understood as a reaction to some of the limitations of the individual and traits based heroic leadership theories. First therefore, I provide an overview of heroic leadership, followed by summaries of post-heroic and critical approaches. Next, the emerging L-A-P approach is explored critically including how leadership is conceptualised in L-A-P, where it overlaps with other post heroic theories and how it can be used in development and research. Next, I review specific studies that have informed my thesis from within L-A-P and closely related approaches. Having established the terrain and where my study sits within it, I then give an explanation of how I use L-A-P as a
theoretical lens in my primary research and data analysis. The chapter concludes with a restatement of the rationale for using L-A-P and setting the scene for the next chapters on voluntary sector literature and context.

2.2. Locating L-A-P in the field

Definitions of leadership can be as simple as “having followers” (Grint, 2010a, p. 2) or an “influence process” (Braun and Nieberle, 2017, p. 784) but different theoretical traditions diverge in how they define leadership and what element of this complex phenomenon their research focuses on (Alvesson, 2019; Howieson and Hodges, 2014). Grint provides a useful summary of approaches which covers the vast array of leadership work (Grint, 2010a):

- Position based leadership, which is concerned with where somebody sits in an organisation’s structure.
- Person based leadership, which is concerned with who a person is and whether they have the right traits (inherent or cultivated) to lead.
- Results based leadership, which is concerned with what a leader achieves.
- Process based leadership, which is concerned with how leadership is practiced (Grint, 2010a).

Rather than being examples of leadership that can be found in the real world, these approaches are constructs intended to help us understand the bases from which leadership is studied (Grint, 2010a). In reality examples of leadership may include elements of two or more of these approaches. I find Grint’s typology useful because it makes clear that there is no universal definition of leadership and that therefore scholars start from different places in terms of their understanding and assumptions about what the focus of their research is.
As well as understanding the different ways leadership has been defined, in order to locate my study in the field it is helpful to understand how the theories of leadership can be divided into groups. This is because, whilst Grint’s typology is helpful in explaining what scholars’ fundamental understanding of what leadership is, it is less useful when it comes to trying to organise the various theories of leadership into a simple typology. In the literature reviewed for this chapter, various attempts are made to organise the myriad leadership theories in this way (Avolio et al., 2009; Carroll et al., 2019; Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995; Howieson and Hodges, 2014). I find Collinson’s typology, which divides them into three broad groupings, those being heroic, post-heroic and critical leadership studies, useful in terms of navigating and organising leadership literature (Collinson, 2018). In Collinson’s typology, the primary focus of heroic leadership is “on (effective) leaders’ traits, styles, identities and practices” (Collinson, 2018, p. 364). Post heroic leadership studies moves beyond the focus on the individuals to take account of “the socially constructed nature of leadership processes, emphasising collective and relational dynamics” (Collinson, 2018, p. 364). She outlines critical leadership studies as a third tradition which prioritises “power and control dynamics, identity constructions and inequalities, and the contested nature of leader–follower relations” (Collinson, 2018, p. 364). The usefulness of this typology is twofold, firstly it takes the theories in roughly chronological order giving a sense of the overall structure of the field, with heroic leadership theories being those that came to dominate the field as it grew in the mid to late 20th Century, followed by a wave of post heroic theories and most recently the development of critical theories in response to the limitations of the first two. As with Grint’s typology this is very much a simplified version of what is actually a highly complex and somewhat messy academic field in development. Secondly, it is also a typology that Collinson has used to help locate L-A-P within the development of the field, albeit in order to critique it. For that reason, I find it serves as a good way to organise this literature review in order to
take us on the journey to understanding and adopting an L-A-P lens that I have taken during the course of this PhD.

2.2.1. Heroic leadership

Whilst Collinson’s typology provides an appealingly simple and apparently comprehensive summary of leadership scholarship, what it doesn’t do is give a sense of how substantial or influential the different approaches are. In order to do this, it is helpful to unpack the development of the field a bit, starting with what Collinson calls heroic leadership theory. This will illuminate why newer approaches, including L-A-P, often end up being defined in contrast or opposition to this historically dominant grouping of leadership theories. Heroic leadership theories can trace their roots back centuries, with antecedents as far back as Sun Tzu’s work in 3-400 BC and Machiavelli’s in the 16th century (Grint, 2010a). The more recent but still historic work of Thomas Carlyle on “great men” (Grint, 2010a, p. 54) in the 1840s is also frequently given as an important historical marker in the development of the field. A second conceptual milestone is the idea of Charisma, defined by Weber in the early twentieth century as “a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional qualities” (Weber, 1968, p. 241). These ideas, which convey the sense that some people are exceptional individuals who stand out from others, are central to heroic leadership theories which became dominant in the field of leadership studies as it developed in the last three decades of the twentieth century (Avolio et al., 2009).

One of the most influential heroic theories of leadership, which persists to this day as the core of more recent approaches, is JM Burns’ model of “transformational leadership” which was introduced
in the 1970s (Burns, 1978). Burns built on the earlier idea of exceptional individuals as great leaders to frame transformational leadership as happening when “one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality” (Burns, 1978, p. 20). The focus of Burns’ work is on the individual and he takes an explicitly aspirational approach, which seeks to understand how leadership should be practiced. Whilst heroic theories have developed and become more nuanced over time, this normative leaning towards understanding what is perceived to be good leadership by the scholars and the focus on the actions and traits of individual leaders has persisted (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). A positivist methodological tradition has also developed around these individuals focused theories of leadership (Antonakis et al., n.d.; Gardner et al., 2011) including Bass’ Full Range Leadership Model which incorporates and builds on measurements of transformational leadership (Avolio, 2004; Bass and Riggio, 2006).

Since Burns’ work, leadership theories have continued to develop over time and in response to the context in which they are applied (Avolio et al., 2009; Braun and Nieberle, 2017; Yukl, 1999). In particular, concern with how to develop approaches to leadership so that it is practiced in a good way became a pressing issue in the early 21st century. This can be seen as related to the trend for heavy investment in leadership thinking and development by private sector bodies and business schools which are concerned with the practice of business leaders (Allen and Sowcik, 2013). Since a series of corporate scandals in the mid-2000s and the collapse of the banking system in 2008 suggested all may not be well in the world of business leadership, there has been a focus on developing authentic and ethical approaches to leadership (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Brown and Treviño, 2006; Gardner et al., 2011). There is no unified definition of authentic leadership but as Hodges and Howieson’s summary of “consistency in a leader’s words, actions and values” (Howieson and Hodges, 2014, p. 20), demonstrates that there is a continuing emphasis on the individual. Ethical leadership is harder to define still because what ‘ethical’ is depends on the normative context being
studied, but ethical approaches share the idea that leadership should involve doing the morally right thing (Brown and Treviño, 2006). These limitations notwithstanding, heroic leadership scholars have endeavoured to find theoretical fixes to the weaknesses exposed in earlier approaches by the apparent ethical failures of business and banking leaders.

The approaches covered in this short section on heroic leadership are by no means a comprehensive overview of the theories that focus on “(effective) leaders’ traits, styles, identities and practices” (Collinson, 2018, p. 364) as Collinson puts it. Nor do they represent a single coherent field that scholars may see themselves as part of as there are substantive differences between heroic theories which are the topic of scholarly debate. Rather, this section has been used to highlight some of the central historical and theoretical milestones in the development of leadership studies that can be said to be focused on individual leaders as heroic or potentially heroic figures. This is both to give a brief overview understanding of the field’s development and to make clear what the next two groups in the typology are positioning themselves in contrast to.

2.2.2. Post heroic leadership

Post heroic leadership studies has developed rapidly since the start of the 21st Century and can be understood in part as a response to heroic leadership’s focus on individuals and the dyadic top down relationship between leaders and followers (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995; Yukl, 1999). Indeed, a prominent post heroic theory, followership, explicitly turns this dyad on its head to consider the influence of those in subordinate roles (Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). This short section does not attempt to comprehensively cover all of the post heroic leadership theories. As with the previous section on heroic leadership, its purpose is to flag some of the important historical and theoretical milestones
in the development of leadership theory as it has moved on to consider a wider set of actors than the individuals at the top of organisational hierarchies. Pearce and Conger’s 2002 book on shared leadership helped to shift the narrative of leadership studies towards approaches that took account of influences that flow in a multidirectional way across an organisation’s structure, rather than focus simply on the top down relationship (Pearce and Conger, 2002). As heroic leadership theorists had done in the past, Pearce and Conger drew on historical influences for their work including sociologist Mary Parker Follett who argued in the 1920s that people with the most knowledge of a situation should be those who lead rather than only those who are in formal positions of leadership (Pearce and Conger, 2002). They also argued that as the world of work had become more networked and collaborative, and less hierarchical and dependent on command and control models it was important that leadership theory caught up with these contextual changes (Pearce and Conger, 2002). A similar argument has been put forward more recently by Raelin in favour of the newer iterations of post heroic leadership theory (Raelin, 2018).

Since Pearce and Conger’s work there has been a proliferation of post heroic leadership theories which differ in focus but all of which see heroic theories as failing to appreciate the full range of actors and activities that make up the leadership process (Cullen-Lester and Yammarino, 2016; Denis et al., 2012; Uhl-Bien et al., 2014). These theories of leadership also tend to argue for greater attention to be paid to context rather than studying individuals as if they operate in a vacuum (Collinson, 2018). As with heroic leadership theories, these approaches do not represent a single coherent field although there are branches and subdivisions of post heroic theory that overlap and terminology is often used interchangeably where theories have characteristics in common (Avolio et al., 2009). This variety is reflective of the way the approaches have sometimes developed from within a particular industry, as with distributed leadership in the Education sector (Youngs, 2017). It is also indicative of the lively debate that exists between leadership scholars about whose ideas sit
where in the lexicon (Collinson, 2018). This thesis is not excessively focused on the taxonomy of leadership theories, rather it draws on ideas from across the post heroic literature. In particular, I draw on theories that focus on understanding the process of leadership as it emerges through everyday practice and in which flows of influence are not always intentional or planned. Three of these theoretical groupings; relational leadership, collective leadership and collaborative leadership are particularly influential on this thesis and are reviewed in more depth later in the chapter. In terms of research methods, proponents of these approaches tend to be informed by social constructionist philosophy and generally (but not exclusively) take qualitative approaches to research (Bryman et al., 2011; Carroll et al., 2008). This is another way in which they contrast with heroic or individual and traits based leadership theories which are associated with positivist quantitative methods (Carroll et al., 2008).

2.2.3. Critical leadership studies

Critical scholars, whose work I have included under this third grouping, can be found in both the heroic and post heroic groups. As with those on heroic and post heroic leadership studies, this section does not attempt to exhaustively cover critical approaches to leadership studies. Instead, it highlights some of the ways in which critical scholars have engaged in driving the field forward by questioning and critiquing existing theory and developing alternative approaches to understanding leadership (Collinson, 2011). In this thesis I draw on this tradition of critical engagement to help overcome some of the limitations of the L-A-P approach such as those pointed out by Ford who argues that L-A-P and other leadership theories fail to surface or question power structures including those cultural norms that tend to exclude women (Ford, 2016). Broadly speaking critical leadership scholars are concerned with unpacking the power dynamics of leadership and the power structures that underpin the contexts in which leadership happens (Alvesson, 2019; Collinson, 2014; Collinson
et al., 2018; Meindl et al., 1985; Tourish, 2013). Tourish defines power in a leadership context as “our ability to influence other people” which “derives in part from our ability to control such things as resources, rewards and punishments” (Tourish, 2013, p. 8). Critical scholars have sought to understand how power dynamics affect organisations not only through the traditional hierarchical structures but through the influence of followers, the role of resistance and those not in formal positions of leadership such as, in the case of Collinson’s research, trade union members (Collinson, 2014). Critical scholars have also sought to reframe what can be considered as leadership by studying examples of leadership that don’t fit with the traditional organisational work place focus such as the #metoo social movement (Carroll et al., 2019). Chronologically, the relatively recent growth in critical leadership studies can be seen as part of the broader sweep of critical theory across a wide range of fields and critical leadership scholars include those working from feminist (Ford, 2016) and post structuralist perspectives (Collinson, 2006).

A common charge made in critical leadership literature is that heroic leadership scholars are guilty of romanticising individual leaders (Collinson et al., 2018). Alvesson takes this to the extreme in his suggestion that leadership scholars are a naïve set of idealists who have watched one too many Disney movies and are “Waiting for Godot” (Alvesson, 2019, p. 27), believing idealised leaders will eventually emerge to solve the worlds woes. However, far from wanting to tear down LS as a field and start again, these critiques tend to come from a place of wanting to improve and update the ways we look at leadership. Even Alvesson whose critique is unsparing writes from the perspective that there are still “good reasons” (Alvesson, 2019, p. 37) to study leadership when it is used to understand organisational life as it happens rather than to try and mould an idealised and unrealistic version of individual leaders. Scholars of the dark side of leadership also confront the failure of leadership theories to look beyond the idealised head on. Writing on the dark side of leadership argues for the need to explore instances where leadership creates bad outcomes, is toxic or
derailed, in an attempt to understand what goes wrong in these circumstances (Braun et al., 2018; Tourish, 2013). This critical perspective has been used to engage with heroic or individual focused leadership theories; for example the “Hitler problem” (Bass and Riggio, 2006, p. pvii) has long exercised leadership scholars and more recently high profile individuals including Donald Trump have provided ready examples for scholars of the dark side (Braun et al., 2018). Dark side scholarship also comes from a post heroic perspective as in the work of Tourish who uses an understanding of this side of leadership to argue for a more decentralised, communication and process based approach to leadership (Tourish, 2013).

This short section has introduced the idea of studying leadership critically and pulled out some of the common themes to doing this across heroic and post heroic approaches. Understanding of power dynamics and the dark side of leadership are two themes that I will return to as I develop criticality within my own chosen theoretical lens. Next I turn to the definition and development of the main scholarly influence on that lens; Leadership- as-Practice.

2.3. Leadership- as- Practice (L-A-P)

The opening sections of this chapter have given a brief overview of Leadership Studies’ development and shape as a field. It will now move on to explore L-A-P, the approach this thesis is part of, in more depth. In relation to Grint’s typology, L-A-P can be seen as primarily taking a process approach to understanding leadership and in relation to Collinson’s, it sits in the post-heroic group of theories.
2.3.1. Definition

The L-A-P literature sees leadership as a process that is embedded in practice rather than in individuals or other entities (Raelin, 2016a). In L-A-P, leadership can be defined as the setting, ordering and re-orienting the flow of organising process (Crevani and Endrissat, 2016). In other words, it’s about setting or changing the direction of an organisation, project or activity. In the case of charities this can be seen as setting or changing how the charitable mission is delivered. In L-A-P, practice can be defined as an assemblage of interwoven human and non-human elements that interact to create meaning (Sergi, 2016; Simpson, 2016). These human and non-human elements engage in practices that together make up what Sergi likens to a bricolage\(^1\) of activity which constitutes the process of leadership (Sergi, 2016). She emphasises that L-A-P research is often focused on the micro and the mundane interactions of every day working life because it is these that make up the bricolage (Sergi, 2016). Mundane is often used as a term in L-A-P writing to conjure a sense of observing the unremarkable activities of daily work, that can described as “banal” (Sergi, 2016, p. 113) or the things that constitute the unplanned “practical coping” (Raelin, 2016a, p. 7) that happens in day to day practice. In keeping with this focus on the day to day, L-A-P is concerned with emergence i.e. leadership as it happens in the moment rather than leadership as an outcome (Simpson, 2016). The image of a river is sometimes evoked to aid this understanding of leadership as a process that continuously flows, making and remaking itself (Shotter, 2016; Simpson, 2016).

2.3.2. L-A-P’s origins and account of leadership

L-A-P is a new addition to the broad church of leadership studies. The 2016 book “Leadership-as-Practice Theory and Application” announced L-A-P as a new “movement” in the field (Raelin, 2016a, 1Bricolage is a heuristic device to describe a grouping of assorted elements that come together to interact and form a whole.

\(^1\) Bricolage is a heuristic device to describe a grouping of assorted elements that come together to interact and form a whole.
Edited by Joseph Raelin, the book brings together authors from a range of perspectives including “collective, shared, distributed, and relational leadership” which Raelin frames as sitting under the umbrella of L-A-P (Raelin, 2016a, p. 4). The chapter authors come from a range of philosophical and theoretical traditions meaning they are not entirely consistent or compatible with each other in approach (Raelin, 2016a). This gives the impression that in L-A-P, leadership theories are seen as a toolbox and that L-A-P research may take something of a magpie approach to using them. In recent work Raelin acknowledges that L-A-P has an “arm’s length association with theory” (Raelin, 2020, p. 500), with the primary focus being on how leadership is practiced and contextualised rather than how it can be theorised. L-A-P is not completely theoretically agnostic though because it rejects what Collinson’s typology has framed as heroic leadership theories and draws its ideas mainly from the post-heroic theories of leadership. L-A-P does also offer some more original conceptual contributions, notably its development of the role of materiality in leadership practice (Carroll, 2016; Sergi, 2016). Overall, I have found that adopting L-A-P as a theoretical lens encourages the researcher to embrace the flexibility to draw on ideas from a range of theories in order to conceptualise leadership practice holistically².

L-A-P has developed as part of “the practice turn” (Carroll et al., 2008, p. 363) called for by Carroll et al in 2008. In their paper the authors made the case that leadership studies has been dominated by competency-based approaches to research transplanted from management and organisational studies (Carroll et al., 2008). They critique these as being neglectful of the moral, emotional and relational aspects of leadership because they are only designed to study individuals in isolation (Carroll et al., 2008). Citing strategy as practice as a forerunner, Carroll et al make the case for

² In the 2016 book Crevani and Endrissat use the term holistic to explain how a practice view looks at its subject environment and activity within it as a whole, rather than extracting elements or isolating snapshots to examine (Crevani and Endrissat, 2016). It is in this sense of trying to understand the whole of the leadership practice I am looking at that I use the term holistic in this thesis.
adopting a practice approach when researching leadership which will allow researchers to engage with the lived experience of leaders and understand more about how they “get on” (Carroll et al., 2008, p. 364) with the practice of leadership. In this approach practice is understood as having three dimensions; practitioner (people), practice (routine behaviours) and praxis (the interconnection between actions, actors and institutions) which, when studied together give a holistic understanding of leadership practice (Carroll et al., 2008). Since Carroll et al’s intervention, practice approaches have been increasingly used in leadership studies. Scholars in relational leadership (Ospina and Foldy, 2010), collective leadership (Quick, 2017), and other shared approaches to leadership that have gained ground in the published literature have all embraced a practice approach (Avolio et al., 2009; Carroll et al., 2019; Cullen-Lester and Yammarino, 2016). Meanwhile Raelin has put forward a growing body of practice focused work labelled explicitly as Leadership-as-Practice (Raelin, 2011, 2021, 2020, 2016b; Raelin and Trehan, 2015). Whether this body of work is yet substantive or developed enough to be called a movement, as Raelin has framed it, has been a point of contention in the literature (Collinson, 2018; Raelin et al., 2018). It is clear from that debate that L-A-P is still in the nascent stages of development as an approach to leadership research, a point that L-A-P scholars themselves have conceded (Raelin et al., 2018). So, L-A-P is still emerging as an approach, and it is not the only one to focus on practice. Due to this, and because it overlaps with other traditions, it is necessary to explore where the boundaries of L-A-P currently lie.

2.3.3. The blurry boundaries of L-A-P and closely related traditions

Section 2.2 placed L-A-P in the process focused and post heroic areas of thinking in the overall field of leadership studies. To establish the finer boundaries, it is useful to contrast L-A-P to other closely related traditions; an approach taken by Crevani and Endrissat in the 2016 L-A-P volume (Crevani and Endrissat, 2016). Rather than simply echo Crevani and Endrissat I will contrast L-A-P with the
theories that are most relevant to my thesis, those being relational leadership, collective leadership and collaborative leadership. The relevance of these theories becomes clear in the Findings and Discussion chapters (6 and 8) where I use them as conceptual tools to help build the holistic ‘whole world’ picture of leadership practice at the case study charity. Therefore it is helpful to understand the basic tenets of these approaches and to what extent it is possible to ‘let them in’ to research using an L-A-P lens.

2.3.3.1. Relational Leadership

Relational leadership sees leadership as an emergent shared accomplishment and is concerned with how people relate to each other rather than who they are (Crevani, 2015). This approach sees the processes of interaction that make up relationships as constitutive of leadership (Crevani, 2015). It is not so much a type or style of leadership as it is a way of looking with the focus being on how people behave “in-relation” (Crevani and Endrissat, 2016, p. 27) to each other in activities that can be framed as the work of leadership. In research there has been a twin track approach to using the relational leadership lens; with scholars falling into either the positivist tradition (Uhl-Bien 2011, 76; Graen and Uhl-Bien 1995) or the constructionist tradition (Ospina and Foldy 2010) with a limited number of mixed methods studies bridging the two (Crevani 2015). Positivist scholars have tended to focus on understanding relationships via exploring the perspectives of the entities (people) involved in them and linguistic analysis techniques are commonly used for this purpose (Uhl-Bien 2011, 77). Constructionist scholars have developed a toolkit of three ways of seeing relational leadership in practice which focus on what happens in the spaces in between people rather than the people themselves (Crevani 2015, 244). These are framing; which is about putting a situation into perspective and choosing what to focus on, positioning which is thinking about how people position
and reposition themselves in relation to each other as they might in a dance and bridging which is about enmeshing people and making them interdependent (Crevani 2015, 257).

2.3.3.2. Collective Leadership

Collective leadership is used, rather like L-A-P, as an umbrella term for a range of approaches to researching and theorising leadership that share the central idea that leadership is a plural endeavour that resides in interpersonal relationships (Ospina et al., 2020). Like Raelin with L-A-P, leading collective leadership scholars including Sonia Ospina locate shared, distributed and relational leadership under their umbrella (Ospina et al., 2020; Raelin, 2016a). A difference in the two umbrella approaches is that Raelin has conceded an arm’s length association with theory for L-A-P whereas Ospina et al are endeavouring to make the connection between collective leadership research and theory clearer and less fragmented (Ospina et al., 2020). In order to achieve this, they have come up with a four-way typology of approaches to collective leadership. This differentiates between two different locations for leadership; the first being accounts that see leadership as residing in the relationships between people (in the group) and the second being those that see leadership as residing in the systems people exist within (in the system)(Ospina et al., 2020). These two different locations can be studied in two different ways. They can be studied as types of leadership whereby the researcher seeks out real world examples of these types of collective leadership. Alternatively, they can be used as lenses through which to view any type of leadership or leadership example. Adopting a collective leadership lens is more about making an epistemological and ontological commitment to viewing leadership practice in a certain way. Ontologically it means moving away from entity focused work to viewing interactions as the building blocks of leadership. Epistemologically it means working out how to understand and explain leadership as an emergent reality without resorting to entity focused explanations. This approach holds much in common with
the L-A-P approach I develop further later in this chapter. For Ospina et al, that is acknowledged, with L-A-P seen as one of the several different slants that can be taken on adopting a collective leadership lens (Ospina et al., 2020). The distinctive element of L-A-P is acknowledged here as being the focus on micro-level conversations and mundane daily activity (Ospina et al., 2020).

Whilst, as Ospina et al’s typology shows, there is great variety in the approach to and understanding of collective leadership in the published literature, a fairly consistent point is a focus on the dynamic and unplanned interactions of leadership (Ospina et al., 2020). Friedrich et al contrast this with other shared forms of leadership in which the role of leadership is assumed to be static and team members as homogenous, meaning the role can be divided up in a planned and durable way (Friedrich et al., 2009). In their study of collective leadership Friedrich et al use the playful image of the game of “whack a mole” (Friedrich et al., 2009, p. 934) to characterise the actions of individuals who move in and out of leadership roles as required and as their skills enable. Another common focus is on how these interactions can lead over time to forms of leadership emerging that did not exist before and, when working well, prove to be more than the sum of their parts (Cullen-Lester and Yammarino, 2016). In her longitudinal study of urban environmental stewardship in Grand Rapids, Michigan, Quick explores how relational dynamics between a broad range of stakeholders led to self-organising and eventually a form of collective leadership that produced unexpected outcomes including mutuality (Quick, 2017). For Quick it is both the interactions between people and the outcomes of their shared work that constitutes collective leadership (Quick, 2017).

So, as with L-A-P, collective leadership is a broad umbrella approach to understanding leadership. It incorporates examples and concepts that help to illuminate leadership dynamics in different contexts, and relational interactions that have not been the focus of heroic leadership theories.
2.3.3.4. Collaborative leadership

Collaborative leadership shares the theoretical roots of and is a term sometimes used interchangeably with shared and distributed leadership, as a descriptor for any leadership that is spread across teams or organisational boundaries (Grint, 2010a; Kramer and Crespy, 2011). It is not always used as a standalone theory or type of leadership but is often explored as a way of working that may be compatible with different styles of leadership or leadership contexts. For example Chrislip’s work on collaborative leadership developed out of finding ways for citizens and local leaders to work together to solve complex localised problems (Chrislip, 2002). Meanwhile Grint draws on the arena of geopolitics to argue that collaborative leadership is of increasing importance the more complex or “wicked” (Grint, 2005, p. 1473)3 a problem is and where soft power is being deployed in order to try and address it. Other literature places emphasis on particular approaches to fostering collaborative leadership skills such as communication that help to drive collaborative activity (Kramer and Crespy, 2011).

Huxham and Vangen have made substantive contributions to the development of collaborative leadership theory based on their primary research in collaborative settings across sectors and including voluntary organisations (Huxham and Vangen, 2005, 2000; Vangen and Huxham, 2003). There are similarities with relational and collective leadership here in that Huxham and Vangen look at how people relate to each other and work together in ways that, when successful, produce outcomes that are larger than the sum of their parts. In keeping with L-A-P they also see leadership

3 Grint defines wicked problems as those which are complex, cannot be removed from their environment, and in which there is no clear relationship between cause and effect, unlike tame problems which are more like puzzles in that there is always an answer (Grint, 2010)
as something that occurs through structures and processes rather than being tied only to people (Huxham and Vangen, 2000). Where Huxham and Vangen differ is that they don’t necessarily reject the focus of studying people rather than interactions and their work looks at projects that are intentionally framed as collaborations, which is not always the case with L-A-P, relational or collective leadership (Huxham and Vangen, 2005). Huxham and Vangen have developed two key concepts that can be used to illuminate leadership practice in collaborations. The first is that of collaborative advantage whereby synergy is found between two or more organisations with some shared goals (Huxham and Vangen, 2005). The second is collaborative inertia which sums up the experience of collaborative work that is slow to progress and may fail to achieve anything (Huxham and Vangen, 2005). Their analysis of a wide range of collaborations explores the types of behaviour and interaction that lead to collaborative advantage. These involve both the practice of consistently nurturing and championing the relationship and the darker practices of manipulation and politicking (Huxham and Vangen, 2005; Vangen and Huxham, 2003). More recently Vangen has also focused explicitly on the paradoxical nature of collaboration, involving as it often does, parties with contradictory goals (Vangen, 2017; Vangen and Huxham, 2012). In this analysis both the synergies between organisations and their distinctiveness need to be nurtured in order for collaborations to be productive (Vangen, 2017; Vangen and Huxham, 2012). Huxham and Vangen’s work demonstrates conceptual richness in that it gives an understanding of leadership across organisational and sector boundaries and it also accounts for the dark side of collaborative leadership rather than looking solely at how to cultivate good or successful practice.

2.3.4. Materiality, Mundanity and the distinctiveness of the L-A-P approach

Taking an L-A-P approach does overlap significantly with relational, collective and collaborative leadership. There is nothing in the descriptions of these three approaches that is absolutely
precluded from L-A-P which Raelin claims aspires to explore leadership “wherever and however it appears” (Raelin, 2017, p. 216). A key way L-A-P does differ is that it also takes materiality into consideration; something the other approaches do not do to the same extent (Crevani and Endrissat, 2016; Sergi, 2016). Materiality suggests that items, artefacts and environmental factors can become constitutive parts of the leadership process when they influence a particular course of action (Sergi, 2016). This consideration of the role of material objects often goes hand in hand with the focus on mundane or apparently unremarkable activity in L-A-P. This approach is illustrated by Sergi’s study of the co-ordination role played by a planning document in a complex team project (Sergi, 2016).

Another example often cited by Raelin in L-A-P texts is Carroll’s study which observed the leadership role of non-verbal instructions and a koosh ball during a team meeting at a software company (Carroll, 2016; Raelin, 2016b). Without a word being spoken, the individuals observed in Carroll’s study knew it was “team time” (Carroll, 2016, p. 103) and that whoever held the koosh held the floor. This is assumed to demonstrate the influence objects and the body have on how people work together to achieve things. Of course, it is still a person in control of the koosh ball and it could be argued the koosh is just a symbol that transmits that person’s leadership style. However, Carroll argues that leadership studies need to start taking account of "whole worlds” because in "most leadership literature, the everyday clutter and direct spatial context of leadership is usually absent or at best referred to only tangentially and minimally” (Carroll, 2016, p. 96). She argues that leadership may be enabled or constrained by this context including the objects and people in it (Carroll, 2016). Being alert to the role of materiality in leadership practice has implications for research methods that may be necessary in order to study through an L-A-P lens. For example, Carroll’s observation of the koosh ball is possible because of her ethnographic approach which focused on observation of her participants in their workplace (Carroll, 2016).
2.3.5. Power, agency and the unit of analysis in L-A-P

One of Raelin’s central claims for L-A-P is that it is able to “release leadership from a role-driven, entitative influence relationship” (Raelin, 2016a). However, in her contribution to the 2016 volume Simpson argues that few studies have actually managed to separate out where agency lies in different understandings of leadership (Simpson, 2016). To make this splitting out of units of analysis more achievable she teases out the differences between what she calls “the leader practitioner” view in which agency lies with the free will of the individual, the “leadership as a set of practices” view in which agency lies in the influence of individuals over each other and the “leadership in the flow of practice” view in which agency is an ongoing co-ordinated accomplishment of work which can be intentional or unintentional (Simpson, 2016, p. 173). Simpson acknowledges the echo of Carroll et al.’s practitioner, practice, praxis typology here (Carroll et al., 2008). Definitions of L-A-P tend to focus on the leadership in the flow of practice and Raelin has recently confirmed his view that L-A-P studies should aim to understand agency as existing in the spaces between people, expressed in the form of social interactions (Raelin, 2020). It is appropriate therefore to consider interactions as the unit of analysis to shed light on leadership in the flow of practice.

The focus on interactions in L-A-P allows the researcher to remain very open to observing the flow of influence between and across structures and entities. However, a critique of this approach is that it could lead to a failure to recognise more embedded and institutionalised forms of power that may be less visible in day to day interactions (Collinson, 2018). For example, Ford suggests that because early L-A-P research has focused on the traditional leadership arenas of organisations and teams of people then it risks “reinforcing many traditional or perhaps taken for granted assumptions about organisational life, including assumptions of gender neutrality” (Ford, 2016). Collinson is firmer in her critique, seeing as a fundamental weakness of L-A-P that it neglects or denies asymmetry of
power between leaders and followers and the role of hierarchy (Collinson, 2018). She argues that the:

"continued impact of hierarchies on the organisational behaviour of leaders, managers and workers cannot simply be airbrushed from analysis by a combination of wishful thinking and the language of collectivism" (Collinson, 2018, p. 366).

Carroll’s response on behalf of L-A-P scholars is that it is concerned with soft power and micro power dynamics which amount to “tiny drops of emancipatory choice” in contrast to the “tsunami of domination” that can stem from wider social structures (Raelin et al., 2018, p. 377). In a recent paper Raelin picks up this argument dividing conceptions of power between hard and soft: hard power being structural forces which exclude people from participation and soft power being the force which can include them (Raelin, 2020). In essence the defence is that L-A-P studies have simply not been seeking to understand destructive hard power because the focus is to better understand the role of constructive soft power. There is an unapologetic values-based alignment of L-A-P with what Collinson has called collectivism here. There is also an assumption that soft power will always be emancipatory, a term which Raelin doesn’t clearly define but associates with participants being given the chance to “find their own voice, develop their own identity, and discover their human dignity” (Raelin, 2020, p. 497). However, none of this negates the possibility of L-A-P research becoming more critical by taking greater notice of the role and impact of hard or structural power or the darker sides of soft power in future studies, including my own.
2.3.6. L-A-P as an approach to development

The two practical ways of deploying L-A-P in the world of practice, both of which feed back into development of theory, are L-A-P informed empirical studies (of which this thesis is one) and L-A-P informed leadership development. Denyer and James set out a series of examples of L-A-P informed development work including collaborative leadership learning groups, residential courses run by a multinational company and executive coaching focusing on role and team development (Denyer et al., 2016). As its most vocal proponent, it is worth taking a moment to examine Raelin’s work on L-A-P informed leadership development in particular. For Raelin, traditional classroom-based leadership education that takes individuals out of their work context is not the appropriate way to develop “leaderful practice” (Raelin, 2011, p. 195), the approach he associates with L-A-P. Leaderful practices are those that encourage democratic sharing of work to create teams that are “humming” (Raelin, 2011, p. 203) and which feel leaderless because in fact they are full of leadership with everybody participating. For this to be achieved Raelin suggests that coaching, action learning, peer mentoring and group reflection may be effective and that change agents who encourage a certain type of culture from both within and outside organisations are needed (Raelin, 2011, 2016b, 2013; Raelin and Trehan, 2015).

Raelin’s work has not focused on voluntary sector contexts but much of what he says chimes with the direction of travel in UK voluntary sector leadership development. This direction is explored in the next chapter and includes the need to go beyond CEOs and work with people outside of classrooms to develop leadership through mentoring and collaborative working (Davis et al., 2019; Hodges and Howieson, 2017). Raelin’s focus on “democratic participation” and the “co-creation of social organisation” (Raelin, 2011, p. 195) also chimes with the structure of charities which are required to have a shared leadership structure in place in the form of a volunteer trustee board. This
structure is referred to by Terry et al as one of the reasons shared conceptions of leadership may be particularly useful when looking at VSOs (Terry, et al., 2020). However, Raelin’s development practice work can also be seen as painting a somewhat utopian picture of value driven “leaderful practice” (Raelin, 2011, p. 195) which his subjects should aspire to and has been critiqued as being underpinned by a commercial agenda (Collinson, 2018). These concerns underline the difference between L-A-P as an approach to development and empirical studies of L-A-P which seek to understand practice as it is. This thesis presents an interesting opportunity to reflect on the potential of Raelin’s L-A-P development approach in a voluntary sector setting, but more relevant to the research design is an examination of how L-A-P has been used as an approach to research.

2.3.7. L-A-P as an approach to research

In 2020, after the methodology for my thesis was planned, Raelin published an article titled “Toward a methodology for studying leadership-as-practice” (Raelin, 2020). This paper is intended to provide a “conceptual and practical foundation for those who wish to conduct research in the area of leadership-as-practice” (Raelin, 2020, p. 480). In it he outlines six related conceptual building blocks of L-A-P he suggests should be taken into account when working out the appropriate methodology for an L-A-P study, as follows:

1. Agency which he characterises as the force that is mobilised in the space in between people.
2. Context which is the embedded circumstances in which practice is occurring and is partly made up of two of the other building blocks;
3. Identity which reflects who a person is as a leader and is formed continually and recursively with the social environment and;
4. Materiality in which objects are understood as contributors to leadership practice.
Power which Raelin considers power as being either soft emancipatory power or hard power that excludes people from participation.

Dialogue, understood a process of “genuine interaction” (Raelin, 2020, p. 497) and deep listening that should take place between researcher and participant (Raelin, 2020).

This paper (Raelin, 2020) can be seen as the latest iteration of Raelin’s thinking on how to deploy L-A-P in research and in the conceptual building blocks there is an attempt to put a comprehensive framework around how to grapple with several of the issues discussed already in this chapter. Although this paper came too late to explicitly shape my L-A-P lens, appreciation of several of the blocks including materiality and context did become central to my approach and findings. What is less explicitly evident in my study are the conceptual blocks of identity and dialogue. Carrol’s work on identity in L-A-P is powerful in its argument that peoples’ leadership identity is formed continually and recursively with their social environment rather than being an innate or shaped by the individual and this is an important contribution by L-A-P (Carroll, 2016). My data did bring out interesting observations of this type of identity formation (see the vignette about Mousab in 7.3.6.), however they did not come through as being central to answering my research question and so have not become part of the findings. Similarly I do not discuss dialogue in the findings which Raelin describes an activity that helps researchers ensure their work is participatory and developmental (Raelin, 2020). Whilst interviews and discussions with the charity’s people were important sources of insight and triangulation for my findings, they were not co-participants in the research. My own approach, as the methodology chapter (5) outlines, was designed to be less actively engaged and more focused on understanding leadership practice as it is rather than cultivating leadership practice as it could be. Chapters eight and nine reflect on to what extent this was achieved and to what extent becoming more actively engaged represents an opportunity for future research.
At the time of designing my methodology, the most appropriate guidance on how to do so using an L-A-P lens came from the 2016 volume on L-A-P (Raelin, 2016a). In the introduction to this book Raelin acknowledges that there are a wide range of approaches to L-A-P research and Kempster et al.’s chapter later in the book focuses on “Methodologies to discover and challenge leadership-as-practice” (Kempster et al., 2016, p. 242). The authors explain that methods for L-A-P studies are varied and they emphasise the importance of two elements in any research design. First is being clear about the unit of analysis which is in keeping with Simpson’s discussion of where agency lies in leadership (Kempster et al., 2016; Simpson, 2016). Second is using multiple techniques to enable illumination and triangulation of findings (Kempster et al., 2016). By adopting interactions as my unit of analysis and employing multiple data collection methods in my research I have taken on board this advice and incorporated it into my research design. One of the overarching approaches recommended by Kempster et al that seems particularly relevant to this project is ethnography which involves researchers becoming embedded to help understand an organisation in a reflexive way (Kempster et al., 2016). This chimes with Carroll’s call for L-A-P research to explore “whole worlds” (Carroll, 2016, p. 96) because becoming embedded enables the researcher to observe aspects of practice that are not apparent from narratives alone. My case study design adopted ethnographic techniques and I became fully embedded with the charity. This is discussed in much greater depth in chapter five along with a consideration of the implications researching during the COVID-19 pandemic had for ethnographic techniques.

Kempster et al see researchers as having a dyadic relationship with L-A-P, as well as using it as framework for research, individual studies all help to “discover and challenge L-A-P” (Kempster et al., 2016, p. 242). As such they see all empirical studies as contributions to building the theoretical understanding of the L-A-P approach. This represents a significant opportunity for my thesis to make a contribution to the wider literature because, as Kempster et al point out “as a fledgling
development in the field of leadership studies, L-A-P has a wonderful opportunity to guide the development of theorizing from the ground up” (Kempster et al., 2016, p. 249). From the literature reviewed so far, two ways this could be achieved are already clear. One is that new studies may help verify or strengthen concepts of leadership that are emerging through L-A-P. Prominent among these are the understanding of leadership as a process that is achieved through the flow of interactions and within this a greater consideration of the role of materiality (Carroll, 2016). The second is that new studies may help address some of the weaknesses L-A-P has been criticised for such as its failure to take embedded power structures into account as an influence on leadership practice (Collinson, 2018). Chapter eight of this thesis picks up these points and considers how and to what extent my findings move theory development of L-A-P forwards.

Overall, as an emerging approach to research L-A-P is a good match with my study. Rather than test the validity of a particular theory in a new context, it is my ambition for this thesis to provide an inside out, all-encompassing overview of how a charity delivers on its mission, which is then related back to the wider literature. To achieve this, a broad and flexible approach to leadership is required and this sits well with L-A-P which aspires to find leadership “wherever and however it appears” (Raelin, 2017, p. 216) and to appreciate "whole worlds" of leadership practice (Carroll, 2016, p. 96). I will return to assess the extent to which this promise of L-A-P is borne out in chapters eight and nine. For now, I will turn to studies that have helped inform my thinking and help to provide the precedent for taking this approach to my study.
2.4. Themes to illuminate leadership practice: Place, Practices and People

The theoretical landscape of leadership studies can feel labyrinthine to navigate and so, perhaps unsurprisingly, the application and development of theory also produces a somewhat bewildering array of studies that may be relevant to a thesis such as mine. Further to that I have chosen to adopt a theoretical lens that aims to open up ideas about what might be relevant to leadership rather than narrow the researcher’s focus. So in the literature review phase of this PhD project, I read widely across the two journals dedicated to Leadership Studies (The Leadership Quarterly and Leadership) as well as Voluntary Sector and Business and Management journals. First, I used a snowballing method to identify readings that gave me an up to date and in depth overview of the field of Leadership Studies. Next, in order to focus on the research topic I searched for literature that focused on leadership in voluntary sectors and small charities in particular (chapter three reviews this literature). I did find some work in this field that used heroic leadership theory and quantitative methods (Gilstrap et al., 2015; Hassan et al., 2017; Mahalinga Shiva and Suar, 2012; Peng et al., 2020; Santora et al., 2011; Simsa, 2020; Trautmann et al., 2007) but these did not feel highly relevant because they were not from the UK context and my theoretical lens suggested that research underpinned by post heroic and critical understandings of leadership was more relevant for this review. However, this work, in the context of charities, was so scarce that I rapidly had to expand my search to studies of any context or theoretical approach that felt relevant to social change work and that which serves people in need. Having done this, when I came to conduct my primary research and data analysis, I found I had a diverse pool of literature from which to draw insights and relate back to what felt like emerging themes. In this section I will present a small set of articles which have been helpful in shaping my thinking on leadership as this study has progressed. They are quite disparate articles and don’t synthesise easily so I have grouped them into three loose categories that reflect the object of study in these papers, those being place, practices and people.
These categories don’t directly mirror the themes in my findings chapters, rather they reflect groupings which link the articles reviewed and also cross over with my themes. The articles selected are those which I have come back to or sought out as I went through the iterative process of data analysis (which is detailed in chapter five). Some of these papers appear in chapter eight as they have directly influenced my conceptualisation of leadership practice, others have played a more background role in my thought process as I have collected and analysed data. In keeping with the magpie like tendency of L-A-P, these studies include those that explicitly place themselves under the L-A-P banner and those that do not but are from related approaches, such as collective and relational leadership.

2.4.1 Articles Exploring Place

The first grouping, place, refers to studies that understand physical spaces as constitutive elements of leadership practice. These are not studies of place leadership i.e. leadership of a geographic location, although they may provide insights that are informative to place leadership in so much as they shed light on how local contextual factors become part of how leadership is practiced. Working at the level of individual workplaces, Ropo and Salovaara’s study builds on the materiality or “thing-ness” (Ropo and Salovaara, 2019, p. 461) of L-A-P to explore the interaction between people and the immediate place they work in. Their method is to analyse three work-based vignettes in which the place in which work is done (a stage, a ship builders assembly hall and an electrician’s centre) is seen as influential. The senses, feelings and memories that these places evoked in the workers were found to have had a material impact on their practice. As such the place in which they work is seen to be one of the factors that leads how they work; demonstrating how the work environment may be considered in a study of leadership practice. Focusing on broader conceptions of place from towns through to regional areas, there have been articles which call for place to be understood as
playing a constitutive role in leadership (Collinge and Gibney, 2010; Grint, 2010b). More recently, Jackson has brought this narrative into the domain of L-A-P research (Jackson, 2019). He argues that a multidimensional understanding of leadership requires researchers to consider the role of place. His article calls for more time and energy to be invested in research on place as a complement to collaborative conceptions of leadership (Jackson, 2019). Although Raelin argues that L-A-P seeks to pay more attention to local contexts, at the time of writing Jackson’s call to action is yet to be clearly answered in the form of empirical studies (Raelin, 2016a). My PhD project can be considered as part of the response because, in this thesis, the place in which leadership happens is seen as constitutive of how leadership is practiced both at the immediate and city level. At the immediate level I explore the role of the working environment in leadership practice and at the city level I explore the role of local policies and practices in shaping leadership practice at the charity.

2.4.2 Articles Exploring Practices

The second grouping, practices, refers to studies that have used leadership theory to illustrate and conceptualise leadership practices as observed in real world settings. Here I am referring to practices as regular ways of doing things in the work place as opposed to the more holistic idea of practice which encompasses practices, praxis and practitioners (Carroll et al., 2008). For example, “bundles of practices” (Jacklin-Jarvis and Rees, 2021, p. 6) that enable collective leadership are explored in in Jacklin Jarvis and Rees’ paper on grassroots associations in the UK. These bundles include organising, engaging and accounting activities which enable the associations studied to endure in an associational as opposed to professionalised form (Jacklin-Jarvis and Rees, 2021). As with this thesis, the authors adopt an L-A-P lens and are informed by collective conceptions of leadership (Jacklin-Jarvis and Rees, 2021). The practices identified in Ospina and Foldy’s 2010 study of relational leadership in social change organisations in the US is another example of a study focused on
practices (Ospina and Foldy, 2010). The paper explores how “the connectedness needed for collaborative work” (Ospina and Foldy, 2010, p. 292) that helps organisations pursue their missions can be fostered. What they find is five practices in the organisations studied that nurture collaborative work which they label as; prompting, naming and shaping identity, engaging in dialogue about difference, creating equitable governance and weaving multiple worlds together (Ospina and Foldy, 2010). The authors argue that by identifying these leadership practices they have found a way to operationalise relational leadership theory, moving away from the who, where and how of leadership to the what (Ospina and Foldy, 2010). A third example is a paper by Simpson et al in which they authors have dug more deeply into “leadership in the flow of practice” (or praxis) (Simpson et al., 2018, p. 644) and developed the concept of the performativity of leadership. Their focus is looking into what the authors say is the underexamined “black box” of process, specifically using an empirical study which observed “leadership movements” (Simpson et al., 2018, p. 644) in a regular weekly senior management team meeting to understand how senior managers’ day to day conversations can create turning points in the direction of practice and are therefore constitutive of leadership. These articles demonstrate how qualitative research into day to day practice can be used to crystallise what may otherwise seem mundane or insignificant activity into concepts that help us understand what types of practices are part of leadership. In other words, these articles provide tangible examples of how elements of L-A-P thinking can be operationalised in a piece of academic research.

2.4.3. Articles Exploring People

The third grouping, people, is called this because it covers studies which help to expand the type of people or roles that are included for consideration in studies of leadership beyond positional leaders to include a larger group of actors. This could be a very a broad topic but what I am most interested
in here is articles that bring actors into the frame of leadership that may be particularly relevant in the work of small charities. They are therefore drawn from studies of social change work or work that serves people in need. The first example is Quick’s longitudinal ethnographic study of urban environmental stewardship in Grand Rapids, Michigan (Quick, 2017). She uses collective leadership theory to chart how a diverse range of people from across the city come together fuelled by a shared public “imaginary” (Quick, 2017, p. 445) to work on green issues and who become more “coordinated and synergistic” (Quick, 2017, p. 450) over time. The participants in urban environmental stewardship in Quick’s study are not drawn from a particular sector or structure but include citizens, politicians and public and private sector actors (Quick, 2017). Another example of where people not traditionally considered as playing a role in leadership are a focus is Nicholson and Kurucz’s paper on bringing the idea of the ethics of care into relational leadership (Nicholson and Kurucz, 2019). In this understanding of leadership, the central driver of leadership direction should be care for the people or cause the organisation seeks to serve (Nicholson and Kurucz, 2019). These two examples expand the lens of study to include a wider range of actors. They also both include a central idea as a driving force of action; a public imaginary about environmental stewardship in the case of Quick’s study and a focus on human and environmental wellbeing in Nicholson and Kurucz’s article (Nicholson and Kurucz, 2019; Quick, 2017). Most of the L-A-P work reviewed in this chapter focuses on direction setting and change but doesn’t necessarily focus on what that direction is towards. Quick and Nicholson and Kurucz’s articles provide examples of where a central idea is present and this chimes with my use of mission as the central driving idea of small charities’ work. A final article I’d like to include in this people section, although somewhat counterintuitively it decentres the focus of research from people altogether, is Drath et al’s on what they call the DAC (direction, alignment, commitment) ontology for leadership studies (Drath et al., 2008). This proposed new ontology takes us firmly away from focusing on the roles of people who may or may not be considered leaders in favour of focusing on how everyone involved in an endeavour align in terms of their direction and commitment towards a goal. This is an interesting proposition that may
allow researchers to sidestep the problem Simpson argues L-A-P studies often have of falling back into focusing on people as their unit of analysis (Simpson, 2016).

2.5. The theoretical lens for this study

So far, this chapter has outlined the leadership studies terrain for my thesis with a particular focus on the emerging L-A-P approach. This final section will focus on how I apply what I have learned from that terrain to my research. For the primary research element of this thesis, I adopt an L-A-P lens to help answer the research question which is: how is leadership practiced at a small asylum seeker and refugee charity? The idea of a theoretical lens doesn’t appear to have a unified definition in the literature and has been described variously as a perspective (Ford, 2010), a theoretical device (Ospina et al., 2020) and a theoretical framework (Given, 2008). For clarity then, it is necessary to unpack a little how I am using the term. By adopting a lens, I mean that for my research I enter an L-A-P mindset in which leadership is understood to be defined and observed in a certain way and in which I am alert to particular influences. Jacklin Jarvis and Rees describe this approach as adopting a “conceptual lens” (Jacklin-Jarvis and Rees, 2021, p. 15). Metaphorically, this process could be viewed as a three step process akin to putting on and using a pair of glasses:

- Step one is putting the glasses on which is akin to adopting a definition of leadership for the research setting which is consistent with L-A-P.
- Step two is adjusting the eyes to look through the glasses which is akin to readying oneself to view the world as a complex web of interactions between people place and thing.
- Step three is to begin to observe through the glasses, allowing them to clarify what you see by making you alert to interactions which feel part of leadership practice. This includes those where
material objects and environments, contextual influences and mundane seeming activity are involved.

The idea of a theoretical lens as I have described it is one that is suited to L-A-P because it does frame and focus what you see, but in an expansive way that allows the researcher to see the potential for leadership in almost any interaction they observe.

To unpack the L-A-P lens I adopt in this thesis in a bit more detail it is necessary to explore each step of putting on the glasses. In step one a specific definition of leadership needs to be adopted. As discussed in section 2.3.1 above, in L-A-P leadership can be defined as the setting, ordering and re-orienting the flow of organising process (Crevani and Endrissat, 2016) and practice can be defined as an assemblage of interactions and working customs which combine and interact to create meaning (Sergi, 2016; Simpson, 2016). In this definition ‘interactions’ means any reciprocal action or influence between people and/or their environment and ‘working customs’ means the norms of work-related activity within and/or between organisations. At an organisational level then establishing, delivering and altering what an organisation does can be seen as the process of leadership in action and the everyday activities and working customs can be seen as how that leadership is practiced. In the case of charities, I use the mission as the focal point of what leadership is trying to achieve (more on this below). In my case study, the charitable mission is to improve the welfare of ASRs in the city where it operates. Therefore, the definition of leadership practice at my case study is the everyday interactions and working customs that enable the charity to improve ASR welfare in the city where it operates. Adopting this definition by putting on the glasses provides an important guiding point to help me understand what data is relevant to answering the research question. It provides a rationale for deciding which data demonstrates interactions that are doing the work of leadership as opposed
to interactions that may be interesting but are not material to the definition, delivery or adaptation of the mission.

In the definition I am adopting, mission is taken to mean the overarching objectives of a charity which relate to the public purpose statement in a charity’s governing document and which are often set down in a mission statement. This seems the most pertinent way of framing what leadership is for in terms of charities because it is what the organisation ultimately exists to achieve. I could have chosen to look at leadership of different elements of how a charity functions e.g. leadership in managing its people, resources or different functions such as service delivery or fundraising. However, my research is a whole organisation study which looks at a small charity and takes into consideration all the micro-elements of activity which build into the bigger picture of mission delivery. It can also be argued that being driven by a charitable mission rather than the profit motive or public service motive is one of the things that makes charities different to organisations in other sectors (Billis and Glennerster, 1998; Buckingham, 2011). So, focusing on how leadership relates to mission is also particularly relevant to the contribution this thesis makes to the wider literature.

The second step in the putting on the glasses metaphor is readying oneself to view the world as a complex web of interactions between people place and other entities. In the case of my research this involves adopting interactions as my unit of analysis. Being clear about the unit of analysis in L-A-P studies is a challenge and one that Kempster et al emphasise should be a priority for research (Kempster et al., 2016). In order to operationalise the idea of leadership in the flow of practice, as called for in L-A-P studies (Raelin, 2020; Simpson, 2016), I focus on interactions as my primary unit of analysis. In order to analyse interactions of course I also have to identify which entities are interacting with each other; be that person, practice or other entities. However, my observational
and analytical lens is focused less on who or what is playing a role in leadership practice and more on how they relate to each other. In other words, in this thesis I see interactions as doing the work of leadership so surfacing and understanding the interactions that are most instrumental in how the charitable mission is delivered or changed is my main focus.

The final step in the putting on the glasses metaphor is looking with clarified vision at the research subject. As well as looking broadly across and deeply into the activity of the charity in order to appreciate leadership “wherever and however it appears” (Raelin, 2017, p. 216), adopting an L-A-P lens entails a particular focus on materiality, mundanity and contextual influences. In this way the L-A-P lens is useful for paying attention to things that may be influential on leadership but that are often overlooked in traditional leadership studies. Both Sergi and Carroll contribute to the field through their examples of paying attention to the mundane, everyday activities of organisations and picking out occasions when physical objects become material to the process of leadership (Carroll, 2016; Sergi, 2016). Carroll’s example of a koosh ball doing the work of leadership and Sergi’s of a project planning document are two such examples (Carroll, 2016; Sergi, 2016). The use of these items is in a rather mundane and routine way; the koosh ball casually thrown from hand to hand, the document shared and edited by a range of people, but the L-A-P lens illuminates the ways in which they influence the direction work takes. This openness to mundanity and materiality is central to the research design and analysis of data in this thesis. As suggested by Kempster et al, I use a range of data collection methods to build a holistic picture of leadership practice which appreciates the role material items and mundane activity play. As I discuss in the Methodology chapter (5), the role of observation in data collection and of free writing in data analysis are particularly useful in allowing me to surface the material and mundane elements of leadership practice. Finally, the L-A-P

---

4 These authors do not reference neo materialist literature in their work but it does appear to be influenced by this thinking which aims to move away from a dualist understanding of lived experience to a monist understanding in which experience is embodied in the physical world (van der Tuin and Dolphijn, 2010)
lens encourages an alertness to contextual influences on leadership practice. Collinson’s stinging attack on L-A-P for its lack of attention to underlying power structures and Ford’s highlighting of the need to take into account feminist concerns and other power imbalances in the context of each study struck home with me (Collinson, 2018; Ford, 2016). These seem to highlight L-A-P’s failure so far to achieve its aspiration of understanding leadership in its context (Raelin, 2016c) or at least to appreciate the influence of underlying power structures on micro interactions. For this reason, the study looks explicitly at the influence of context and how the structural power that underpins the social and policy environment the case study operates in, affects its practice at the micro-level. As such there is a dedicated context chapter (4) that lays out many of the contextual details I refer back to in the presentation and discussion of findings (chapters 6-8).

2.6. Chapter conclusion

This chapter has detailed the conceptual backdrop for this research and located it in the wider field of Leadership Studies. It has critically examined L-A-P as the emerging approach to leadership research that my thesis is part of. It makes clear that the promise of L-A-P is that its flexibility and holistic focus on practice makes it appropriate for a study that seeks to develop a holistic and in-depth understanding of how a small charity is able to deliver on and develop its charitable mission. Next the chapter has drawn on specific examples of papers from the literature that have informed my thinking both from within L-A-P and closely related approaches. Finally, it has provided detail on what adopting an L-A-P lens means for this thesis. Although I have included studies that explore leadership in voluntary sector or social change settings, the work of UK charities is scarcely covered in this chapter. In order to fully locate this thesis, chapter three reviews the literature from Voluntary Sector Studies that is most relevant to this study and the chapter five provides the necessary contextual information.
Chapter Three- Voluntary Sector Studies Literature Review

3.1. Chapter Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to locate my thesis in the existing literature on the UK voluntary sector. It will also identify studies that may help illuminate leadership practice at my case study charity. As well as contributing to the emerging L-A-P movement, this thesis helps to develop the embryonic but growing body of voluntary sector specific research on leadership (Macmillan and McLaren, 2012; Terry, et al., 2020). Accordingly, this chapter first briefly overviews the history and development of Voluntary Sector Studies in the UK, demonstrating how and when leadership theory appeared on the scene. Secondly, I review the leadership focused voluntary sector literature that has been published so far. With this study, I aim to provide a highly contextualised account of leadership practice which provides insights that will be relevant to wider Voluntary Sector Studies.

To this end, I use the next part of the chapter to explore the literature that has focused on small and then asylum seeker and refugee focused charities, these being the two characteristics that most clearly define my case study organisation. These latter two sections are not explicitly leadership focused but draw on the broader literatures this thesis can also learn from and contribute to. I conclude the chapter with a discussion of how the literature reviewed helps to set the scene for my case study and leads to the following chapter on context (4).
3.2. Introduction to the field of UK Voluntary Sector Studies

In her 2016 article “Where did we come from? The emergence and early development of voluntary sector studies in the UK”, Harris dates the emergence of the UKVSS field of study to the 1970s (M. Harris, 2016). She charts the milestones in the development of this still small field in relation to government policy on the sector and the development of leadership institutions within in the sector such as the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO) (M. Harris, 2016). This approach of placing the sector in relation to policy and practice as opposed to theory is reflective of the grounded, multidisciplinary literature that can now be found under the banner of voluntary and non-profit studies in journals including the UK based Voluntary Sector Review and the North American based Voluntas and Non-Profit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly. Amidst the disciplinary diversity of UKVSS studies there are also a small number of academic centres that anchor the field. These tend to be located in Sociology and Social Policy departments5 but are also increasingly a presence in business schools including the Centre for Charity Effectiveness at Bayes Business School and the Open University’s (OU) own Centre for Voluntary Sector for Leadership (CVSL) which my PhD research is affiliated to.

From the 1990s, policy focused UKVSS scholars saw UK governments as taking a more visible and interventionist policy approach to the sector (Kendall, 2000). From New Labour’s enthusiasm for what it labelled the Third Sector, through the Coalition government’s Big Society, the May Conservative government’s Shared Society and the Johnson Conservative government’s Civil Society, the sector has remained on the public agenda since this time (Alcock and Kendall, 2011; Bennett et al., 2019; Milbourne and Cushman, 2013). This policy attention has been associated in the literature

---

5 These include the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University, the Third Sector Research Centre at the University of Birmingham and the Centre for Philanthropy at the University of Kent
with welfare pluralism, by which I mean the trend towards diversifying the types of organisation that provide welfare services to include private and voluntary sector organisations in combination with state run services (Rees and Mullins, 2016). There is a deep seam of critique in UKVSS about welfare pluralism linked to a concern that the independence of the sector has been compromised by state intervention (Macmillan and Paine, 2021). In this narrative, service delivery VSOs are seen as having become drawn into a race to the bottom due to competitive tendering for government contracts and have lost their ability to independently contest government policy on behalf of service users (Rees and Mullins, 2016). The commentary on the fate of smaller charities is particularly despondent and there is a narrative about small VSOs being the losers in this policy environment due to being unable to compete with larger better resourced VSOs for service delivery contracts (Aiken and Harris, 2017; Milbourne and Murray, 2014).

Overlapping the concern about independence is another debate about whether VSOs should actually be seen as collectively forming a third sector alongside the private and public spheres. A foundational text in this debate is a paper by 6 and Leat who provocatively suggest that the sector could be seen as no more than a construct of government policy (Leat and Perri 6, 1997). Subsequent scholarship has charted the sector’s position as it has been shaped by changing government policy. In relation to the New Labour government of the 1990s- 2000’s Alcock saw policy as encouraging partnership with the sector and mainstreaming of VSO services. In relation to Conservative led governments from 2013 onwards, Macmillan argued that government used the big society agenda to partially de-couple that partnership (Alcock, 2010; Macmillan, 2013). Alongside research into the extent to which the sector is shaped by government policy, there are ongoing efforts to develop academically rigorous theory around who makes up the sector, what its purpose is and how it does or should go about its work. One of the challenges of defining and theorising the sector is the heterogenous nature of the organisations and activities it contains. It has been
memorably described as a “loose and baggy monster” (Kendall and Knapp, 1995, p. 65). In order to
tame the monster conceptually, various theoretical models of hybridity have been developed (Billis,
2010; Buckingham, 2011; Evers, 1995; Rochester et al., 2020). Hybrid organisations are those which
have characteristics of belonging to more than one sector for example a social enterprise which is
part VSO and part for profit service provider (Doherty et al., 2014). These approaches provide ways
to rationalise the permeable borders and increasingly grey areas within the sector without losing its
distinctiveness altogether.

Other scholars of the voluntary sector have focused more at the organisational level (Billis and
Glennerster, 1998; Salamon et al., 2000). Salamon et al’s definition of a VSO, which was developed
in the US but is often quoted in UKVSS, states that a VSO is “a formal organization, self-governing,
independent of government, not profit-distributing, and voluntary” (Salamon et al., 2000, p. 15).
Focusing more specifically on the nature of the services provided by VSOs, Billis and Glennester
proposed a theory of comparative advantage (Billis and Glennerster, 1998). This rests on the idea
that VSOs have an advantage over public and private sector providers in delivering human services
to certain users because of organisational characteristics that predispose them to respond more
sensitively to disadvantaged people. Specifically, it suggests that because people who work or
volunteer in VSOs exhibit a high level of stakeholder ambiguity, they are better able to understand
and serve their users. In this context stakeholder ambiguity refers to the idea that people involved in
VSOs, including the staff, trustees and volunteers who deliver the services, often have some lived
experience or understanding of the disadvantage being addressed. Billis and Glennester warn that
this advantage may diminish as organisations grow and develop or take on more professional staff
(Billis and Glennerster, 1998).
Alongside the development of theory around VSOs has been some literature which aims at conceptualising the role of the sector as a whole independent of the narrative of government policy (Alcock, 2010). One of the concerns voiced is that this theory is underdeveloped, thereby reducing the sector’s ability to advocate for itself in policy and funding circles (Macmillan and McLaren, 2012). In 2012, Macmillan and McLaren brought leadership theory into the frame as a possible way to build a strategic narrative that would allow more effective leadership of the sector (Macmillan and McLaren, 2012). This was a forerunner to a growing interest in how leadership theory may be used to help illuminate our understanding of the sector. In the intervening years, PhD studies and a growing number of academic articles have developed that interest further (Haslam, 2020; Jacklin-Jarvis and Rees, 2021; Terry, et al., 2020). My thesis can be seen as part of this development within the field of UKVSS. The next section will unpack in more depth how far UKVSS scholars have come with introducing leadership to the field in both practice and academic terms. In the sections that follow I will return to some of the themes around independence and welfare pluralism that I have introduced here, in so much as they relate to small and ASR charities.

3.3. Leadership studies and the UK Voluntary Sector

Leadership theory in all its guises is very much engaged in the development of practice. A substantial international leadership industry exists that seeks to develop leadership capacity in organisations and individuals (Youngs, 2017). As an academic subject, LS, has developed as an interdisciplinary academic field which, although it has two dedicated journals and an established place in many Business Schools, is often written about from the perspective of other fields (Riggio and Harvey, 2011). For example there are experts in education leadership (Youngs, 2017) and health leadership (Rowitz, 2013). However, both academically and in practice terms, leadership has made only partial inroads into the UK voluntary sector. Whilst this may be due simply in part to the very small nature
of the UKVSS field, it has led to the perception that there is a leadership deficit in the sector (Harris, 2016). This has been exacerbated by recent scandals including the collapse of Kids Company in 2015 and the abuse of young women by Oxfam workers in 2018 (Dean, 2020; Terry, et al., 2020).

3.3.1. Leadership Development

Leadership development initiatives in the sector mostly predate the recent developments in VSO leadership research. So they have been delivered without a sector specific research base which takes account of the distinctive and heterogenous nature of VSOs (Terry, et al., 2020). This disconnect between theory and application is reflected in the response to leadership development in parts of the sector which have been sceptical about its relevance and value (R. Harris, 2016a). Harris’ paper for Clore, a social leadership development charity, titled “Leadership Development in the Third Sector; Learning Lessons” charts the development of leadership initiatives in the UK voluntary sector (R. Harris, 2016a). It shows that investments have been made but with mixed success; including in the Third Sector Leadership Centre which was open 2006-9 and the Clore Social Fellowships which is a continuing scheme (R. Harris, 2016a). Overall, the paper paints a picture of patchy investment in leadership and scepticism towards the concept of leadership development except from those at the top of large organisations. A follow up paper in 2019 suggested there was growing enthusiasm for leadership development that focuses on collaborative and embedded approaches (Davis et al., 2019). However both papers point to the concern that, as a result of cost and time constraints and confusion over what leadership means, there remains a deficit in understanding and developing leadership in the sector (Davis et al., 2019; R. Harris, 2016a).
3.3.2. Leadership Research

As discussed in chapter two, my leadership literature review took in social change work from different countries. For this literature review I particularly focused on what has developed out of UKVSS as that which should be most directly relevant to my case study organisation. In terms of the academic research on leadership in the sector, Macmillan and McLaren described it as “embryonic” (Macmillan and McLaren, 2012, p. 5) in their 2012 paper. Indeed, the literature published around and since that time is sparse and beyond a general tendency to use qualitative research methods, it doesn’t easily synthesise into one or more coherent approaches to leadership. It is therefore necessary to briefly consider the unique contribution of each study to understanding leadership. This is done next under two broad themes that have emerged in reviewing the literature. The first is studies seeking to understand individual leaders and the contribution they make. The second is studies that develop concepts which may help us to understand and develop the practice of leadership in the sector. These studies tend more towards utilising post heroic conceptions of leadership either through individuals’ accounts (Buckingham et al., 2014; Howieson and Hodges, 2014; Paton and Brewster, 2008) or scholars’ conceptual analysis (Kay, 1996; Kirchner, 2006; Macmillan and McLaren, 2012; Schwabenland, 2006), both of which emphasise how leadership is shared between people and is shaped by a range of perspectives.

3.3.2.1. Studies of leaders

The studies which have explored individuals and their experiences of leadership perspectives share a common finding that peoples’ experiences are diverse and don’t fit neatly into any of the existing leadership models (Buckingham et al., 2014; Hodges and Howieson, 2017; Paton and Brewster, 2008). They draw different conclusions about what this means for the further study and practice of leadership in the voluntary sector. Hodges and Howieson explain that traditionally leadership
scholars have suggested authentic leadership as the best model for VSO leadership, but they argue that a broader framework including “adaptive, distributed, ethical, servant and shared leadership” is more appropriate (Howieson and Hodges, 2014, p. 209). Paton and Brewster aim to further develop theory through collaborative inquiry with VSO leaders, with a focus on their interior experience (Paton and Brewster, 2008). They suggest that experience is always shaped by context and a range of actors (Paton and Brewster, 2008). Finally, Buckingham et al focus on how VSO leaders are legitimised and argue that in the context of austerity in the UK there should be a greater willingness to explore and lead based on values that are shared across the sector (Buckingham et al., 2014).

Whether their focus is relating the sector to existing theory (Howieson and Hodges, 2014), developing new theory (Paton and Brewster, 2008) or influencing practice (Buckingham et al., 2014) these studies share a focus on individual leaders and an acknowledgement that understanding the diversity of practitioners’ lived experience is an important step in voluntary sector leadership research.

3.3.2.2. Studies of leadership

The second area of literature is one that goes beyond individuals’ accounts to take a wider view of how leadership is practiced in the voluntary sector. Kirchner’s model of voluntary sector leadership, whilst still having a focus on the CEO, begins to mark out how a range of actors should be seen to have a role to play (Kirchner, 2006). Kirchner takes a position focused approach, outlining how a CEO leads up to their board, down to their staff and out to their wider community (Kirchner 2006). Kay’s work published earlier in 1996, goes beyond this structured approach to conceptualise leadership in the sector as a social process in which leaders are not only those in management positions but anyone who has the influence to participate in meaning making activity (Kay, 1996). There are echoes here of relational leadership theory which sees leadership as emergent relational
accomplishment (Crevani, 2015). Kay argues explicitly for the development of a culture which recognizes different perspectives and draws them together to create diverse communities (Kay, 1996). What these papers share is the suggestion that accounts of leadership in the sector should consider a range of actors. Where they differ is that Kirchner marks out a specific set of roles that should be considered whilst Kay takes a more holistic approach to considering anyone who may have influence.

Two studies go beyond the realm of individual actors to consider narrative as having agentic power; in other words, the story of a VSO can be part of the leadership process in its own right. Schwabenland’s book on the founding stories of charities focuses on how realities were constructed through storytelling in Indian and UK NGOs (Schwabenland 2006). She talks about how repetition of the founding story by both leaders and members helps to construct and reinforce organisational values and commitment to a cause (Schwabenland, 2006). Macmillan and McLaren widen out the idea of narrative from use by a single organisation to use across the sector (Macmillan and McLaren 2012). They suggest that narrative is one of the tools needed to help VSOs find “room” (Macmillan, 2013, p. 42) or an acknowledged role and position in the rapidly changing political landscape. What these papers highlight is that in VSO settings, establishing and deploying narratives is an important element of leadership practice.

3.4. The research agenda

The literature reviewed thus far suggests two reasons that researching leadership in the voluntary sector may make a valuable contribution to the literature. First, the experiences of VSO leaders demonstrate that the contexts in which they work are diverse and influential on their practice and
therefore voluntary sector specific studies should help researchers to understand which theoretical frameworks may best illuminate leadership practice in the sector. Second, this diversity suggests that research on the voluntary sector is fertile ground for developing theory that may help deepen understanding of leadership. Terry et al add a certain urgency to the need to study leadership in the voluntary sector and to do so in such a way that furthers understanding of its heterogeneity across organisational type and focus (Terry, et al., 2020). The authors warn that the perceived leadership deficit will not effectively be filled if academia, policy and practice continue to assume a level of homogeneity in VSOs that does not exist (Terry, et al., 2020).

Harris argues that VSOs must accept circumstances will be volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (R. Harris, 2016b). Echoing Raelin’s call for collective leadership in a more networked world, he also argues that we should embrace the opportunities digital technology bring alongside a new generation that are more comfortable with collaborative working (R. Harris, 2016b, p. 5). If Harris is correct, it follows that the research agenda should be one that is able to extend our understanding of these new ways of leading. Terry et al begin to develop this case further, pointing to the potential for the use of collective leadership approaches for understanding leadership in the sector (Terry, et al., 2020). Jacklin Jarvis and Rees’ recent article which uses an L-A-P lens to explore bundles of practice at grassroots associations takes this forward as I do in this thesis in the context of small asylum seeker and refugee charities (Jacklin-Jarvis and Rees, 2021).

3.5. Small charities in the UKVSS literature

The subject of my primary research is a small charity (in income terms) with an annual revenue of under £100k (NCVO, 2020). In much of the literature I have reviewed, the diversity of VSOs is
acknowledged but this has not led to a substantial pool of published literature on smaller charities specifically. There is some research that suggests these organisations offer something distinctive to the sector; in the ‘Value of Small study’ Dayson et al found that smaller VSOs provide a distinctive offer of long term, deeply engaged and embedded work with local communities (Dayson et al., 2018). However, that distinctive offer remains under researched in the UK. In this section I look at the published literature that does exist, which is of most relevance to my case study charity. First, I look at charities as an organisational type. Second, I consider research into how the policy environment I touched on in the opening section of this chapter has affected smaller charities particularly. Next, I look at practice in small charities and particularly the role of volunteering. In this section I explore the case made in the literature that volunteering can be seen as a defining feature of smaller organisations and one which expands their significance in terms of impact and agency.

3.5.1. Charities

There are a range of structures considered to be part of the UK voluntary sector including Community Interest Companies, Social Enterprises, community groups and registered Charities including Charitable Incorporated Organisations. This thesis focuses specifically on charities and there are some distinctive features of being a charity that should be noted here because they are significant to how I define and explore leadership practice. First is the fact that charities are obliged to have volunteer trustee boards, thereby establishing a potential structure through which collective leadership may occur (Terry, et al., 2020). Second is that charities should be set up in order to serve a charitable purpose (Charity Commission, 2020). The legal terms for these purposes are broad and so charities are encouraged to draft their own specific purposes. I have chosen to use the term ‘mission’ in my definition of leadership practice at charities to conceptualise what these charitable purposes are, an approach which is used in other studies of charities (Chew, 2010; McGovern, 2013;
Parsons and Broadbridge, 2004). Some charities explicitly use the term mission and produce mission statements, others use terms such as outcomes or purposes. I have chosen the term mission for simplicity and because in a single word it sums up the idea of charity’s being led by a purpose which is one of the concepts used by scholars of the voluntary sector to describe the way in which VSOs are distinctive (Buckingham, 2011; Salamon et al., 2000).

3.5.1. Small charity independence

In the opening section of this chapter, I introduced the argument, from literature, that VSOs were less independent as a result of greater government engagement and policy attention. Specifically, this has been linked to the creation of what Carmel and Harlock have called a governable terrain within the sector and isomorphism that has occurred within this space (Carmel and Harlock, 2008). The governable terrain was created, according to Carmel and Harlock, by the New Labour government extending greater control over the actions of VSOs. This was done through procurement of services and performance measurement of work delivered with government funding, alongside an enhanced regulatory framework (Carmel and Harlock, 2008, p. 155). Milbourne and Cushman suggest that within this terrain organisations experience enforced changes to their activity e.g. through government contract requirements (Milbourne and Cushman, 2015). This process, which draws conceptually form DiMaggio and Powell’s work of coercive isomorphism, causes VSOs to conform to dominant norms (Milbourne and Cushman, 2015). The normative or mimetic form of isomorphism which involves a more voluntary or subconscious taking on characteristics of the larger and more dominant organisations, is also seen to have driven VSO behaviour across the sector (Carmel and Harlock, 2008; Milbourne and Cushman, 2013).
There are several studies that suggest smaller charities have been the greatest victims of this controlling policy environment. Milbourne and Murray make the case that smaller organisations have been the losers in the contracting environment (Milbourne and Murray, 2014). They suggest that smaller charities are being outbid for funding by private organisations and larger charities, relegating them to, at best, sub-contractors in delivering services over which they have a diminishing chance of shaping (Milbourne and Murray, 2014). Thompson et al analyse data from the 2010 national survey of charities and also find that the smallest organisations, which may in the past have attracted grant funding, are least well equipped to take on contract funding. They find that this is a problem both of perception within the small charities and an issue of capacity which means they are unable to meet the monitoring and evaluation burden associated with contract funding (Thompson and Williams, 2014). In their more recent paper Aiken and Harris conclude that the cumulative effect of policy changes has been to hollow out smaller charities (Aiken and Harris, 2017). Those that have survived, the authors argue, have done so by cobbling together and defining their work according to the demands of whatever government and foundation funding is available to them (Aiken and Harris, 2017). It should be noted that my case study, registered in 2011, came into existence when welfare pluralism was already the norm. As the findings will show this recent history and the fear of mission drift, whereby a charity shapes its activity in response to funders goals (Milbourne and Cushman, 2013), does cast a shadow over more recent practice in small charities.

In depth and longitudinal studies of organisations in UKVSS are limited. In their field guide to the sector, Macmillan et al make the point that much of the qualitative research on UK VSOs relies on short, snap shot case studies for their findings (Macmillan et al., 2013). Their longitudinal ‘real times’ study, which includes but is not limited to small charities, is a counter balance to this (Macmillan et al., 2013). This study sheds light on how VSOs navigate unsettled times in the sector through a range of strategies including restructuring, mergers and repositioning (Macmillan et al.,
In a more recent paper, Macmillan and Paine have begun to theorise this approach by VSOs as a process of strategic selectivity through which they understand and navigate the unevenly distributed opportunities provided by public commissioning (Macmillan and Paine, 2021). To add to this slightly more optimistic or solutions focused study, there are also a small number of monographs that focus specifically on small VSOs and draw out the special importance of volunteering in these organisations by authors who write from long experience of working within small VSOs and suggest a possible alternative narrative around organisational agency in the face of government policy (McGovern, 2017; Milbourne, 2013; Rochester, 2013).

McGovern’s book on small charities in the age of austerity argues that smaller organisations and informal volunteer led groups are a meaningful force in society which can help build a counter narrative to that focused on the necessity to grow and professionalise to survive (McGovern, 2017). This can be achieved, she argues, by focusing on social mission as the driving force of VSOs (McGovern, 2017). In her book on the voluntary sector in transition Milbourne finds that smaller VSOs have the ability to resist the structural changes driven by the state in the ‘governable terrain’ through their ethos and communities of practice (Milbourne, 2013). Rochester’s book also suggests that we should adjust the lens through which we view the sector to take greater account of the thousands of less formal grassroots organisations and associations which exist under the radar of most academic and policy attention (Rochester, 2013). In the mainstream literature, Rochester suggests, there are two common but erroneous assumptions about voluntary action; one being that voluntary organisations are hierarchical structures led by paid managers and second that volunteering is a gift of time which is analogous to a gift of money (Rochester, 2013). His argument is that in smaller organisations voluntary action plays a larger and more complex role than allowed for in most of the discourse on the sector including as a source of self-help and mutuality (Rochester, 2013).
There is a growing literature to support the idea that volunteering is about more than hours given and there is research attention being paid to the more intangible benefits of volunteering (Stuart et al., 2020). Armour and Barton’s study of foodbank volunteers and Penny and Finnegan’s exploration of volunteering’s link to enhanced self-respect are two recent examples (Armour and Barton, 2019; Penny and Finnegan, 2019). However, the picture for volunteering is complex and there are elements of the literature that point to inequality that exists where VSOs rely heavily or exclusively on voluntary action. Mohan highlights spatial disparities in relation to the Big Society agenda of the coalition and Conservative governments from 2010 (Mohan, 2011). He uses information on VSOs, civic participation and local public spending to make the case that the UK has a geographical divide when it comes to how effective voluntary action can be in meeting needs. He shows that the affluent southern home counties are eminently better placed to achieve this than poorer regions (Mohan, 2011). The ability and willingness of people to volunteer is also affected by stage of life (Power, 2020), gender (Parry et al., 2020) and socio economic status (Davies, 2018). The case of unpaid internships as a route into paid voluntary sector careers also highlights a darker side of volunteering which allows class based discrimination and exploitation to become embedded in the sector (Leonard et al., 2016).

Finding the balance between a commitment to volunteering and moving towards greater professionalisation appears to be an ongoing challenge and process of negotiation for the sector. McGovern suggests that at an organisational level those which depend heavily or entirely on volunteers are often more fragile and less likely to survive than larger and more professionally managed organisations (McGovern, 2017). Rochester’s earlier work helps illuminate the challenges of being a small VSO and transitioning to a larger more professionalised organisation (Rochester,
2002). He associates smallness and newness in VSOs with a blurring of the boundaries between the operational and governance systems, where all the work often falls to a small group of individuals (Rochester, 2002). This can lead to a counterproductive cycle of responsibility becoming concentrated on a shrinking group of people leading to individuals burning out thereby reducing the group further, this is caused by what he calls “the liability of smallness” (Rochester, 2002, p. 116). Rochester’s study suggests that in small organisations there is a tendency for single employees to be overburdened and it can be difficult to manage the balance of responsibilities between volunteers who feel ownership of the charity and employees who are tasked with running it (Rochester, 2002). Employing people may help mitigate the liability of smallness but is in itself a challenging step. Cunningham’s studies of declining working conditions, work intensification and worker dissatisfaction in the sector are an apt reminder that simply employing people is no simple alternative to relying on voluntarism and is fraught with its own challenges (Cunningham, 2001, 2008).

3.6. ASR organisations in the UKVSS literature

As well as being a small charity, my case study is focused on the welfare of asylum seekers and refugees. This type of organisation is even less represented in the UKVSS literature than small charities are. In their systematic review of literature VSOs and migration up to 2016, Garkisch et al found just eight studies that focused on the UK (Garkisch et al., 2017). None of these studies considered ASR VSO work from a leadership or management perspective and only one focused on VSOs as organisations (MacKenzie et al., 2012). Other studies tended to be concerned with single issue areas including advocacy (Tomlinson, 2010) volunteering (Jones and E. Williamson, 2014) or the role of female refugees in integration (Newman et al., 2018; Tomlinson, 2010). The studies that do exist are so sparse that it is difficult to synthesise them into clear themes. Rather than include
non-UK Voluntary Sector studies I have made the choice to deepen this literature review by drawing on scholarship from the fields of migration and geography which focus on the UK asylum and refugee sector because the shared context sheds further light on how ASR VSOs operate (Darling, 2016a; Phillimore et al., 2021b). What this section does is review pertinent articles that fall under two broad areas; studies that look at how ASR charities operate in the UK political and social context and studies that look at the internal development of ASR charities. Chapter four will further set the scene for the dynamics explored in these articles.

3.6.1. ASR charities and the influence of policy

The literature suggests that filling gaps in provision left by UK asylum policy is one of the roles that ASR VSOs fulfil. Wren’s article on the experience of multi-agency work in Glasgow during its early years as a dispersal centre for asylum seekers illuminates how VSOs have played a significant role in welcoming and resettling ASRs (Wren, 2007). She highlights the important role of VSOs and also raises concerns over the extent to which the whole multiagency support system has operated in a reactive mode, often leaving VSOs to fill gaps in statutory service provision (Wren, 2007). This sense that VSOs have had to do more than complement state provision but have actually had to compensate for its insufficiencies in areas where ASRs are sent to live is repeated by Findlay et al (Findlay et al., 2007). In their study the authors consider whether ASR VSOs can be said to be providing a “shadow state” (Findlay et al., 2007, p. 57) to ASRs by providing services that used to be under the remit of the government. They find that the provision of services by ASR VSOs differed greatly in London where ASR charities had long histories and Manchester and Glasgow where new charities were being formed in response to the dispersal of asylum seekers (Findlay et al., 2007). Their article demonstrates that place, as well as policy, has a major impact on the ability of VSOs to
provide services and that the voluntary sector cannot be expected to act as a consistent substitute for the state.

Immigration scholars have explored the experience of ASRs in this context of insufficient support from the state and in their analysis they have shed light on the role of ASR VSOs. For example Phillimore has introduced the concept of a “welfare bricolage” (Phillimore et al., 2021a) for migrants where the processes of enhancing health and wellbeing draw in formal and informal actors from the public, private and third sectors (Phillimore et al., 2019, 2015). Phillimore’s work also considers the role of settled communities in welcoming and supporting the integration of ASRs (Phillimore, 2020; Phillimore et al., 2021). Meanwhile immigration scholar Darling has linked the insufficiency in state backed support to the privatisation of ASR services in his research (Darling, 2016a, 2016b). Darling makes the case that privatisation has disincentivised local authorities from engaging with ASR welfare and that private providers have a narrow focus on contract delivery (Darling, 2016a). ASR VSOs may be a particularly interesting site of study for understanding how these dynamics play out because they deal with asylum seekers who exist outside of many of the mainstream state provided welfare services (see chapter four for more detail on this).

Alongside welfare service provision, the literature highlights advocacy as an important aspect of ASR VSO work. This is particularly in the light of the "hostile environment" (Wilcock, 2019, p. 114) towards illegal immigrants (which includes most asylum seekers) that has been constructed by the UK government. In her article about VSO narratives, Tonkiss explores the ways that advocacy can still be achieved, even in the scenario where a VSO is funded by the state that is hostile towards its clients. She suggests that VSOs can build a narrative that contests some elements of government policy whilst accepting others, thereby enabling them to influence policy even in adversarial
conditions (Tonkiss, 2018, p. 120). For example, the spike in refugee flows in 2015 is framed by ASR charities as one of a failure of policy in contrast to the government’s suggestion there have been “floods” of refugees (Tonkiss, 2018, p. 125). In contrast the government narrative separating refugees from other economic migrants is conformed to and even entrenched by messaging from the charities which seek to support them (Tonkiss, 2018). In order to create what Macmillan and McLaren refer to as “room” for themselves in the policy discourse (Macmillan and McLaren, 2012, p. 3), these ASR charities create a narrative which is not simply in opposition to the state but includes complex strands of both contestation of and conformity to national government policy. As with the studies that illuminate how ASR VSOs fill welfare gaps, this literature shows that these organisations are working in a policy environment which is often paradoxical to their own charitable missions.

3.6.2. ASR groups and organisational development

There are a small number of articles that focus on the challenges small and below the radar ASR VSOs face in developing and being sustained as viable organisations. These shed light on the importance of having a core capacity that is able to navigate the UK funding and service environment. Studies of Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs), which are organisations run by and for ASRs, highlight the challenges these groups face in trying to understand and integrate themselves with the existing voluntary and public sectors (Griffiths et al., 2006; Lukes, 2009; Phillimore and Goodson, 2010). Phillimore and Goodson find failures to adapt on both sides and suggest that public institutions should be ready to make changes to practice in order to accommodate and value the contribution of more informal, and in some cases culturally distinct, organisations (Phillimore and Goodson, 2010). In their study of new immigrant support organisations, Mackenzie et al find that competing for funding is a key stumbling block for development and an experience that limits collaboration between migrant focused VSOs (MacKenzie
et al., 2012). They found that it was organisations which developed a political community beyond one based on shared ethnicity or language alone that had the best chance of survival (MacKenzie et al., 2012). I could not find examples of published studies that focused on ASR VSOs which operate as partnerships between ASRs and settled community members, as is the situation with my case study, or those which developed beyond the challenges identified by Phillimore and Goodson. However, Terry’s PhD thesis studies three organisations that did negotiate this transition (Terry, 2017). She found that, similar to Mackenzie’s idea of a political community, they achieved this in part by developing internal agency based on family, religious and entrepreneurial cultures, in addition to their focus on ASR needs (Terry, 2017).

3.7. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has located my thesis in the broader field of UK Voluntary Sector Studies. As I did for L-A-P in the last chapter, I explained leadership theory’s emergence within UKVSS by briefly exploring the field’s history and main debates. In doing this I also highlighted some of the theoretical developments in UKVSS including the idea of stakeholder ambiguity that may resonate with my case study. Next I reviewed what has been learned so far about small and ASR charities, highlighting some aspects of practice that may resonate with or be complicated by my findings including a heavy reliance on volunteers. The other side of the policy coin for my case study is the immigration and asylum system and its local interpretation in the city where the charity is based. The final section of this chapter has started to shed light on this in so much as it is reflected in the relevant published literature. Specifically, it has demonstrated how hard it can be for ASR VSOs to compensate for the fragmented welfare system, to navigate the hostile environment towards asylum seekers and to formalise and develop as organisations. The next chapter will set the scene in more detail.
Chapter Four - Context

4.1. Chapter Introduction

This chapter sets the scene for the empirical research of my thesis by laying out the specific policy, social, and geographical environment in which the case study charity works. It also provides detail about the charity itself and where it sits in these broader contexts. All of these factors are influential on how leadership is practiced at the charity and, in line with the L-A-P lens I am adopting they need to be understood before the thesis moves on to discuss the methodology and findings of my empirical research. The information provided in this chapter follows on from the literature I have explored in chapters two and three and will help me relate the findings back to that literature in chapter eight. In terms of structure, this chapter moves through the macro, meso and micro context the case study works in. First it describes UK asylum policy over the last 30 years including the global and national political context is has developed in, in so far as it is relevant to my study. The chapter then goes into some depth about how this policy affects the lives of asylum seekers at the current time in order to draw out the areas of need ASR VSOs work to meet. Next it provides an overview of the asylum seeker and refugee sub sector of the UK voluntary sector and how the various types of ASR VSO relate to the case study. Then it provides summary information on the city where the charity is based, focusing on the current local policy environment for ASRs and local social and political dynamics that relate to this. Finally, it provides information on the charity itself; defining its legal structure, where it sits as part of a regional ASR sector and some information on the organisation’s development that is pertinent to the research. All of this information is important as background information to the findings of my study and also much of the material and social environment described in this chapter is shown to play a direct role in leadership practice at the charity. The chapter concludes by discussing the relevance of its content to the thesis before moving
the focus on to the following chapter on Methodology.

4.2. Immigration and asylum in the UK

This section outlines immigration and asylum policy in the UK from the last 30 years, considers some of the drivers of this policy and the impact it has had on people living as ASRs in the UK. All of this detail is important to the thesis because it provides the background to the particular needs of ASRs which the case study charity is focused on addressing.

4.2.1. Definitions

A refugee, as defined by the United Nations, is a person who:

“owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country” (from the 1951 UN Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees cited, by Migration Observatory, 2020).

UK legislation in the early 1990s made the legal distinction between refugees, who had a right to remain in the country, and asylum seekers who were seeking that right but whose case was yet to be heard (Sales, 2002). The UNHCR simply defines an asylum seeker as “someone whose request for sanctuary has yet to be processed” and acknowledges that different countries have their own systems for determining who qualifies for international protection (UNHCR, 2021). Until the UK introduced its asylum system in the late 1990s, it had primarily offered this protection to refugees
through specific programmes linked to particular geopolitical upheavals (Sales, 2002; Wren, 2007). This approach changed in response to an increase in “spontaneous asylum seekers” (Zetter and Pearl, 2000, p. 677) arriving by their own means, often having fled conflict zones and complex humanitarian emergencies.

My thesis focuses on asylum seeker and refugee charities which I define as organisations that are registered charities for which the sole or major focus of their activity is the needs and/or rights of asylum seekers and refugees. In particular my research is focused on smaller charities and those which provide support to ASRs who are resident in the UK. It is typical for ASR VSOs to include both asylum seekers and refugees in their remit, who are understood to be one and the same people, albeit at different points on their legal journey (Findlay et al., 2007). ASR needs may also fall under the remit of other types of charitable organisations including those focused on migration, cultural heritage, forced marriage, domestic abuse and employability to name a few. ASR specific organisations have become a distinguishable subset of UK charities in part due to how government policy has framed and dealt with the people they serve (Findlay et al., 2007). To understand in more depth why these charities exist and operate as they do, it is necessary to explore the policy context in which they have developed.

4.2.2. Asylum policy

Over the past 30 years the focus of UK government policy has been on controlling immigration, arguably at the expense of the more humanitarian imperative to welcome and resettle refugees (Kaye, 1999; Sales, 2002; Wilcock, 2019). As table one summarises, during this period policy has increasingly distinguished the treatment of asylum seekers from refugees. Sales sees this
development as linked to the growing politicisation of asylum and the divisive ‘othering’ of asylum seekers in the popular discourse through which they have been separated out and viewed as outside of mainstream society (Sales, 2002). She argues that this differentiation has been to such an extent that it has created the “undeserving” category of asylum seeker in contrast to the more “deserving” idea of a refugee (Sales 2002, 463); the implication being that many people who are actually deserving are treated as anything but. A milestone in this process came in 1999 when, in common with other European countries, the UK introduced a policy of no choice asylum seeker dispersal (Alonso and Andrews, 2020; Schuster et al., 2005). This policy, which began under New Labour and has continued under Conservative led governments, sees asylum seekers sent to live in dispersal areas around the UK whilst their claim for asylum is processed (Wren, 2007). Local Authorities sign up voluntarily to be dispersal areas and there has been an uneven distribution of these areas; with concentrations in poor parts of the UK where housing stock is cheap but new arrivals put pressure on already stretched services (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2017). As figure one shows, the North East, where my study is based has a relatively high concentration of asylum seekers despite being a poor part of the country.

*Figure 1- Asylum seeker location by local authority 2016 (GOV.UK, 2016)*
Table 1- Policy milestones and government initiatives relating to asylum seekers and refugees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Govt</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Policy Milestones and government initiatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act 1993; first act dealing specifically with asylum (Sales, 2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(minority) &lt;1997</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Asylum and Immigration Act 1996; removed welfare benefits from those claiming asylum in country (Sales, 2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002; Removed the right to work to asylum seekers waiting over 6 months for a decision about right to remain (Gower, 2021)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Target introduced to keep net migration to under 100,000 per year (BBC, 2018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Liberal Democrat</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Hostile Environment Policy towards irregular forms of immigration introduced (Wilcock, 2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coalition</td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>Immigration Act 2014- prevented private landlords renting to people without legal status, and from illegal immigrants obtaining driving licenses or bank accounts (UK government, 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>Referendum on membership of the European Union.Immigration Act 2016; deport first, appeal later principle extended from convicted criminals to all people appealing an unsuccessful asylum application on humanitarian grounds. Dubbs amendment passed to the act to make arrangements to resettle unaccompanied child refugees from Europe to the UK (Home Office, 2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2015-present</td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>Windrush Scandal exposed the experience of long-term West Indian migrants who were undocumented having arrived as citizens of the British Empire, including removal of rights and deportation as illegal immigrants (Hewitt, 2020)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The backdrop to this changing policy environment has been one of a series of international geopolitical upheavals (Balch and Balabanova, 2016; Kolmannskog, 2012; Tonkiss, 2018). Spikes in arrivals of asylum seekers have been experienced around particular crises starting with conflict in Somalia and Sri Lanka in the early 1990s and the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq in the early 2000s (Migration Observatory, 2020). In 2015 there was an outflow of refugees from the Syrian civil war, when 32,733 people sought asylum in the UK, and at the time of writing refugees are arriving from Afghanistan following the US military withdrawal and Taliban’s return to power (BBC News, 2021; Migration Observatory, 2020; Tonkiss, 2018). The result of this context, as figure 1 shows, is that there has been a fluctuating but overall upwards trend of people seeking asylum in the UK between 1979-2019 which has made having a more comprehensive policy response an imperative. It is the nature of that response that has been a major influence on the existence and direction of ASR VSOs.

*Figure 2- Number of people claiming asylum in the UK 1979-2019 (Migration Observatory, 2020)*
4.2.2.1. The politicisation of asylum

Asylum policy has focused less on humanitarian concerns as it has been entangled with wider debates on national politics and immigration (Ford et al., 2015; Goodwin and Milazzo, 2017; Sales, 2002). The idea that asylum seekers are really economic migrants abusing the UK’s welfare system, so called bogus asylum seekers, has long been a theme in the popular press (Kaye, 1998; Kushner, 2010). This narrative was uncontested by either the Conservative or New Labour party in the 1990s and early 2000s in spite of opposition from NGOs, the church and liberal broadsheet newspapers (Kaye, 1999). Underpinning this cross party like-mindedness was localised resentment about migration, a situation that was exacerbated by dispersal placing proportionately large numbers of asylum seekers in poor ethnically homogenous Labour voting areas (Alonso and Andrews, 2020). These areas had often suffered the effects of industrial decline, poverty and joblessness, all situations which have often gone hand in hand with anti-immigration and far right sentiments (Darling, 2016b; Rushton, 2017). This political and social context set the scene for a steady stripping away of rights from asylum seekers which is outlined in table one. The dynamic of housing asylum seekers in places where they may be unwelcome serves to feed the flames of wider anti-immigrant feeling in the public discourse. Anti-immigrant rhetoric has included anti asylum seeker tropes and was especially heightened in the debate leading up to the EU referendum in 2016 which serve to entrench views in the public that asylum seekers are a negative force in society (Goodwin and Milazzo, 2017; Kaye, 1998; Khosravinik, 2009).\(^6\)

The public and political discourse around asylum has amplified the policy importance of this tiny fraction of the population (0.6% of the total UK population in 2019 arrived as asylum seekers-\(^6\)).

\(^6\) A diversity of views exists for example more recent events including the debate around refugee flows from the Syrian civil war and the Windrush scandal may have led to greater public questioning of the UK asylum and immigration system (Hewitt, 2020; Tonkiss, 2018). However, the focus here is on general trends particularly as they pertain to dispersal areas in the North East of England
Migration Observatory, 2020). Without a champion for humanitarian driven asylum policy in either main political party and against the backdrop of anti-immigrant feeling, successive governments have employed the rhetoric of deterring people travelling to the UK to seek asylum (Wilcock, 2019). In 2011 the coalition government introduced net migration targets and since this time both government policy and rhetoric have become increasingly aggressive towards asylum seekers (Wilcock, 2019). Particularly notable have been the policy of “deport first, appeal later” for failed asylum applicants (Home Office, 2016, p. 1) and the creation of what then Home Secretary Theresa May called a “really hostile” policy environment to irregular migrants i.e. those without the legal right to remain on arrival (Wilcock, 2019). This aggressive rhetoric from central government, when coupled with the underlying social trends, has made racist and anti-immigrant discrimination against the people ASR charities seek to serve more permissible (Migration Observatory 2020; Tonkiss, 2018). The bleak point we have reached, according to migration scholars including Allsopp, Sigona and Coddington et al is that government policy is to intentionally detach asylum seekers from the benefits of citizenship and to make them live in poverty (Allsopp and Sigona, 2014; Coddington et al., 2020).

4.2.2.2. ASR lives in the UK

Introduction of the no choice dispersal policy was a watershed moment that has had major implications for ASR charities. Put simply, it has the created need for supportive services in new locations. Other elements of policy introduced since have deepened that need including that, since 2002, asylum seekers have not been allowed to work (Gower, 2021). Instead, asylum seekers who are unable to support themselves through private means are given £39.63 per week for their subsistence (up to date as of January 2021). This compares to a UK citizen over the age of 25 for whom the basic rate of universal credit is £409.89 per month or £94.59 per week (gov.uk, 2021).
There are factors including access to housing support and the number of children in a family that vary both these rates, but the comparison does illustrate that the basic rate asylum seekers are expected to subsist on is significantly less than that of UK citizens. In addition to those who are entitled to government support, there are failed asylum seekers who have no recourse to public funds (NRPF) and are left to either work illegally or depend on the charity of others (Jolly et al., 2020). The poverty experienced by many ASRs mean that they often turn to charities to help provide, among other things, basic necessities including food, clothing and transport costs.

In the UK system, life as an asylum seeker is intended to be a brief interval of a few months whilst each individuals’ case is considered. In reality, the system has been beset with bureaucratic problems and this impoverished state of limbo can be drawn out for extended periods. In the late 1990s New Labour intended to create a ‘Fairer, Faster, Firmer’ way to deal with people seeking asylum (Home Office, 1998). They aimed to clear a backlog of applications and provide quicker decisions (Home Office, 1998) but in practice claims can still take many years to be processed, with only 20% being turned around in six months in 2019 (Migration Observatory, 2020). 70% of unsuccessful applicants go on to appeal their initial decision thereby extending their wait for clarity further (Migration Observatory, 2020). Navigating the legal framework for asylum is complicated and the right to remain is granted based on narrow legal criteria so expert legal representation is crucial (Refugee Action, 2018). Access to legal representation is a right, but in practice can be very difficult for asylum seekers to obtain and appeals are often made because ASRs did not have the means of representing their case well enough in their first application (Refugee Action, 2018). For those who are ultimately refused asylum, approximately half are successfully removed from the country (Wood, 2019). Those who remain are those who have no recourse to public funds, unless they have particular mental health conditions or caring responsibilities (NRPF, 2020). Added to the stress of the asylum process, many people who go through it are also suffering the ongoing effects
of major trauma from their home country or journey during this time (Allsopp and Sigona, 2014). The uncertainty of life as an asylum seeker and the precarity associated with accessing good legal advice are areas of need that ASR charities work to meet through providing services including immigration advice, mental health support and broader wellbeing activities as well as the provision of basic necessities.

The way services are provided to asylum seekers in dispersal areas is a facet of policy that has marked asylum seekers out as ‘other’. When the policy of dispersal was developed it was envisioned that multi-ethnic communities would be chosen where language clusters and social support systems could develop (Wren, 2007). In practice dispersal areas have been determined more by the location of cheap housing, often in areas of social deprivation and high unemployment which already susceptible to far right and racist narratives (Bowler and Razak, 2020; Darling, 2016b). The placing of individuals in housing has been managed by privately contracted firms (Darling, 2016). This, Darling argues, has led to a detachment and reduced sense of accountability by the local authorities in whose areas they are housed (Darling, 2016). Darling’s study, which looked at dispersal housing in four cities including the site of this study, found that privatisation had framed asylum seekers simply as economic burdens to be dealt with by the private sector rather than individuals with complex needs living as part of local political systems (Darling, 2016a). If insensitively managed, separating services from the mainstream can also lead to asylum seekers being marked out for abuse, for example by the housing firm JOMAST which was criticised for painting asylum seekers’ doors red in Middlesbrough (BBC News, 2016). Subsistence payments are also made via branded prepaid cards (Coddington et al., 2020). Until 2017 these were limited to use in specific shops and the policy was changed partly in recognition that marking out asylum seekers by how and where they pay for their goods led to harassment (Coddington et al., 2020). Whilst asylum seekers can access some mainstream services if they live in a community including GPs and schools, the quality of access is
dependent on the local authority in question. For those with no recourse to public funds access to services is legally prohibited (Jolly et al., 2020). The implication for charities of this separation of ASRs from mainstream society is a need for services that bridge the gap, enabling people to become part of a community and access welfare services.

For those who are given refugee status in the UK, there are particular challenges immediately after their application for asylum is approved. At this point many individuals call on ASR charities for support (Refugee Council, 2020). The length of peoples’ right to remain in the UK depends on how they entered the country and if they are granted refugee status or humanitarian protection, but in the first instance it is normally five years (Free Movement, 2019). Once the right to remain is granted, people are entitled to work and to access the same benefits as UK citizens. For spontaneous asylum seekers (who arrived independently and often illegally rather than being brought under a government run scheme), there is a 28 day ‘move on’ period between their asylum application being accepted and their asylum seeker housing and financial support being withdrawn (NRPF, 2020; Sales, 2002). It is during this period that they are expected to apply for universal credit and housing support from their local council, assuming they are in need of it. This move on period is brief and navigating a new set of service providers, often requiring access to IT and English literacy is challenging, making this a key point of vulnerability in a refugee’s life. Charities argue that many fall into destitution at this point without additional support (Refugee Council, 2020).

Although refugees are sometimes acknowledged as a ‘deserving’ (Sales, 2002) category of immigrant in the public discourse, and they are entitled to access the same welfare services at UK citizens, move on is just the first of many challenges they may face. Among these are the challenges that follow them through from their time as an asylum seeker, including being on the wrong end of anti-
immigrant sentiment and, often, the effects of major traumas which caused them to seek asylum in the first place (Allsopp and Sigona, 2014; Bowler and Razak, 2020). Then there are challenges that are more unique to life as a refugee including how to reunite with family members and how to secure employment or training in a new country (Newman et al., 2018). Finally, there are the effects of an imperfect set of welfare services in the UK that have been stripped back under austerity and are often ill suited to help refugees integrate in their host communities (Darling, 2016). ASR charities work to address these myriad challenges in multifaceted ways including forming community support networks and mediating access to mainstream services that ASRs face cultural and language barriers from accessing.

4.3. The Asylum Seeker and Refugee Sub Sector

This section maps out the ASR sub sector of the UK voluntary sector in order to locate the case study charity within it. Understanding this ecosystem of voluntary sector work is important in terms of the narrative of this thesis because, as the findings will show, collaborative work across the sector is a central part of leadership practice at the charity.

4.3.1. The role and make-up of the ASR sub sector

The challenges for ASRs navigating a difficult and uncertain phase of life in a new country are many and, as demonstrated in the previous section, the UK policy context can add substantially to their need for support. Government policy has encouraged the voluntary sector to assist in resettlement and VSOs have stepped into this role as more needs are experienced in new areas as a result of dispersal (Wren, 2007). The voluntary sector response is complicated by the fact that it is often at
odds with government policy, making it both part of and against the asylum system in the UK (McGhee and Walker, 2016; Tonkiss, 2018). As with the wider UK voluntary sector, the ASR subsector is heterogenous and organisational goals and attitudes to policy vary. Research on the ASR sub sector is limited (see Chapter 3 for a review of this) but it is possible to understand its main components from published and grey literature. Table two provides an overview of organisations that make up the sub sector as it is at the time of research in 2019-21. The purpose of explaining the diversity of organisation type and role here is to make sense of the need for collaborative work which is unpacked in detail in chapters 7-9. The case study charity for my thesis falls under the category of ‘local and regional ASR specific charities’.

Table 2: Type of VSOs which make up the UK ASR sub sector

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Typical services offered</th>
<th>Geographical focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National Charities</td>
<td>Charities with annual incomes in the millions and high profile brands</td>
<td>Service provision to ASRs, capacity building to other VSOs, campaigning</td>
<td>National headquartered in London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugee Community Organisations (RCOs)</td>
<td>Led by and for ASRs (Williams, 2018)</td>
<td>Social and emotional support and assisting with settlement (Phillimore and Goodson, 2010)</td>
<td>Tend to have a localised focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infrastructure organisations</td>
<td>Set up to build the capacity of small ASR VSOs. Tend to operate on a membership basis</td>
<td>Tend to have a particular focus e.g. housing providers or RCOs</td>
<td>National and Regional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-ASR specific charities</td>
<td>Provide services to communities which include ASRs e.g. religious charities, food banks (Wren, 2007)</td>
<td>Wide ranging depending on the focus of the VSO in question</td>
<td>May be local e.g. a church or national with local branches e.g. the Red Cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local and regional ASR charities</td>
<td>Set up specifically to meet ASR needs in a particular location</td>
<td>Signposting, befriending, housing provision, professional services e.g. immigration advice (Findlay, 2007)</td>
<td>Local and regional in focus, established where ASRs live (Findlay, 2007)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.3.2. Types of ASR VSOs

The history of ASR charity work since the mid-20th century aligns with migration trends into the UK, with support groups and programmes being set up around particular refugee flows and ethnic or national groups (Findlay, 2007). Since no choice dispersal was introduced in 1999 the role of the voluntary sector in the support of asylum seekers and resettlement of refugees has been acknowledged by successive governments (McGhee and Walker, 2016). The two largest charities in the sector, with histories which predate dispersal, are Refugee Action and Refugee Council (McGhee and Walker, 2016). Both these charities have been funded by government for the delivery of asylum services whilst also maintaining campaigning roles which are often at odds with government policy (McGhee and Walker, 2016). In recent years the contracting picture has become more diversified as services have gone increasingly to the private sector and smaller ASR charities have grown into the space (Darling, 2016; McGhee and Walker, 2016). New campaigning organisations have also grown in recent years adding to and diversifying the voices exerting pressure on government (Safe Passage, 2021; Tonkiss, 2018). However, it remains the case that the largest charities play a prominent role in advocacy on the national stage alongside service delivery work and capacity building for smaller charities (Tonkiss, 2018).

RCOs are organisations led primarily by and for ASRs which are generally grassroots and localised in focus (Williams, 2018). As an organisation type their history in the UK, like the larger charities, mirrors migration trends (Williams, 2018). Individual RCOs are characterised in the literature as being somewhat ephemeral in nature because they struggle to formalise onto a more permanent footing (Phillimore and Goodson, 2010; Zetter and Pearl, 2000). With dispersal there has been sharp growth in the number of RCOs and there are now infrastructure organisations and programmes developing to help sustain them (Findlay, 2007; Regional Refugee Forum, 2021). Infrastructure
bodies have historically been a common feature of the UK voluntary sector and can play a meaningful role in building the capacity of groups, encouraging collaboration and providing a voice for them on the national stage (Wells and Dayson, 2010). It can be difficult to frame RCOs’ place in the sub sector because there is a lack of clarity in how they are defined. RCOs may evolve into more typical ASR charities as outlined in Mackenzie et al’s study (MacKenzie et al., 2012) or wider migrant charities may evolve to have a greater focus on ASRs, as has been the case with three charities in the city where my study is focused. These developments are generally left out of the sparse and somewhat pessimistic research on RCO development but what is clear is that RCOs continue to play a role in the resettlement of ASRs (Williams, 2018).

The final two categories of VSO that make up the sub sector, those being non ASR specific charities and local and regional ASR charities are also not new types of organisation. However, their recent proliferation is directly aligned to dispersal across the country (Findlay et al., 2007; Wren, 2007). When dispersal began a voluntary sector response was needed because the process often left significant gaps in community support and local authority co-ordination (Wren, 2007). Dispersal also led in some cases to friction in host communities and abuse of the new arrivals, leading VSOs to consider how best to protect and integrate ASRs (Wren, 2007). It is in these contexts that existing VSOs have extended their remit to the new community on their doorsteps and new charities have formed, including my case study charity, to meet the particular needs of ASRs.

4.4. The place of study

This section provides relevant information on the place in which my empirical research is carried out. Specifically, it looks at the city and relates the city’s role in and approach to ASR integration in
contrast to other parts of the North East and the wider UK. It is important to provide this scene setting information at the meso level because, as the Findings chapters (6 and 7) show, the direction of the charity’s work is significantly influenced by this context. The charity also works directly with the local authority and the dynamics of this relationship are explored in the findings.

4.4.1. The City

My research took place in a city in the North East of England with a population of less than 0.5 million people and an asylum seeker population of between 300-500 according to official records. In this thesis I refer to this site of study as ‘the city’ as part of my approach to ensuring anonymity of the individuals involved in the study (see section 5.7 of the Methodology chapter for more details). As figure 3 below shows, the North East has the highest proportion of asylum seekers per head of population in the UK and has one of the highest proportions of refugees.

Figure 3- Where asylum seekers and settled refugees are in the UK (Migration Observatory, 2020)
The city has been a dispersal area since the policy began although numbers of asylum seekers have not reached as high a proportion of the local population as some other North East cities. The official figures are likely to be underestimates as during the period of study asylum seekers arrived and were put in hotel accommodation as a temporary measure during the COVID-19 pandemic. Within the ASR population the needs also continue to change and grow as new arrivals take the place of asylum seekers who have received an outcome of their claim. From this point onwards, approved refugees navigate ‘move on’ and failed asylum seekers become categorized as NRPF meaning they lose their housing and access to other services. The response of the city council to the needs of ASRs in recent years can be described as minimalist. This contrasts with the approach of other cities in the North East where a more pro-active and welcoming approach has been taken. For example, the city has opted out of voluntary resettlement programmes launched over and above the dispersal system, has attempted to put a stop to new asylum seekers arriving and opted not to take on a Local Authority Asylum Liaison Officer (LAASLOs). In place of creating this post the city opted to invest in a broader integration project rather than provide specific support to the ASR population.

During my fieldwork, interviews with people who were actively working or volunteering with the ASR population in the city, brought to light a range of views on why the council had invested limited resources in ASR integration in recent years. These included the suggestions that; because asylum seekers were disenfranchised and a relatively small group, they were simply not visible to policy makers, something echoed in Darling’s research in the region which identifies a “narrative of political neglect, shrinking accountability and the slow recession of support services and expertise” (Darling, 2016, p. 483). Others felt that the council was prioritising the successful integration of migrants over ASR specific services whilst others that the council had allowed far right activity to influence policy making. The city in question has a profile not uncommon in post-industrial working class urban parts of the UK, which Bowler and Razak have described as a “monocultural failed space”
(Bowler and Razak, 2020, p. 52). In this context racism and anti-refugee tropes are challenges and this came to light in my primary research along with particular incidences that had led to tensions between asylum seekers and the more settled community. However I did also find that ASR issues were not invisible in the council and among other initiatives there is a regular multi agency meeting on refugee and asylum seekers that is hosted by the council. There are also individual council workers who are committed to working with VSOs to provide welcome and integration services. Chapters six and seven will go into more depth about the activities of the city council where relevant. The point to note at this stage is the limited institutional capacity and public facing information given over to ASR needs.

4.4.2. The charity

This section provides overview information on the case study charity, what type of VSO it is and how I locate it in the regional ASR sub sector. Having set the scene at the more macro and meso levels, this section provides the narrower and more micro-level information that is needed to give the reader a clear picture of the organisation which is discussed in the following chapters. The single organisation that my thesis focuses on can be defined as a local and regional ASR charity. As explained in chapter three, charities have a distinct legal structure. The case study was registered as a charity in 2013 and re-registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) in 2018 to take advantage of the reduced financial liability this new legal structure placed on trustees. Both legal structures are registered with the charity commission and can be described as charities. As explained in section 4.3.1 of this chapter, local and regional ASR charities are those that were set up specifically to meet ASR needs in a particular location. My case study was drawn from a group of nine charities I identified through a scoping study in 2019. This study confirmed that there has been growth in the number of local and regional ASR charities in the dispersal areas of North East
England, with at least seven having been registered between 1999 and 2017. See 5.4.1 for further discussion of the scoping study. The point to note here is that the case study is an example of this new type of charity that has emerged in the context of recent asylum policy. The charity studied is referred to simply as ‘the charity’ to help maintain the anonymity of individuals involved in the research.

The charity’s origin is a weekly volunteer run drop-in for asylum seekers started in 2002 and remained an entirely volunteer run organisation until 2016 when it took on the sole employee who is now the manager of the charity. It continues to benefit from significant voluntary input from its board members, local people and its client base. As the profile of asylum seekers in the city has evolved, so have the charity’s services. In particular, it has expanded to provide social and welfare activities for women and families. During my study the COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on the way the charity operated and included temporary closure of the drop-in to be replaced by telephone referral services and doorstep visits for practical and emotional support. The charity has a dual focus on improving life for asylum seekers and helping them to integrate into the local community, both before and after their refugee status is decided. Partnership working with other local VSOs is a major feature of its work, in part because involvement with a wider set of organisations helps the clients build relationships with people from the settled community. It has a physical presence in the city in the form of a rented office and uses a range of community spaces for its activities. It is a non-specialist charity which signposts clients to specialist professional services. The charity’s annual income is in the region of £50,000-£100,000 per year and this was relatively stable during the period of the study, placing it in the category of small in income terms (NCVO, 2020). It does some receive some project funding from local authorities and during the period of

---

7 Face to face drop-in services resumed in September 2021 after my data collection had ended
research it received local government emergency funding linked to the COVID-19 crisis in 2020. However, it is not commissioned to deliver any welfare services nor does any of its core funding come from government sources. It also does not see itself as a campaigning organisation although it does consciously aim to influence local policy through dialogue in multi-agency meetings and through collaborative relationships with other service providers. Figure four gives an outline of where the charity sits within the broader ASR subsector and how it relates to the different types of organisation within it. The closer the grouping is to the case study, the greater the interactions and linkages to it are. Chapters six and seven explore the collaborative work of the case study charity and this diagram sets the scene for how and where its work overlaps or is informed by the other ASR VSOs in its field.

*Figure 4- How the organisation types in the ASR sub sector relate to the case study charity*
4.5. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has set the scene for the empirical research of my thesis. By providing a contextualised account of UK asylum policy since the 1990s I have laid out the macro operational environment my case study works within. By examining what this context means for life as an asylum seeker in the UK today, I have brought forward the many needs ASR charities work to address. By mapping out the ASR sub sector, an exercise that I could not find anywhere in the published literature, I have provided insight into the types of organisation the charity works with and in relation to. By summarising the local authority’s situation and stance with regards to asylum seekers and comparing this to other local authorities, I have previewed the meso level local policy context which the case study has to navigate in its work. Finally, by locating the case study more specifically as a charity in the North East and providing some factual background information on its history and development I have provided a basic overview of the work at the micro level that is considered through an L-A-P lens in more depth in chapters 6-8. Having now provided a comprehensive backdrop for the thesis I will move on to discuss the approach I took to my empirical research.
Chapter Five- Methodology

5.1. Chapter Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to set out in detail the methodology followed in my empirical research. As well as providing a clear picture of the work that was carried out in order to answer my research question, it explains the approach as one that is consistent with the L-A-P theoretical lens I have adopted and my philosophical position as a social constructionist researcher. The structure of the chapter is as follows: it looks first at my research philosophy and the case study approach I have taken to the research. Then it details my specific research design including how I collected data and what data I collected. Next it moves on to an account of how I analysed data and ends with a consideration of how I ensured good reflexive and ethical practice throughout the process. The chapter ends with a summary of its content and discussion of how this sets the scene for the chapters that follows.

5.2. Research Philosophy

This section outlines my ontological, epistemological and axiological position as a researcher and how these complement the theoretical lens I have adopted for my thesis. Ontology refers to one’s understanding of the nature of reality (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 133). Epistemology refers to one’s understanding of knowledge and what constitutes acceptable, valid and true knowledge (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 133). Axiology refers to the role of values and ethics in research (Saunders et al., 2019, p. 134). Overall, my philosophy can be described as social constructionist and I take an
interpretivist approach to research. By this I mean I see the social world as something that is made by people and can be interpreted by research (Saunders et al., 2019). This is in contrast to positivist methods, which are also used in social research but have been developed from more scientific research that aims to uncover what are understood to be more fixed realities in the natural world (Saunders et al., 2019).

5.2.2. Ontology

My ontological position is that reality is socially constructed through interaction and the creation of shared meanings (Gergen, 2015). Those meanings change over time and can be affected by those who engage with them including myself as a researcher (Gergen, 2015). I believe that social reality evolves as our context and understanding of the world develops and so it is important to acknowledge that the output of research will always be bounded by the time and context it is conducted in. However, in my view that evolution can be gradual and so it may be the case that certain social realities may remain stable or change at a barely perceptible level for long periods of time (Saunders et al., 2019). For example, when taking a historical view it is clear that the social realities about gender roles in UK society have evolved over time, but I would not expect to see them change significantly over a 14 month PhD study. Overall, my ontological approach is in keeping with the constructionist principles that underpin the practice view of leadership and which Raelin advocates as being appropriate for L-A-P research (Carroll et al., 2008; Raelin, 2020)
5.2.3. Epistemology

My epistemological position as a researcher is that theories and concepts alone are not enough to fully understand the world; narratives, perceptions and interpretations are also necessary to explain what happens in a social setting (Butler-Kisber, 2010; Saunders et al., 2019). My epistemology is therefore subjectivist meaning that I see social reality as primarily made up of peoples’ perceptions and consequent actions (Saunders et al., 2019). As such the empirical research for my PhD has employed a range of data collection methods to help tease out narratives and perceptions and to allow me to interpret findings from my data. For example, the semi structured interviews gave participants space to share their own narratives of how the charity had developed. These interviews, alongside conversation and observation during my fieldwork gave me insight into the perceptions of my research participants, as did the comments I received from gatekeepers on draft summaries of my findings. I took an iterative approach to data collection and analysis and an inductive approach to learning which meant I could continually return to and re-explore perceptions and narratives to inform my interpretation of the data. This epistemological position is appropriate to the L-A-P lens which lends itself to holistically designed empirical research projects (Kempster et al., 2016).

5.2.4. Axiology

My axiological position is that I view the impact of my own beliefs and values on my research as, on balance, a positive (Saunders et al., 2019). I aimed to adopt an empathetic stance during my fieldwork and sought to understand the world from the point of view of my participants (Saunders et al., 2019). At times this meant digging deeper into activities that didn’t initially make sense or

---

8 In this context I am referring to research participants who acted as intermediaries between myself and the wider pool of participants (Clark, 2011). I had three main gatekeepers at the case study: the manager, the chair of trustees and the treasurer.
seem of value to me until I understood the rationale behind them. Broadly though, the values I brought to the research aligned with those of the charity’s trustees and manager, and I believe this was beneficial to the research. For example, my personal view of the UK asylum system is that it could and should be driven by more humane principles. I also believe small charities play a vital and poorly understood role in ameliorating the problems associated with the current system. Both of these viewpoints align me with the trustees and manager of the case study charity, and I believe helped to ensure I had a high level of access and was able to foster trust with them during my fieldwork. This in turn helped to ensure the quantity and quality of the data I was able to collect. I also come from a background of professional experience in the voluntary sector and have personal relationships with ASRs through my extended family. I believe this gave the research participants confidence in my motivations and ability to understand and interpret their work. Raelin suggests that L-A-P researchers should acknowledge that values are embedded in the relationship the researcher has with the participants (Raelin, 2020). I have explained how that is the case with my research here and again in sections 5.6-7 on reflexive practice and research ethics in this chapter.

Going into the study I was conscious that I would have to be alert to the ways in which my values influence the research and that whilst this influence could be a positive thing, it should not go completely unchecked (Simons, 2009). In particular I didn’t want to produce an unduly biased or unbalanced interpretation of leadership practice at the charity. It is my belief that research can be of most value to practice when it explores the dark sides of practice as well as what is working well. However, changing one’s own position in an organisation from supportive insider to a potentially more critical outsider would have added a layer of complexity to this research approach. Therefore, I intentionally focused my research on a charity I had not worked with before in a part of the voluntary sector I was only partially familiar with at the start of my research. This was intended to create some space between my own loyalties and the study. The other check in place to ensure I did
not allow my own values to unduly bias the findings of this study was the reflexive practice which I discuss in section 5.6 of this chapter.

5.3. Case study approach

This section details what it means to take a case study approach to research, why I adopted this strategy for the study and, drawing on the literature, how I have shaped my own approach to case study research.

_Case study as strategy_

A case study is not a method as such, rather it is a strategy for research (Hartley, 2004). The term case study is a broad one and it encompasses both teaching case studies which are particular examples used to illuminate an issue and trigger debate, and research case studies which are used to examine research questions and issues in a contextual and causal context (Yin, 2017). Yin summarises research case studies as empirical inquiries that help explain a contemporary phenomenon in its context (Yin, 2017, p. 7). These case studies tend to consist of detailed investigations with data collected over a period of time (Hartley, 2004). My thesis undertakes a research case study which can be summarised as follows:

_An in depth qualitative study of leadership practice at a single organisation in its operational context over the course of 14 months, the output of which is a thick description that helps to answer the research question__ how is leadership practiced at a small asylum seeker and refugee charity?_”
The ‘case’ in a research case study

What the case is in a research study can vary enormously. Yin lists individuals; small groups; organisations and partnerships as more concrete case study topics and communities; relationships; decisions and projects as less concrete case study topics (Yin, 2017, p. 33). What is common to all case studies is that they consider the case in its context and how it is influenced by that context rather than trying to understand it in isolation (Hartley, 2004). The case in my thesis is leadership practice at a single organisation, ‘the charity’. The charity was identified through purposive sampling, initially as one of three case study locations that included the shared characteristics of being small charities, focused on asylum seeker and refugee needs and based in dispersal areas. Data collection encompasses actors that have no formal role at the charity including other charities, local policy makers, individuals and service providers. As the findings will show, these stakeholders play an active role in leadership practice at the charity, and it was therefore necessary to include them within the boundaries of the case.

Data collection methods in a research case study

Case study research takes a mixed methods approach to data collection (Stake, 2005). What those methods are vary and can include both qualitative and quantitative methods but having more than one method is common across case study research (Yin, 2017). It is also an approach that Kemspeter et al recommend in L-A-P research (Kempster et al., 2016). This is both because the data then allows for holistic understanding of complex phenomena and because it makes it easier to qualitatively triangulate data within the case to enhance the validity of findings (Eden and Huxham, 2006). By holistic understanding I mean one which allows me to understand all the interacting dynamics that
make up leadership practice at the charity (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). My thesis uses a range of qualitative methods for data collection, the main ones being semi structured interviews, document review and observation.

Learning from a research case study

In case study research an inductive approach to learning is commonly taken (Hartley, 2004). This means collecting data to explore a phenomenon and from that data identifying themes and patterns which help to form a conceptual framework and build theory (Saunders et al., 2019). This is in contrast to deductive research which sets out to test hypotheses by collecting data that may prove or disprove them and abductive research which uses data to try and find the most likely explanations for an event or phenomenon (Saunders et al., 2019). I take a largely inductive approach to learning because it is the most open and free ranging way to approach a study, although it is framed by the lens I have adopted (see 2.5 for a full description of the theoretical lens I have adopted for this study). It is appropriate for case studies viewed through an L-A-P lens to take an inductive approach because they aim to understand “whole worlds” (Carroll, 2016, p. 96) of leadership practice which are complex, emergent and unpredictable and may not be so fully captured by hypothesis testing (Raelin, 2016c). The result of this process is a “thick description” (Geertz, 1973, p. 15); the term which is often used to describe the output of inductive studies, evoking as it does the idea of a mass of rich, detailed data which pays attention to context, intentions and emotions as well as behaviours and actions (Geertz, 1973).
5.4. Research design

This section outlines the design for my empirical research, looking at how I established the case study, the research question and the process of data collection. My research design evolved quite significantly during 2020, partly in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. As 2020 started I had planned 12 months of fieldwork divided between case studies at three charities. During the course of March 2020- March 2021, I had to take two study breaks due to childcare commitments and changed my research design from a three-case study model to a single case study. This allowed me to switch to a more in-depth study and generate richer data than originally envisioned. This section focuses on the design of the single case study that was eventually carried out. In a paper for the Voluntary Sector Review (VSR) I reflect in some depth about adapting research methods in the pandemic and in particular how it changed my approach to the use of semi structured interviews (Vivyan, 2021). The paper relays the advantage of gathering more rich ethnographic data by extending the timeframe with the case study and of using interviews as a flexible tool in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. The circumstances motivated me to use interviews in a more conscious and imaginative way; seeing them as tools to develop new relationships, to build bridges over gaps in face to face relationships and as a way of generating longitudinal insights through series’ of reflective interviews (Vivyan, 2021).

5.4.1. The scoping study

In order to identify my case study and to help me refine my research design I carried out a scoping

---

9 I had agreed the terms of research with two other case study organisations at the end of the pilot study in 2019. However, by March 2020 it had become clear that there was scope to generate richer findings with the first case study by spending more time with them and following their work through the disruptions of the pandemic. Practical barriers had also been created from studying the other two organisations, one of which had suspended many services and one of which had relocated its head office to London in the first half of the year.
study of nine ASR charities which entailed semi structured interviews on the development of these organisations with individuals in leadership positions. In my reading on case studies and research design for L-A-P, scoping studies were not suggested as a routine part of the approach. However, elsewhere in the qualitative methods literature it has been suggested that they may be of particular value to novice researchers (Malmqvist et al., 2019) and those taking ethnography informed approaches (Sampson, 2004). There are multiple potential benefits to carrying out a scoping study including refining research instruments such as interview schedules, foreshadowing problems in research and better informing new researchers (Malmqvist et al., 2019; Sampson, 2004). It also provides supplementary contextual data which in my case helped to reinforce aspects of the findings. A well-managed scoping study has the potential to increase the quality of the research it helps develop (Malmqvist et al., 2019).

I found that my scoping study did provide the main empirical project with all of the potential benefits. I was able to develop both the research questions and my own approach (see sections 5.4.2-3 of this chapter for discussion of this). Through the course of the scoping study, I became a hands off interviewer, asking open questions and finding the topic that would allow each interviewee to reflect most broadly and openly on their experiences. I also realised that studying leadership practice at a very small charity was going to be challenging in terms of making sure I could access all the actors involved and not merely shadow a single member of staff. This informed the holistic set of data collection methods I have used for the case study which gave me access to a wider set of participants and more perspectives than a single data type may have done. I also became aware of elements of leadership practice that seemed to be shared across organisations.

---

10 In the literature referenced here the term ‘pilot study’ is used which I am taking to be synonymous with my preferred term ‘scoping study’ which fits better with an interpretivist as opposed to positivist approach. This is because both represent a phase of exploratory research, and both have benefits for the larger research project they are designed to inform.
including the sense that when working with ASRs, the physical environment in which support work takes place is very influential on what can be achieved. This focus on materiality reinforced my decision to adopt an L-A-P lens and has fed through to my research and findings.

An additional motivation for me conducting a scoping study is that I thought it would be a good way to get a feel of potential organisations to study and in turn let them meet me and thereby help with participant recruitment. This isn’t something I had found in the literature but is something I felt would work based on my experience of work in the in the sector. I used a snowballing approach to identifying my interviewees, meaning I started with a small number of organisations (three) I was aware of and asked each of my interviewees to recommend another organisation to approach (Parker et al., 2019). Taking this approach meant the study included a greater number of charities than it may have otherwise. As hoped it also enabled me to secure access to the organisation I eventually focused on.

5.4.2. Access and chronology of fieldwork

In qualitative case study research, securing and maintaining access to research participants can be one of the biggest challenges (Taylor et al., 2014). In particular the relationship between gatekeepers and researchers over the life of a project is seen as one of central concerns of qualitative fieldwork (Clark, 2011; Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert, 2008). My access to participants and three gatekeepers in particular; the manager, the chair and the treasurer of the charity, was essential to the success of my study. The changing context and structure of my fieldwork made this access something I needed to put a great deal of thought and energy into. The chronology that follows gives the context for this in table three below.
Table 3: Chronology of fieldwork

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timings</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September-December 2019</td>
<td>Interview with trustee of the charity as part of the scoping study followed by negotiations about research. I met with the Manager and a trustee (who later became chair) to negotiate access and they agreed to a three month case study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January- mid March 2020</td>
<td>Eight weeks of the initially planned 12 week case study research took place. This included observations, semi structured interviews and document review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-March-Mid June 2020</td>
<td>National COVID-19 lockdown, I took a study break due to childcare responsibilities but remained in touch with the gatekeepers at the charity and attended meetings and continued observation of charitable activities online where time allowed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid-June-November 2020</td>
<td>Renegotiation and resumption of fieldwork. The charity agreed to extend the fieldwork until a time to be agreed between Christmas 2020 Easter 2021 and I resumed a mix of online and face to face fieldwork in line with COVID-19 government guidance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 2020- April 2021</td>
<td>Fieldwork slowed down due to the second and third COVID-19 lockdowns and me taking a partial study break for childcare duties January-March 2020. Fieldwork was completed during this phase taking the extended timeframe up until Easter 2021.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As this chronology shows, my fieldwork plans changed substantially in timeframe, continuity and the balance of online and offline work. The disruptions caused by COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions, and the request to spend substantially more time with the case study could all have negatively impacted my research. However, in general the changes to my fieldwork actually served to enhance the access I had to my research participants. Taylor et al identify one of the challenges of access in longitudinal research as the relatively high likelihood that organisational structures and personnel would change during the study (Taylor et al., 2014). This happened with my case study; the
chairperson changed early in the fieldwork and the three main gatekeepers were ceded more
decision-making authority by the trustee board early on in the pandemic. By this point I had already
built good relationships with these individuals who became more central to delivering the work of
the charity during my study. Also, as I have reflected in VSR, the context of the lockdown and
enforced working from home online, gave me greater access to stakeholders I had been struggling to
interview (Vivyan, 2021). I believe the alignment of my own values, as described in section 5.2.4 of
this chapter (Axiology), and the extended timeframe of my research, also enabled me to become
more embedded and gain greater access to the charity’s work and the insights of its people. The
downsides of having to sacrifice the three case-study model relate to the extent to which the
findings of my study can be generalised; this is discussed in 9.4.

5.4.3. The research question

Yin has suggested that case study research is best suited to answering “how” and “why” research
questions (Yin, 2017, p. 27). Hartley suggests that this allows the researcher to explore the case
quite freely and be open to collecting what she calls “opportunistic data” (Hartley, 2004, p. 232).
There is very little discussion in the L-A-P literature of what type of research question the theoretical
lens may be best suited to. The exception is in Crevani and Endrissat’s chapter in “Leadership-as-
Practice: Theory and Application” where the authors suggest “How is leadership produced?” (Crevani
and Endrissat, 2016, p. 37) as an example research question for L-A-P studies. My own research
question has evolved during the study from an initial broad focus on new charities and is now: how
is leadership practiced at a small asylum seeker and refugee charity? The ‘how’ part of the question
is directly influenced by the case study approach I have taken to research. The ‘leadership practiced’
part is directly influenced by the L-A-P lens, in that my intention was to understand the practice of
leadership as it emerged during my time with the charity. Finally, the terms ‘small’ and ‘asylum
seeker and refugee’ are included because they foreground the importance of context in this study and because they are the two most significant organisational characteristics. They are most significant in that smallness and the ASR focus have come through in the literature and in my findings as the areas of UKVSS research that my thesis can contribute to the most. They also mark this study out as a new departure for L-A-P in terms of the research setting.

5.4.4. Types of data collected

This section details the types and content of the data I collected during fieldwork and considers how I approached collecting each type of data in relation to the literature and my research design. The four main sources of data for this study are semi structured interviews, document review, observation and field notes. Data was collected iteratively as it became possible to move in or out of physical observations (see 5.2) and as opportunistic data presented itself in the form of new documents, events and participants for interview (Hartley, 2004). Table four provides a detailed breakdown of the data collected, demonstrating the in-depth and holistic approach I took. Following the table there are summaries of my approach to each of the types of data collection. As discussed in section 5.4.2. my access to the charity was such that I was able to continue my data collection as long as needed. During the 14 months I spent with the charity I moved between the data collection and analysis in an iterative way following a process of inductive learning. I ended data collection once I had reached a point of saturation, by which I mean the themes presented in my findings had become solidified and new codes had ceased to emerge (Saunders et al., 2018).
## Table 4 - Summary of data collected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantity</th>
<th>Breakdown</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Semi structured interviews</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 28 | - 15 with trustees  
- 1 employee  
- 5 volunteers  
- 1 local authority senior manager  
- 1 funder  
- 4 voluntary sector workers  
- 1 private sector provider | Interviews lasted on average 47 minutes. Seven were conducted face to face and 21 using skype for business due to COVID-19 restrictions. Three trustees and the manager took part in multiple interviews. |
| **Document review** | | |
| Internally produced for internal audience | - Manager’s reports 2016-2021.  
- Trustee minutes 2013-21.  
- Emails between trustees  
- WhatsApp conversations between volunteers and clients. | These documents provided me with an understanding of the range and frequency of the charity’s current and past activity. They also provided insight into the tone of communications and trustee and manager’s views of external collaborators. |
| Internally produced for external audience | - Newsletters from 2011-2018 (newsletters have not been produced since then).  
- Annual reports and accounts from 2013-19.  
- Online presence (website, Facebook page). | These documents gave me a historic record of the charity’s activity and financial situation. The newsletters provided rich detail on the charity’s activities and the emphasis and pride placed on elements of the work to a supportive audience. |
| Externally produced | - Press reports on asylum issues and related far right activity in the locality.  
- Correspondence between a volunteer and local councillors on asylum seeker issues. | These documents gave me insight into the collaborative activity going on in the city, local contextual information on the ASR experience and charity’s operating environment. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Observations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>37 face to face</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>31 zoom observation visits</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Office based work, weekly drop in and weekly women’s group sessions (physical and online).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Trustee meetings (physical and online).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Annual planning day meeting (physical).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Refugee week planning meeting and refugee events (online).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Multi agency meetings and a local women’s network group (physical).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Voluntary sector response to asylum seeker needs co-ordination meetings (online).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With these visits I aimed to observe as wide a range of the charity’s activities as possible. During COVID-19 I was unable to take part in doorstep support due to restrictions on travel. I was able to observe the full range of the charity’s activities other than this.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| 1 field journal |
| 60 pages/35,618 words |
| This documents my observations as well as my reflections and emotions whilst carrying out fieldwork. |

5.4.4.1. **Semi structured interviews**

Semi structured interviews are conversations around a theme or set of themes in which the interviewer asks open prompting questions when needed but allows for free ranging conversation (Flick, 2018). Kempster et al suggest that interviews are an important element of a holistic L-A-P informed approach to research (Kempster et al., 2016). They are also a common component of research case studies and their purpose can evolve over the course of a project from initial orientation to more in depth reflective interviews (Yin, 2017). This was the case with my study which became more dependent on interviews at times of COVID-19 lockdowns in particular, as the means by which I could continue to build relationships and acquire insight into the work happening on the ground. There was no set timetable for interviews which took place in an ad-hoc way throughout the fieldwork. Whilst the majority of the interviews were one offs, I also completed a series of interviews with three trustees and the manager. I decided to make this change when my research approach switched to focus on a single in-depth case study. The rationale, inspired by a similar approach to interviews taken in Quick’s longitudinal leadership research, was that this would allow me to
understand leadership practice and a range of perspectives on it as it emerged and developed over the longer period (Quick, 2017).

I began the research with an interview schedule (appendix ii) but this developed over time as the use of interviews in the project evolved into what Quick has called “active interviews” (Quick, 2017, p. 449) which stimulate participants interpretations (Quick, 2017). Appendix iii is a list of questions extracted from one of my later interview transcripts and it demonstrates how the questions evolved to be more ‘active’ and fitted to the context of the moment. The other major change to interviews necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic was a switch to telephone interviewing in which I called people on their phones using the OU’s skype system. I had intended at the outset to transcribe interviews and found doing so a useful first step in analysis, so I needed to record them. This decision limited me to using skype voice calls rather than video calling as it was the software the OU allowed for secure recording of conversations. Irvine et al suggest that telephone interviews lose some of the nuance and rapport that can be built in a more natural face to face encounter (Irvine et al., 2013). It was the case that some of the phone interviews were notably shorter than face to face with one lasting just 17 minutes and another lasting 27 minutes. Both of these were with participants I had not met face to face and in the interviews the prompting questions I had prepared were covered quickly with fewer personal reflections being shared by the participants than in interviews with people I already knew. In contrast phone interviews with participants I knew well from the first phase of fieldwork felt quite relaxed and tended to be longer conversations.
5.4.4.2. Document review

Document review is a common feature of case study research and, when done thoroughly, it forms an important part of ensuring data collection is systematic (Yin, 2017). Being systematic can mean exhausting every source of data available, in my case I wasn’t aiming for this, but I did want to collect enough data to give me a holistic or whole worlds understanding of leadership practice at the charity (Carroll, 2016). As well as feeding into this holistic understanding, document review can also serve to corroborate and add to evidence from other sources, helping me with the process of triangulation which is discussed in section 5.4.4 (Carter et al., 2014). In this study I began the fieldwork stage with an overview review of all past internal documents. I was then privy to all the documents produced during my time with the charity. I was also included on the mailing lists for local and national ASR sector news that the manager received. Finally, I also collected opportunistic data as they became relevant to my study including press reports and correspondence relating to ASRs in the city (Hartley, 2004). Yin warns that documents should not be viewed as neutral and necessarily factually accurate (Yin, 2017). In keeping with my social constructionist ontology I saw document review as an opportunity to understand the perspectives and interpretations of the document’s authors (Saunders et al., 2019). By going through organisational history in several ways; in interviews, document review and observing conversations, I was able to tease out the different narratives and perceptions that had become influential on the charity’s day to day leadership practice.

5.4.4.3. Observation

My approach to observation drew on ethnography, a major influence on L-A-P research, which often employs ethnographic methods (Raelin, 2016c). Hammersley and Atkinson describe ethnography as field research which uses a range of methods with a particular focus on participant observation
(Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). They describe the work of the ethnographer as participating “overtly or covertly, in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983, p. 2). This accurately describes the approach I took to being part of the case study organisation for the 14 months I studied it. My participation was mainly overt in that I always explained my presence and role as a researcher in each new setting I entered. It is hard to say if this would have affected peoples’ behaviour, but because most of the activities I observed involved a concerted focus on the activity itself, my sense is that my role was a peripheral concern to most people. Observation was an essential activity to answering my research question which focuses on day to day and mundane activity (Carroll et al., 2008; Crevani and Endrissat, 2016).

Observation was particularly important when it came to understanding the role material artefacts and environments on leadership practice at the charity (Carroll, 2016; Sergi, 2016). I took an approach to observation which ensured I was able to be alert to these influences. I gave time and space for observation of the everyday activities of the charity a high priority in my activity plan. Also, space for unstructured reflective activities during the data collection phase such as gentle exercise and driving to and from the city allowed observations to surface. This may not have been the case had I relied more heavily on interview transcripts or documents alone. The outcome of taking this approach can be seen in the chapters seven and eight, in particular in the use of vignettes which highlight material elements of leadership at the charity. My vignettes are short written episodes used to evoke elements of leadership practice and its context. They are ‘real’, drawing on events that I observed during fieldwork rather than fictional episodes which are sometimes used in research to elicit responses from participants (Given, 2008; Pitard, 2016). These vignettes draw directly on the appreciation of materiality that I developed during observation sessions.
From eight weeks into my fieldwork the COVID-19 pandemic complicated my methodology as I had to switch to a blended approach of observing both online and offline activity (Tummons, 2020). There is a growing precedent in qualitative research for online ethnography and some examples of blended ethnographies that recognise the need to understand both online and offline activity as it is practiced in the day to day life of research participants (Dyke, 2013; Tummons, 2020; Tunçalp and L. Lê, 2014). As the charity’s activity moved more online it was necessary for me to follow where the work was happening. Having this blended approach meant observation could continue to be a central element of the data collection. The increased use of video calling for meetings and group activities was particularly useful as it enabled me to continue to observe the material environment participants were experiencing and the virtual environment they were interacting across.

All of my observation sessions were recorded in the form of field notes alongside reflections and ideas for further research activity in my field journal, which is a common way of recording ethnographic observation (Quick, 2017). Having this longitudinal record of my fieldwork has proved useful in terms of understanding how activities and peoples approaches, including my own, changed over the course of the fieldwork. It has also helped as a tool to locate other data sources in the context in which I collected them.

5.4.5. Ensuring the reliability and validity of data

In inductive qualitative studies, the reliability and validity of data can be ensured through a robust research design (Hartley, 2004). This means ensuring that data is consistent in how it is gathered and used (reliable) and is accurate (valid). In particular, this can be achieved by employing a range of
methods of data collection so that there is a sufficient depth and breadth of data available for meaningful analysis (Yin, 2017). The previous section details the depth and breadth of the data I collected. The following points summarise the methods I used to ensure my data was both valid and reliable:

- **Organisation and storage of data:** all data was stored in NVivo which is qualitative data analysis software. This means all of the data that has fed into the analysis can be viewed in a single place giving both a clear overview of the extent of the data and allowing for comprehensive data searching for key words, concepts or themes and easy organisation of excerpts of data into ‘nodes’ under larger thematic groupings.

- **Triangulation within the case:** triangulation can be used to test the validity of findings by converging and comparing different sources of data on the same issue (Carter et al., 2014). In my study each theme and sub theme presented in the findings is evidenced through multiple sources of data. Where a theme appeared to be significant in early analysis but lacked depth of evidence, I explored it in more depth in the next phase of fieldwork to ensure this either provided weight or suggested an alternative explanation for the finding.

- **Consultation:** as a sole researcher it was important that I sense checked my findings with other people who were in a position to comment on their validity and to ensure they weren’t simply a reflection of my ‘voice’ (Simons, 2009). To do this I shared all reports going into the public domain with the three gatekeepers and produced summary reports at three points during data collection. I sought and received feedback on these reports which either confirmed my findings or sent me back to the field to re-explore issues that might be explained differently.

- **Iterative data collection and analysis:** data collection and analysis were iterative, with the first early analysis document being drafted in April 2020 and subsequent write ups in August 20, October 20 and May 2021. This back and forth process allowed me to identify the issues that needed further exploration or triangulation.
• Review in relation to extant literature: just as I moved back and forth between data collection and analysis I referred back to extant literature and continued to build on my reading throughout the fieldwork. Much of this came in the form of notes to self on draft analyses of what literature the findings may speak to or be informed by.

5.5. My position as researcher

Raelin advocates for L-A-P researchers to co-participate in research with the subjects of their study in order to co-produce outcomes for leadership development (Raelin, 2020). The focus of my study is slightly different in that it seeks to illuminate but not develop leadership practice at the charity. I feel this is appropriate because small asylum seeker charities are such an understudied group that it is important to first understand how leadership is practiced before considering how to develop it further (Terry, et al., 2020). My position as a researcher was one of participant observer, by which I mean that as well as observing the work of the charity I became an active member of the group I was studying (Allen, 2017). My participation took the form of practical work such as helping to set up and clear away the drop-in and joining in activities such as doing craft activities and dancing with the women’s group on Friday mornings. During the course of the fieldwork, I avoided participating in such a way that may significantly alter leadership practice at the charity. For example, I was a silent observer at trustees meetings and avoided sharing my opinions on practice. The intention of taking on this active but not influential role was so that I altered practice as little as possible during fieldwork and could therefore focus on understanding rather than influencing change. I did not achieve a perfect separation between observation and development of leadership practice and acknowledge that researcher’s always bring some influence to the setting of their study (Wallace and Sheldon, 2015). In my case there was scope for me to influence leadership practice because the
participants actively sought my input and opinion. We resolved this challenge reasonably well by separating my role as a researcher from my role as a volunteer. As I neared the end of my fieldwork I was asked by the board to become a trustee of the charity. I agreed to this and became a trustee in May 2021 by which point I had completed data collection, analysis and had drafted the findings chapters. This timing made it relatively straightforward for me to draw a line between my analysis of leadership practice as I had understood it as a researcher and my evolving understanding and engagement as a trustee.

5.6. Data analysis

This section details the approach I took to analysing my data in order to generate the thick description of leadership practice at the charity, which in turn forms the basis for answering my research question.

5.6.1. Unit of analysis

At the outset of data collection, my focus was broad as I sought to understand the dynamics of the charity in as wide a ranging way as possible. As I moved into data analysis and later iterations of data collection my focus began to be framed more clearly by the theoretical lens I outlined in 2.5. In particular I was seeking an understanding of data that helped me make sense of interactions between people, place and things, interactions being my unit of analysis. Within this I was particularly seeking the interactions that felt material to process of leadership practice, which I have defined as the everyday interactions and working customs that enable the charity to improve ASR welfare in the city where it operates. Finally, I kept myself alert to interactions that could shed light
on the influence of context and mundane activity on leadership practice. The methods I used to analyse my data and draw out this understanding are explained next.

5.6.2. Thematic Analysis

In order to arrive at my findings, I followed a process of thematic analysis (TA) using Braun and Clarke’s stages of analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006). They define thematic analysis as “a method for systematically identifying, organising, and offering insight into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set” (Braun et al., 2019, p. 54). In their most recent work Braun and Clarke highlight the importance of researchers being consistent and knowing in their approach to thematic analysis meaning that our philosophical stance and theoretical assumptions should be in line with how we analyse data (Braun and Clarke, 2019). They acknowledge a wider range of approaches to TA including “small q” (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p. 594) approaches that use positivist tools such as code books to interpret qualitative data and grounded theory approaches which have their own methods particular methods for developing theory from data including line by line coding (Braun and Clarke, 2021, 2019; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Heath and Cowley, 2004). My own approach to research fits best with Braun and Clarke’s own “reflexive thematic analysis” (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p. 589) which is a “big Q” (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p. 594) approach meaning that my philosophy and methods are both qualitative (Braun and Clarke, 2019).

Reflexive thematic analysis is largely an inductive approach but Braun and Clarke emphasise that data analysis does not happen within a theoretical vacuum (Braun and Clarke, 2021). As I have shown, my own L-A-P lens has tempered how I have approached inductive learning. This has been through its influence on how I define leadership practice (what I’m looking for), my focus on
interactions (my unit of analysis) and my particular sensitivity to context, the mundane and the material (drawing critically on L-A-P approaches). In this way we can see that reflexive TA is in keeping with my theoretical assumptions. It also matches my interpretivist philosophy because the approach is designed to allow the researcher to generate patterns of meaning from data rather than seek answers to a question. This mainly inductive, gently guided (by L-A-P) approach to TA is also in line with L-A-P’s approach to understanding leadership “wherever and however it appears” (Raelin, 2017, p. 216). Several of the studies I’ve been influenced by and which have sought to understand practice in organisations have used versions of thematic analysis (Ospina and Foldy, 2010; Ropo and Salovaara, 2019; Terry, 2017). So, there is some precedent for using this method and there were examples I could refer back to as I developed my own approach. I was able to trial the approach during the scoping study and found the flexible iterative structure of Braun and Clarke’s stages a helpful way to immerse myself in the data and let meaning emerge. Finding this fit with my cognitive approach is arguably another important consideration for novice researchers (Heath and Cowley, 2004).

There are two points where I have drawn in concepts from other approaches to data analysis to engage in what Braun and Clarke have described as a “mashup” (Braun and Clarke, 2019, p. 589). This is an approach they have critiqued but acknowledge as valid as long as it is done consciously and with a rationale provided (Braun and Clarke, 2021). The first is where I have used the concept of saturation to help me decide when I had collected enough data. For me saturation point was reached when my themes felt solid and I did not feel new data was modifying them (Saunders et al., 2018). Whilst this concept may have developed out of grounded theory rather than reflexive TA, it felt consistent with my approach. I found it a useful way to assess, in a reflexive way, whether I had gathered enough data to generate findings. The second point is where I have stepped outside of the stages of analysis to free write, talk and exercise as ways to stimulate what Gabriel has called the
“inquiring imagination” (Gabriel, 2015, p. 334) which engages a researcher’s imagination and encourages them to continually ask why their data is interesting and how it is relevant (Gabriel, 2015). These steps were particularly useful in the development of vignettes which evoke leadership practice in all its complexity including the role the material environment and artefacts play.

5.6.3. My approach to thematic analysis

My data analysis took place iteratively over the 14 months of fieldwork and in the two months following it. During this time I moved through the phases of data analysis recommended by Braun and Clarke (Braun et al., 2019). Below I describe the activities and analytical work that took place during this process. I then follow this up with illustrations of my analysis process.

The first stage of the process, which started whilst I was conducting fieldwork, was to familiarise myself with the data which helped me understand and begin to reflect on what I had gathered. The activities during this phase were as follows:

- Typing up notes into field journal (word document)
- Transcribing interviews and reading through transcripts in NVivo. In reviewing interviews, I gave primacy to what they demonstrated about people’s perspectives. I used them as a chance to understand perspective in a way that I may have misunderstood or not fully appreciated in busy observation sessions. I also used interviews to help complete timelines and sequences of events
- Taking paper notes on documents and drawing up overview documents (timeline and document review summary), also updating those documents periodically

The second stage of the process was to generate codes from and identify themes in my data. The activities during this phase were as follows:
• Coding interview transcripts and my field journal line by line in NVivo so that all the content was coded. At this point many of the codes were descriptive rather than analytical (Gibbs, 2007)

• Grouping codes into themes that related to core ways of working at the charity, this included the deletion, combination and renaming of some codes as they became more analytical

• Reviewing the themes in relation to leadership theories and voluntary sector concepts from literature; rearranging and organising themes so that they related to key concepts as well as reflecting the different elements of practice at the charity

• Reviewing the themes against the research question; retaining those themes which best represented and covered leadership practice and removing those that did not help to answer the research question

The coding and organising into themes was all documented in NVivo but I used this software as a tool to support my analysis rather than drive it. Other activities that took place iteratively during this stage of the process, which aided my analysis, were as follows:

• Moving between NVivo and paper-based notes to create and explore potential codes

• Exploring surprises and alternative explanations for themes that were emerging through a mix of re-examining data and more observation and conversation in the field

• Checking the validity of themes by looking back through codes and data to check if there was enough evidence of a theme for it to be included in findings (this isn’t just how many times something crops up in quotes but also how clear and pertinent it feels). If there was not enough evidence the theme was either dropped or explored further in fieldwork to see if validity could be established

• Sharing theme names and summaries with participants and supervisors, taking on feedback, making amendments
• Writing- brainstorms, free writing, drafting early versions of vignettes, notes made in the margins/around notes on other theses and papers as I read them (Given, 2008; Miles et al., 2013)

• Walking, running, swimming- letting themes settle into place either through subconscious process or describing them out loud to others

The final phase of my data analysis was producing the Findings chapters (6 and 7) which draw on the data to set out a detailed answer to my research question. Several reports and iterations of feedback from my supervisors and the case study gatekeepers fed into these. Each draft report led back to a further iteration of coding. This iterative process of playing back initial themes to research participants is in keeping with the dialogical approach Raelin advocates for L-A-P work in which participants are encouraged to explore the research subject with the researcher (Raelin, 2020). The final version of the Findings chapters which emerged from this process use a mixture of narrative analysis, quotes, diagrams and vignettes to present the data under their themes, drawing out a range of different voices and ways of illustrating practice. I drafted and redrafted the vignettes during data analysis and found these the best way to understand and evoke the material and mundane aspects of leadership practice that are so important to my L-A-P lens and conception of leadership.

Illustration of the data analysis

Figure 5 shows images of my handwritten notes and snapshots of coding in NVivo which demonstrate some of the process of analysis. In this case, they show how a theme which was initially titled ‘Voluntarism’ (later titled ‘The relational shaping of leadership practice’) emerged and was refined into a set of subthemes through iterations back and forth between handwritten notes and
coding in NVivo. The idea of voluntarism emerged from the data which I had first thought was most concerned with professionalism and standards (April 2020 notes) but which I came to realise could be more richly explored through the experience of volunteering at the charity (August 2020 notes). Accordingly, the codes in NVivo first grew in number (from April to August 2020) and were then ordered into three levels with examples to illustrate each sub theme (September 2020).

Figure 5: Illustration of data analysis

April 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Level 1</th>
<th>Level 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>professionally voluntary</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boundaries</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>motivations and personal history</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on volunteering</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>standards at</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
August 2020

September 2020
5.7. Reflexivity

Taking a social constructionist approach to this research means I recognise the potential for my own values, interests and experience to influence how the research is carried out and what the findings are (Saunders et al., 2019). Reflexivity or reflexive practice is the means by which researchers are able to acknowledge and understand how and when this influence is happening (Given, 2008). Putting reflexivity into practice can be seen at its most simple, as taking a step back from the situation in order to reflect on it (Gabriel, 2015). To move it beyond a box ticking exercise, reflexivity should be an ongoing process that actively informs how research is carried out and drives adjustments to research methods (Gabriel, 2018). Reflexivity can also help researchers with management of their own emotions, which is a subject that has been neglected in research (Widdowfield, 2000).

I found that to achieve good reflexive practice I needed to both take breaks from fieldwork and try to cultivate a state of mind in which I was conscious of my own feelings and value-based reactions to situations I found myself in. The breaks included gaps in fieldwork due to COVID-19, days I took to work from home including interview transcription days and smaller breaks as I drove home from the charity’s office which is approximately 40 minutes from where I live. I used these breaks as periods to reset myself emotionally and to go through what I had experienced. Doing this enabled me to separate out what felt important because of how it made me feel and what felt important because it was material to leadership practice. I then tweaked my plans for the next period of fieldwork as seemed necessary, for example revisiting discussions with participants or increasing the time spent observing certain activities to deepen my understanding. Gabriel also suggests that reflexivity should involve other people (Gabriel, 2018). Through the series of reflective interviews with the gatekeepers and another trustee and discussing draft reports of my findings I was able to see the
situations we had shared through other people’s eyes. On several occasions this led me to go back to the field to try and understand an element of practice better. So reflexivity can be about understanding and letting your values guide you to a point, but also being open to changing your mind and exploring different perspectives (Gabriel, 2018). Doing this has helped me to come out with a thick description that reflects perspectives in all their richness rather than simply reading the data through my own values (Simons, 2009).

5.8. Ethical considerations

This research was approved by the OU HREC review process. Scoping study- HREC/3294/Vivyan and Fieldwork- HREC/3430/Vivyan.

The term ethics refers both to the fundamental values that underpin human activity and the normative frameworks that are used to help interpret those values and decide what is the right thing to do in different circumstances (Given, 2008). Research ethics are most explicitly concerned with the normative frameworks and Given outlines four areas for consideration when looking at the ethics for qualitative research (Given, 2008). These are; that there is some moral intent in the purpose of research, that research designs have integrity, that the presentation of results observes ethical conventions and that research conduct is humane towards participants (Given, 2008). Considering each of these in turn, I have ensured this thesis has a strong ethical framework as follows:
Moral intent of the research

The motivation for this research is to help us further understand leadership practice in a setting which is neglected in current research. This better understanding has the potential to impact both on future leadership research and practice in charities. The assumption here is that ASR charities undertake morally worthwhile endeavours and deserve the type of research attention larger charities and businesses receive. This is an ethical judgement linked to my own values as a researcher.

Research design integrity

This chapter has covered in depth how the research design has ensured integrity. This includes the measures taken to ensure reliability and validity (section 5.4.4) and the practice of reflexivity (section 5.6).

Observation of ethical conventions in presentation

This thesis is an honest and open account of the work undertaken including the challenges faced and change in direction of the research design. The Conclusion chapter (9) includes a full and frank exploration of the limitations of this research and this will also be included in any future publications linked to it.

Humane research practice

This element of research ethics typically receives the most public attention and understanding
(Given, 2008). It is particularly pertinent to qualitative case study research because researchers tend to work with participants face to face for long periods and often elicit data as a result of relationship building and the development of trust. Through this process researchers may become aware of internal complexities and contested approaches that are hidden by the public face of the organisation (Taylor et al., 2014). My research went through the OU’s thorough human research ethics review process before I began fieldwork and as part of this I put in place the routine safeguards that help ensure humane treatment of participants. This included producing information sheets, consent forms and information sharing and debriefing plans for general participants and interview participants (appendix i is a copy of the participant information and interview consent form). It also included completion of a robust data management plan (appendix iv) and anonymisation plan to ensure no individual or organisation could be easily identified in the research outputs. Plans to minimise risks of harm to the participants were factored into the research design with particular reference to the vulnerable clients of the charity whose personal circumstances and details I did not need to explore to answer the research question.

Thorough preparation and planning is important but nonetheless challenges are likely to come up in any long piece of fieldwork and the particular challenges I faced were as follows:

- Ensuring the anonymity of the case study and participants became harder to achieve with the switch to a single case study because more in depth information might make the organisation more identifiable. To try and ensure anonymity I changed names and sometimes genders of participants in the thesis, I removed location names and referred to people either by a pseudonym or by the role they occupied rather than by a name. I did all of this in agreement with the research participants.
- Ensuring consent across language barriers and physical barriers e.g. over online zoom meetings
or at a busy drop in was challenging at times. In the case of telephone interviews, I asked people to read the information sheet and complete the consent form with an e-signature or their typed name if this was not possible. In the context of meetings and busy face to face settings where it wasn’t practical to circulate written information, the manager or I explained my role as the event started. It is likely that despite this, due to the nature of the events and the language barrier some people did not fully understand who I was or my role and may have assumed I was one more volunteer. They are safeguarded through anonymity.

- Sharing of sensitive information; internal organisational dynamics can be sensitive and over the period I became privy to disagreements and topics of contention within the charity and between the charity and other organisations. On occasion these points of tension were of relevance to the study, in particular because of the focus I had on micro interactions. To mitigate sharing information in such a way that participants would be uncomfortable with I put in place the following mitigations:
  - Some things were excluded because participants asked me to exclude it or because it felt sensitive and unnecessary to include as it either didn’t fit under a theme or wasn’t the most relevant example
  - I shared work going into the public domain and wrote a draft findings reports for the three gatekeepers, so they knew the direction of travel of my work and so that they had something useful from me
  - Adhering to organisational ethics- I was inducted as a volunteer and so learned and adhered to the charity’s policies and volunteer practices. For example, clients of the charity are not asked to talk about their background and their stories are rarely put into the public domain, I adhered to this practice. I also withdrew from situations where clients were sharing sensitive information with the manager; either at the request of the manager or on my own instinct.
5.9. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has documented the research process for this thesis and located it against the relevant philosophical, theoretical and ethical frameworks. In looking at the process it has considered how I developed a case study approach that focused on a single ASR charity and how using multiple qualitative data collection methods I was able to develop a thick description of leadership practice in that context. Finally, it has shown how recognising my social constructionist philosophical stance and the values I bring to the research has enabled me to incorporate perspectives that are different to my own and at the same time produce a value driven piece of research. The following chapters will look at the results of this methodology and weave them back into the wider literatures this thesis contributes to.
Chapter Six- Beyond the border; exploring leadership practice that transcends organisational boundaries

6.1. Introduction to the findings

The purpose of the two findings chapters is to present the data which I have identified, through reflexive thematic analysis, as giving a holistic and contextualised response to the research question: *how is leadership practiced at a small asylum seeker and refugee charity?* The first chapter covers two themes that focus on how leadership is practiced in relation to people and groups outside of the charity’s organisational boundaries. The second chapter covers two themes that are more focused on internal dynamics at the charity and how these constitute leadership practice. The discussion chapter (8), which follows draws on insights from existing literature in order to conceptualise the leadership practice presented in these findings. Below are some definitions which were established in the previous chapters and should be borne in mind when reading the findings.

6.1.1. Definitions that underpin the findings

- The mission of the charity is to improve the welfare of ASRs in the city where it operates.
- The definition of leadership at a charity is the process of establishing, delivering or altering its mission.
• Practice is everyday interactions and working customs, where interactions means any reciprocal action or influence between people and/or their environment and working customs means the norms of work-related activity within and/or between organisations.

• Therefore, in these findings, leadership practice is the everyday interactions and working customs that enable the charity to improve ASR welfare in the city where it operates.

6.1.2. The use of data in the findings

The findings are grouped into four main themes as follows:

*Theme one- Collaboration in leadership practice*

In this theme I look at how the charity’s people work collaboratively with other agencies and service providers to weave a safety net for ASRs in the city. The subthemes surface the impact of the material environment on leadership practice, the challenges and the rewards of working with others to deliver on the charity’s mission and the way that the manager’s position and influence in relation to decision makers affects their ability to do this.

*Theme two- Client driven leadership practice*

In this theme I look at how the charity’s people allow their day to day work to be guided by the needs of their clients as they are presented, and where they move beyond responsiveness to address client needs. It considers how building a responsive capacity has influenced the overall direction of the charity’s mission and the extent to which hyper responsiveness (by which I mean in the moment, rapid responses to ASR clients) hinders forward planning.
**Theme three- Collectivity in leadership practice**

In this theme I look at the internal collective and inclusive leadership practices at the charity. In this theme I surface tensions as well as the ways that this practice allows the charity to deliver on its mission through *how* it works as much as through *what* it delivers. I also explore the process of changing how leadership agency is configured across the charity’s people in response to circumstances.

**Theme four- The relational shaping of leadership practice**

In this theme I look at the dynamics within and between clients, volunteers, staff and trustees in the day to day practice of leadership. I consider the benefits and darker sides of stakeholder ambiguity, a reliance on voluntary input and the culture of allowing people to ‘find their own place’ in the charity’s work.

Throughout the findings I integrate quotes that I recorded in my field journal and from interview transcripts to develop and reinforce the analysis. I also use diagrams where they help to illustrate practice. Finally, I use vignettes developed from my field journal in order to evoke the richness and complexity of practice including the role played by artefacts and the material environment.

**6.1.3. Terminology in the findings**

In describing the interactions that make up leadership practice, wherever possible I refer to the specific people, places and things interacting with each other. However, I also use two more generalised phrases to describe where leadership is practiced and who is engaged in it. These are:
• **The charity’s people**: by this I mean the manager, trustees and volunteers. I use this term when I am referring to elements of practice that engage all of these people, either all or some of the time.

• **The charity**: by this I mean the assemblage of people, resources and material environments in which activities take place that operate within the boundaries of the organisation. I use this term as a short hand to refer to the case study and when I am discussing elements of practice that form a substantive part of delivering the organisation’s overall mission i.e., its leadership. For example, I might say ‘collaborative work is central to leadership practice at the charity’.

6.1.4. The research site

Figure six below details the main activities that are undertaken by the charities’ people and these are colour coded in order to show who takes primary responsibility for each area. This diagram is reproduced and discussed in more depth in 7.3.2. It is provided here as a visual reference to help the reader locate the activities and roles under discussion in these findings chapters.
6.2. Theme One- Collaboration in leadership practice

6.2.1. Theme introduction

In this theme I look at the collaborative activities and relationships that are at the heart of leadership practice in my study. I use the metaphor of a safety net that the charity’s people weave with partners across the city to ensure that, despite the fragmentation and diminishment of asylum services, ASRs are able to access support when they need it. In the sections that follow I explore collaborative leadership practice at the charity’s drop-in and a set of specific relationships which, when they are working well, can deliver better welfare for ASR clients. Through these examples I
consider the material aspects of leadership practice and it’s inherently relational nature. I also draw out the more difficult and darker sides of this approach to practising leadership. The theme concludes with a consideration of how badly local hostility inhibits the charity’s work and how it counters this by shifting how the local narrative around ASRs is framed. It does this in the quiet and collaborative way that is characteristic of leadership practice at the charity.

6.2.2. Leading and co-ordinating collaborative work

The charity’s origins are a drop-in for ASRs that was started by local volunteers in 2002. The purpose of the drop-in is to welcome and support people sent to the city under the policy of dispersal through a mixture of referrals and direct support. It has remained central to the charity’s activities since that time, although it was suspended April 2020- September 2021 due to COVID-19 government restrictions. I have chosen the drop-in for close analysis because it has helped make the charity a dominant force in the collaborative work of weaving the safety net for ASRs and is therefore constitutive of leadership practice. The following vignette, drawn from my field notes, evokes the atmosphere and activity of a typical weekly drop-in session in spring 2020.

---

**Vignette 1 - The drop-in**

*At one end of the church hall is the front door, welcome desk and pool table. At the other end is a kitchen and serving hatch where hot food is distributed fortnightly. In the central space tables and chairs are set out surgery style where representatives of different services meet clients. The room feels cold and cavernous on first entry until it begins to fill up. Quickly, the pool table comes to life with squabbling young African men who revert to the teenage boys they so recently were. In front of the kitchen is a large table for food distribution which takes on the feel of a market stall with the*
trustee in charge promoting the wares in four languages. In the central space a hubbub of humanity has taken over with people in situations representing the full spectrum of human experience. The man who heard of the death of two relatives that morning sits quietly in a corner, a newly registered client wants to know who he can talk to about the lack of a shaving mirror in his bathroom, a man on parole is about to be made homeless and is seeking help and an elderly lady has just received her refugee status and is handing out chocolates in celebration.

The charity’s table acts as a kind of triage for the wider drop-in whilst also registering new clients and handing out gym and swim vouchers to the many regular takers. A representative of the housing provider is here and is in demand because the helpline for housing issues currently keeps people waiting up to two hours. The legal aid solicitor is here taking general queries, having completed his appointments for the morning in the charity’s office across the road. A representative of the MP’s office is here and the other charities that provide for ASRs in the city occupy a desk each. Clients can be seen zigzagging from one desk to another seeking to resolve a series of problems and questions they have built up since the last drop-in. Those with no obvious solution bounce back to the charity. The soon to be homeless man has been turned away by the local authority, so a trustee rings around and a bed is found at the YMCA. The man who has lost family members decides he will accompany the trustee and fellow ASRs going to the football match that weekend, drawing on the society of friends that the charity enables. The elderly lady who is now officially a refugee enjoys the hugs and congratulations of the charity’s volunteers who have been alongside her on this leg of her journey.
This vignette paints a picture of the drop-in as an essential part and a physical expression of the safety net for ASRs. It evokes how the drop-in can help to meet ASRs practical and emotional needs by bringing all of the relevant people and services together in one place in a routinised way. As one ASR interviewee described:

“it became a ready place for me to meet and interact, it gave me all the necessary support emotionally and by way of sorting out my asylum process, like the lawyers come to the drop-in, I was able to access the lawyers and to access other services, and it also gave me the opportunity to meet people, meet my network. All these things were very useful during my asylum process.” (Interview 13, ASR trustee and client)

The vignette describes the drop-in as a shared physical space within which relaxed social interactions like those around the pool table happen alongside more structured interactions like those over the surgery style desks. This set up reflects the need for some support to be organised and process based, whilst other support is simply opening up space for ASRs to meet, interact and be together. One ASR interviewee described sitting down with service providers to work through forms at the drop-in as the one time she was treated as a human, in contrast to the experience of Home Office and solicitor’s appointments. Another interviewee, talking about the more social aspects of the drop-in, described it as the nearest thing to a family gathering in their life at the time. The way the various services are physically expressed in more formal or relaxed set ups, and the zigzagging of ASRs between them, demonstrates how the people interacting with the material environment sets the direction of activity. Therefore, the material environment should be understood as integral to the leadership practiced at the drop-in.

In interviews with the charity’s volunteers there was acknowledgement that on its own the drop-in does not form a complete or completely accessible safety net for all ASRs. Two volunteers felt it was
an intimidating atmosphere for newly arrived single women. This was cited by the manager as one of the reasons the trustees decided to start a separate weekly women’s group. Another interviewee, a trustee of the charity, felt that the social comfort of the drop-in could only temporarily alleviate the stress of living as an ASR. She said that:

“They come every week (to the drop-in) and I could tell you from my own experience that by the time they are leaving that session at about 3 o’clock or 4 o’clock they are going back to their usual state of hopelessness of, you understand, of fear. Fine, for those hours they are there, yeah, they can possibly forget but by the time you are walking back home or getting the bus alone reality dawns on you”. (Interview 13, ASR trustee and client)

Despite its limitations, all interviewees viewed the drop-in as important in the lives of ASRs and to the organisations that support them. Participants from other ASR VSOs were vocal in their respect for the role it played in the city, one describing it as a “vital resource” (field notes, 13th February 2020). The representative of a national ASR VSO also said they decided not to set up a drop-in in the city when they saw the charity’s because it was doing “really good work and ought to be encouraged” (Interview 11). Meanwhile, a manager at the largest regional ASR charity said they had modelled a new drop-in (in another city) on the charity’s. Overall, I formed the impression that running the drop-in represented an effective set of collaborative practices for delivering on the charity’s mission, therefore forming a central plank of leadership practice.

The drop-in’s almost two-decade long history at the heart of the city’s ASR safety net and the esteem in which it is held has also helped give the charity’s manager and chair of trustees a wider voice on ASR matters. By having ownership over the one place that everyone comes together on a regular basis, they are privy to the conversations and interactions going on about and between ASRs in the city. An example of this that I was able to follow during my time was the case of a single
mother who was dispersed to the city with her four young children in early 2020. The family, who arrived with no English, were placed in a house on the outskirts of the city where school places were unavailable for the children. I met the family at the drop-in where they were linked up with a translator and given basic necessities. I then saw the charity manager introduce the mother to several service providers and heard her advocate for the family to be moved in a series of multi-agency meetings. In these meetings she raised the case in a consistent way over the course of several months. Eventually it was agreed the family should be relocated. I am not suggesting this decision be solely attributed to the charity’s manager. The point here is that the drop-in gives the manager the knowledge and credibility she needs in order to interact and influence authorities in the city. In this way, leadership practice moves beyond what the charity can physically deliver for ASRs into the realm of influencing other actors with the ability to enhance ASR welfare.

During my study, changing practice at other organisations and the impact of COVID-19 restrictions put the dominant position of the drop-in within the collaborative work for ASRs in the city under threat. When the first COVID-19 lockdown came into force in March 2020, the charity opted initially to move all of its direct ASR support to over the phone and doorstep visits. Later it resumed regular face to face services, but these focused on less frequent, tightly controlled collection events for food and clothing. By contrast another small local VSO shifted its focus more fully to general ASR support and carried on well publicised weekly ‘drop-in by appointment’ sessions. At the end of my data collection period, it was unclear what impact this second drop-in might have on the charity’s when it resumes. During the COVID-19 restrictions the charity’s manager continued to be a central port of call for ASR needs and even felt relationships with local service providers had improved. For example, under the national ‘everyone in’ policy to house homeless people (BBC, 2020) she was suddenly an invaluable source of information for local government agencies on how to find and support destitute ASRs. This situation led her to exclaim in one of our interviews “part of me is like,
where have you been for the past x number of years?!” (Interview 20). However, by the end of my data collection when the country was gradually emerging from lockdown it was unclear whether these opportunities would continue or would diminish in the context of a second charity doing similar work. This is an example of how external factors beyond the charity’s control impact on the effectiveness of collaborative leadership practice.

The drop-in brings collaborative leadership to practice in a visible regularised way. However, this approach to leadership is not simply an event but is evident in the work of the charity’s people on a daily basis as the following sections will demonstrate.

6.2.3. Seeking synergy in key relationships

The chair and manager’s relational interactions with other key service providers are central to the influence the charity has over their practice. In turn this influences the opportunities that open up for the charity’s own leadership practice to enhance ASR welfare. We have already seen in the last section that the drop-in provides the manager with a voice that can be used to amplify the charity’s influence. This section explores that in more detail in relation to the housing provider. When asylum seekers are dispersed, their first point of contact in the city is a housing manager employed by a private contractor. This section looks at the relationship between the charity’s manager and a manager at the housing provider, and the wider benefits of relationship building with the company. I begin this section with a vignette that acts as a window onto the mundane micro-level interactions that make up the two managers’ relationship.
"I’ll call Abby" is a frequent response to the phone calls, the heads popped round the corner of the office door and the anxious WhatsApp messages that bombard the manager day in day out from ASRs seeking advice. From what she tells me during her interview “I’ll call the manager” is almost as frequent a response from Abby sitting on the other side of the line at the housing provider and also being barraged by calls, visits and messages from anxious clients. The manager’s relationship with Abby, longstanding stalwart and compassionate housing manager for asylum seekers in the city, is central to understanding how anything gets organised for the welfare of the clients they share.

Between them favours are called in, advice updated and solutions found to problems big and small on a daily basis. When all else fails this relationship can form the backstop against farce or fiasco.

One such example that illuminates this is the welcome pack.

The welcome pack is a document that was several iterations on from its first draft when I was introduced to it in January 2020. The pack, required by the Home Office and created by the housing provider, is a 30+ page document. It is being drafted for asylum seekers and is intended to help them find their way around, locate support they need and begin to build plans and activities for themselves for the duration of their stay. When it is finalised, it will be translated into a range of languages and a printed copy given to new arrivals. My time with the charity was punctuated by references to the welcome pack, meetings to revise the welcome pack and consultations on what should be included in the welcome pack. However, a year on from when I first heard of it, the pack was still in draft form and yet to welcome its first new arrival.
The problem with the pack is that it attempts to serve so many purposes it risks serving none. It has information on cultural information VSOs feel is superfluous, it has advice on public transport that doesn’t take into account what types of transport asylum seeker cash cards can be used to pay for and its inflexible design means information on VSOs is supplied on the 35th page. For months the charity returns the same comments and expresses the same concerns but there is barely any movement on the structure or content of the document. At a trustee meeting late in the year the manager sighs and explains that she and Abby have discussed it and have given up on trying to nudge things through the proper channels. Instead Abby simply intends to pull out the last page; with information on VSOs and put it at the front,” but don’t minute that!” the manager tells the secretary.

This vignette gives an insight to the close relationship of the two managers, demonstrating how they have become dependent on each other in their work for ASR clients. It then goes on to tell the story of the welcome pack. This illustrates how seemingly inert physical things, in this case a document, can play a big role in how well the collaborative safety net for ASRs functions. Due to restrictions imposed by the Home Office on data sharing, VSOs are not made aware when people are dispersed to the city. VSOs rely on new arrivals being told about their services through word of mouth, but the welcome pack represented an important opportunity to change this. It also framed and ordered the information new arrivals would receive, relegating the charity and other VSOs to an afterthought at the end of the document. It became clear over time that the charity’s manager was unlikely to be able to influence the other authors of the document to change its structure as she had hoped. At this point the two managers agreed on a simple fix to make sure ASRs got the information on supportive VSO services. In this way the information pack can be seen as playing a direct role in leadership practice, albeit through its manipulation by the people involved. It also shows that having strong individual relationships can enable the charity’s work even where the context may present impediments to it. To return to the analogy, this example shows how the two managers work
together to constantly maintain the safety net which is created through collaborative leadership practice.

There is an interesting addendum to the story of the welcome pack which shows that the charity’s relationship building practice can pay off at a scale beyond that which is achieved through the individual relationship alone. Thanks to the manager’s persistent advocacy, the charity was invited to join a data sharing pilot project designed by the regional migration partnership with the collaboration of the housing provider and the Home Office in early 2021. It was one of only two VSOs invited to be part of this scheme in the region which means that going forward, data on new arrivals will be given directly to the charity. If the pilot proves successful, this may lead to a permanent wider opening up of communication channels nationally, meaning VSOs can reach those who need them more freely and efficiently. This involvement with a scheme that may influence change at a national level shows that the charity’s leadership practice has the potential to go beyond the local safety net and influence ASR welfare on a much larger scale. In particular, this was possible because of the way the charity’s manager and trustees had positioned its work at the centre of collaborative processes in the city, as a key partner to the housing provider and as a regular voice and contributor in multi-agency meetings.

6.2.4. Building relationships for collaboration

Alongside housing provision, the one thing all asylum seekers need is legal representation to help them navigate the asylum system and make their claim. Compared to housing, where the charity’s manager has direct access and frequent contact with the relevant providers, the legal system feels a remote and inaccessible force in ASR lives. Whilst the charity’s trustees and manager often express
frustration with the housing provider and the local council, they speak in more extreme terms of being ‘powerless’ in the face of legal decisions that are the ultimate determinants of ASR welfare. Unlike in the case of the housing provider, the charity’s people are positioned at a distance from the Home Office and do not have direct access to its representatives. One trustee argued in her interview that “we have no power to affect outcomes” (Interview 5, non ASR trustee) and later expressed a feeling that this could undermine everything the charity does to help build a safety net for ASRs because:

“if they’ve (the client) just had a refusal …. then whatever the charity is doing, however much it may have helped, it will not have improved their situation or the way they feel, it may have stopped it being worse than it is but you can’t say there will have been an improvement”. (Interview 28, non ASR trustee)

This sentiment may be unduly pessimistic because there is a link between peoples’ welfare which the charity’s services enhance, and their motivation and ability to fight their case. However, it is a reminder that external context has a really significant impact on the effectiveness of leadership practice.

Although the trustees and manager may feel powerless in the face of the immigration legal system, they nonetheless work to weave effective legal representation and advice into the collaborative safety net for local ASRs. This is a challenging area of relationship building work because there are no immigration solicitors based in the city. A solicitor does travel from their firm in another part of the region to attend the charity’s drop-in every week and provides advice to clients there. This makes them the only legal adviser with a regular presence in the city. This is a significant service for asylum seekers and is another example of where building a relationship with an external service provider has helped weave the safety net that can support ASR welfare. However, a single solicitor
available a few hours per week cannot meet the needs of all the city’s 300+ asylum seekers. The solicitor in question also divides opinion, with one interviewee saying:

“almost everybody I meet they are always ‘oh I cannot use those people again’… of all the people who come they just collect the money, they don’t bloody care, I’m sorry to say, they don’t care what is the outcome they are paid by legal aid either way”. (Interview 13, ASR trustee and client)

This view was not universal and the solicitor in question had successfully represented charity clients, but this sentiment does point to how a weak link in the safety net can undermine its ability to improve ASR welfare.

The charity’s approach to trying to improve the legal advice it enables access to, is through the development of collaborative partnerships. It is hoped that this may lead to an increase in the number and variety of legal advisers available in the city. Throughout the year I saw the charity’s manager putting energy into conversations and contact with a representative of a legal charity in a neighbouring city, at one point bringing them along to a multiagency meeting to further their insight into the ASR situation locally. This is the relational work of leadership, against and in spite of the backdrop of perceived powerlessness, and it has had some success. During my fieldwork, it culminated in the charity’s inclusion in a funding bid by the legal charity which framed its work as complementary and necessary to good outcomes for ASRs alongside legal advice. If successful, this will allow the legal charity’s solicitors to provide advice at the weekly drop-in as well as bringing funding for the charity’s supportive services with it. Although the results are yet to be seen, these interactions are another example of the charity’s approach to leadership practice, that of building collaborative relationships with expert service providers to improve the city’s ASR safety net.
In the UK asylum seekers have the right to housing and legal representation (Home Office- UK Visas and Immigration, 2021) and there are government mandated service providers that exist to fulfil these rights. There is no equivalent imperative for local governments to provide any kind of specialist advice or services to ASRs. As the context chapter (4) showed, the local council has moved to reduce its role in dispersal and does not provide specialist services for ASRs that other councils have opted for. Interviewees from local VSOs had strong views of the council’s attitude to ASRs believing the institution to be either racist or blind to the existence and needs of ASRs in their city. One said:

“I would say it’s either racism within the body politic of the local authority, not just councillors but how the council is, either racism, or in kindness to them perhaps they just don’t think it’s an issue for the city. I’ve had councillors say to me in the past you know this is a white working class city and they don’t see this as an issue”. (Interview 11, local activist who works with ASRs through a number of professional roles)

The manager of another VSO said:

“I’m not saying all councillors or council officers are racist.. but some of them indeed are...I had a councillor who was also on a board with me saying that, in his words, there were no ethnic minority people here”. (Interview 17, local VSO manager)

Whether racist or simply disengaged, it was clear from my data that historically the council has not been a pro-active collaborator in weaving the safety net for ASRs in the city.
The background to my study then was one in which the charity’s trustees and manager felt they had been left to get on with creating the ASR safety net without much input from the local government, a situation Billis and Glennerster may have characterised as state failure (Billis and Glennerster, 1998). As one trustee put it in her interview, the council “historically have never really done very much to support asylum seekers and refugees, it’s usually been left to the voluntary and third sector” (Interview 27, non ASR founding trustee). It is in this vacuum that the charity’s people have shown leadership by delivering services to ASRs and practising in a collaborative way to draw other providers in to support their clients. During my study there was some movement towards a greater involvement in ASR welfare by the council. Just before I began data collection two staff had been appointed to the ‘Connecting Communities’ project which is funded by the Home Office and run by the local council with the purpose of promoting community cohesion. Whilst these two officers had no previous experience of working with ASRs, they were visibly active and committed to understanding and working with ASR VSOs. The charity’s manager and chair of trustees spent time and energy engaging them; the manager trained them on asylum issues, welcomed them to drop-ins and helped attract ASRs to community events supported by the Connecting Communities project. In other words, the manager showed the kind of relational leadership which had helped to strengthen the safety net for ASRs with the housing provider and legal advisers.

During my fieldwork I saw that there was a cordial and deepening relationship between the charity’s manager and chair and the Connecting Communities team. However, there was also an inherent tension between the two. The Connecting Communities team’s remit is integration and the council’s policy is to achieve this is through housing ASRs in a dispersed fashion across the city. The charity’s leadership practice depends on being able to bring people physically together in the city centre. As well as this practical misalignment of approach, the Connecting Communities team had begun to take on some of the brokering and signposting activities that had typically been the domain of the
charity. They had also begun chairing a regular voluntary sector networking meeting. The charity’s manager reacted negatively to this, feeling it was, in her words, a way of trying to “set the agenda” of VSO work in the city. Her feeling was that VSOs should lead voluntary sector forums and that the Connecting Communities team were “justifying their existence by having to have meetings with us” (extract from an email October 2020). At this point she clearly didn’t see a positive synergy between the council’s efforts and that of the VSOs. As with the emergence of the second ASR drop-in during COVID-19, it was not clear at the end of my study whether this new dynamic would compromise the charity’s prominent role in the collaborative work of weaving the ASR safety net, but it had emerged as a potential threat to it. In this example we see a situation in which the charity’s relational and collaborative approach is absorbing resources without achieving the desired outcome of improving ASR welfare, at least within the timeframe of my study. This is an example of the darker side of this type of leadership practice where it takes place against a difficult context.

6.2.5. Practising through place-based tensions

The charity lists “the promotion of social inclusion” of ASRs as one of its objectives in its governing document, this being one of the ways in which ASR welfare can be improved. Discussion of the drop-in earlier in this theme has already illuminated aspects of the leadership practice that helps deliver this objective, in that case through helping ASRs find inclusion with each other. This subtheme considers the extent to which the charity is able to promote social inclusion with the wider community against a backdrop of local hostility to ASRs. Chapter four explained the explicitly hostile environment the Home Office and public discourse on immigration has created for ASRs and provided examples of where dispersal areas have been the locus of far right activity and racist attacks. My data bore this out and experiences of racist and anti-immigrant abuse were shared in all of my volunteer and trustee interviews as well as those with other VSOs. There was only one
exception; that being an ASR volunteer who says he feels at home and has never experienced racism in the city. Others’ experiences had included vandalism of their homes, false accusations of criminal activity, a feeling that refugee candidates were disadvantaged in going for jobs and a more general sense that as a refugee it is easier to live in more diverse cities. One non ASR trustee referred to the city as “not the least racist place you’ll ever come to” (Interview 2) and the manager of a VSO said, “refugees leave the city in droves because of racism” (Interview 17). The individual experiences of abuse can have a deep impact on individual lives and in this way, they threaten to undermine and occasionally tear right through the safety net.

This local hostile environment influences the way leadership on social inclusion is practiced at the charity. For example, the charity’s trustees and manager are extremely cautious about the extent to which the situation of ASRs and their own work are shared in the public domain. There is a fear among the trustees that public promotion of their work or visible campaigning could lead to a backlash for the charity’s clients. When the charity first engaged with social media its clients received abuse online and the memory of this was raised at several trustees meetings as a reason to limit public facing activities. For example, during my time the charity opted not to be formally represented at a Black Lives Matter vigil which took place in the city as part of a global movement against racially motivated violence.

In keeping with its collaborative approach, the charity undertakes quieter, more facilitative actions towards improving awareness and promoting the social inclusion of ASRs. It works with partners in carefully chosen contexts where its members can share their stories in thoughtful and safe environments. These relationships include the city’s university which invites ASR members to talk to its undergraduates on an annual basis, local schools which also welcome talks and the annual
refugee week festival. The charity’s manager has co-ordinated a series of social and experience sharing events for refugee week every year since she took up the post. These tend to be hosted by a range of VSOs and aim to involve ASRs and the settled community together. During my fieldwork, the manager was invited by the national umbrella body to give a presentation on delivering refugee week in difficult communities. This highlighted both the charity’s success at leading collaboration around refugee week and the hostile nature of the environment it does this in. This non-confrontational and collaborative leadership practice is the way in which the charity feeds into narratives that counter the hostility towards and promote inclusion of ASRs in the city. By seeding a better understanding of ASRs in local people of all ages it provides an alternative to the narratives of hostility. So, shaping local narratives around ASRs can be seen as part of the charity’s leadership practice.

6.2.6. Theme summary

This section has explored the ways in which the manager and trustees relate to people and organisations that are external to the charity. In particular it has drawn out examples of collaborative leadership practice which has enabled the weaving of a safety net for ASRs in the city. The examples given demonstrate that the charity’s collaborative leadership practice is consciously relationship focused and is most successful when it’s people are positioned in such a way that they can access and influence other authorities and service providers, and where they can play a role in reshaping the local narrative about ASRs.

6.3. Theme Two- Client driven leadership practice
6.3.1. Theme introduction

A major element of leadership practice at the charity is responding directly to ASR needs. As theme one showed, this often entails signposting ASRs to other specialist services for support. There are needs however, both practical and related to emotional wellbeing, that are not the remit of other providers. It is these gaps which the charity’s people tend to fill directly and with a level of compassion and responsiveness that they see as lacking in the wider environment ASRs find themselves living in. Just as under the first theme I unpacked how the charity’s manager and trustees weave a collaborative safety net for ASRs, in this theme I will explore how they respond directly to need and how this in turn sets the direction for the organisation both at the mundane day to day level and in terms of its overall mission. It provides a clear direction for mission delivery but also gives a sense of how the needs of clients crowd in on the charity’s people in both a physical and emotional sense. First, I look at the responsive relationship the charity’s people have with their clients and the way the charity develops its responsive capacity to respond to need. This shows that practice is often driven by a commitment to reactive, in the moment, support from the manager and trustees. It demonstrates that this practice helps meet immediate needs but also that the chaotic build-up of ‘stuff’ it generates is a source of stress and tension. Secondly, I explore elements of leadership practice that respond to the needs of ASR members in a slightly longer term more proactive way using the example of the women’s group. This shows that the charity has the capacity to respond to ASR needs beyond those which present in the day to day requests. Finally, I step back to consider the impact of this responsive approach on the mission itself. I consider that, on the one hand, leadership is being practiced in such a way as to let the things that matter to ASRs influence how the mission is delivered. On the other hand, the commitment to responsiveness may come at the expense of longer-term planning.
6.3.2. Responsive relationships

One of the key ways that the charity’s manager and trustees build responsive relationships into the centre of their leadership practice is though casework. Casework refers to the work done to individually support and advise ASRs. The charity’s objectives do not include casework and the manager and trustees are not trained to give specialist advice e.g. on immigration law or welfare rights, although they are knowledgeable on these and other relevant areas. In one of her interviews the manager explained that “we’re not meant to be doing direct advice and casework because there are already other organisations that do it” (Interview 20, charity manager). However, the manager pointed out “the reality is people go to the people they know” (Interview 20, charity manager). Also, other agencies refer casework to the charity. The housing manager (discussed in 6.2.3.) said in her interview “they (the charity) made my job 50 times easier because I knew I had a central point where I could direct the families, or the single females and males and I knew they would be helped 100%” (Interview 24, manager at housing agency contracted to house asylum seekers). The energy dedicated to this work is an example of leadership practice that allows priorities to emerge from the everyday experience of interacting with the individuals the charity exists to serve.

From the observations I made and testimonies in interviews it is clear that this casework does enable material improvements in ASR wellbeing, thereby constituting leadership practice. However, spending so much time on casework is also problematic and this practice has its darker side. There is a sense that comes through in the data that the demand for support is at times close to overwhelming. One trustee described the situation as:
“there are so many demands on us that it is literally chaotic and however many things we’ve tried to make it less chaotic it’s been really difficult because how do you turn someone away when they need something and then someone else is there and someone else is there and someone else is there”. (Interview 3, non ASR trustee)

This quote evokes the sense of just how exhausting a commitment to highly responsive relational leadership practice can be for the individuals involved. It also exposes the vulnerability of organisations that rely on this approach in terms of how well the practice can be sustained.

As well as feeling overwhelmed there is also some concern that, as an organisation, the charity is simply not equipped to provide as much of the direct casework support as is needed. Both the manager and a long serving trustee were at pains to point out in their interviews that they could not offer the same level of service to everyone and there would be ASRs in the city that feel they have not benefitted from the charity’s support on an individual level. The manager put it as follows:

“I’m quite certain if you were to ask a whole lot of clients you would get a range of views ... although you get lots of people like the people who are on our women’s group WhatsApp who are very positive and send all those positive messages there are also people who feel we haven’t helped them enough”. (Interview 25, charity manager)

This points to a limitation of the responsive approach, particularly in the context where the ratio of staff to potential beneficiaries is one manager to over 300 ASRs. There is a tension here between the relational and responsive leadership practice and what could potentially be achieved by a more targeted approach to support in which decisions are made less in the moment and more in reflective processes which are one step removed from the day to day.
6.3.3. Developing responsive capacity

In my observations I noted that a great deal of time, physical space and personal energy was devoted by the charity’s people to providing goods to clients as and when they are needed. This responsive practice included sourcing, transporting, sorting and giving out things that ASRs need and cannot easily afford to buy, be that clothing, equipment or food. As with the drop-in, this work drew on the energies of all of the trustees, the manager and several volunteers. I am characterising this work as leadership practice both because its purpose is to improve ASR welfare and because it has a tangible impact on the direction of daily activity, not always in a positive way. This is one of the ways in which we see responsiveness physically crowding in on the charity’s people and the following short vignette evokes this dynamic through how it is expressed in the charity’s working environment.

Vignette 3- Stuff

The awareness of ‘stuff’ begins the moment you walk through the door of the charity’s premises. The organisation occupies two floors of an office building, the first of which is a large open plan office cum meeting room with a small closed corner office for meetings requiring privacy. The second-floor space has the same footprint and is nominally assigned to the storage of donated items and a bike repair workshop. However, goods including clothes, baby equipment and dried foods flow down the stairs and are stacked in every corner of the available space. For the first few months of my fieldwork it was not possible to get through the door and see the manager at her desk without first dodging around Moses baskets and baby car seats piled in the space between the two.

Understanding how all the stuff described in the vignette comes to be there, how it is used, and how people feel about it demonstrates one way that the commitment to being able to respond directly
to clients becomes a form of leadership practice at the charity. The way in which the charity builds up its store of goods is somewhat ad-hoc and based on different strands of work. Those strands include the routine purchase of food for destitute asylum seekers who have no recourse to public funds and a bike scheme that relies on donated bikes and volunteer mechanics. Over time the charity has also become something of a hub for the informal donation and distribution of goods that help make life easier for ASRs. It is difficult to control the build-up of items at the charity’s premises because things have to be accepted when they are offered, not when they are asked for by ASRs. External storage is also a challenge and the charity lost access to two extra storage facilities during my study because the organisations who were loaning the spaces had to vacate them. Added to this uncertainty of supply and storage, ASR needs are also unpredictable, and the charity can never be sure how and when it may be called on for help. The result is the situation described in the vignette of a crowded office where everything has a potential purpose but not necessarily a place to be stored. The vignette evokes the physical expression of this practice and as the following discussion will show this material environment is a constitutive part of leadership at the charity because it helps to determine the direction that is taken to support ASR welfare. This leadership practice is also one that has a dark side to it. The messiness of the office is a source of frustration among the charity’s trustees and manager and creates tension between individuals. In their interviews, all but two of the trustees expressed some level of frustration with the situation, one of them saying in her interviews:

“sometimes I joke with the manager and say yes I know we are so desperate we need everything but ... you can clear some, clear fresh air coming in, it would be nice, it would be really nice”. (Interview 21, ASR trustee and client)

As well as being something of an emotional drain, handling large volumes of donated goods and moving them between donors homes, the offices and distribution sites is physical work. During my time with the charity, responsibility for the ‘upstairs’ was passed between three different trustees
all of whom put significant energy into rationalising the stored resources and expressed exasperation at the trustees meetings, but none of whom advocated actually stopping the practice of storing and distributing goods. Overall, there is a mismatch between the desire to build a latent capacity to respond quickly to appeals for help and the capacity of the charity to manage the logistics this requires.

The value of building this responsive capacity as part of leadership practice was demonstrated during the COVID-19 lockdowns. During this time distributing food, clothing, toiletries and toys became a more central part of what the charity did. This was through deliveries direct to people’s houses and semi-regular appointment based distribution events at the city’s minster church. It was also a time when there was an influx of new arrivals to the region; with 125 young men being placed in hotel accommodation on arrival in the country and new families, couples and single adults arriving in the city on a near weekly basis. Distributing goods helped these people in a very practical way when they would have struggled to shop even if they had the means. It also meant the charity was put in touch with new arrivals who may otherwise have slipped through the safety net so carefully woven at the drop-in in non-pandemic times. Continuing these elements of direct support meant the charity was in touch with a wider network of ASRs than the groups who stay in touch via WhatsApp. Finally, it also enabled the charity’s chair and manager to develop relationships with partners in the city including the team at the Minster, where distribution events took place, and a social enterprise which donated foodstuffs. In the second half of my fieldwork, these groups had become crucial partners in supporting the welfare of ASRs in the city. So just as we saw in theme one that working on collaborative relationships can pay off over time, so can the daily grind of developing the capacity to respond to material needs. When circumstances changed it was this practice that set the direction of the charity’s work in a way that meant it could continue to deliver on its mission.
What these examples of responsive practice have demonstrated is the playing out of a shared sentiment among the trustees and manager; that the charity’s people should always be available to their members and willing to try and help. As one trustee put it in her interview “we are always here for them and they can turn to us at any time” (Interview 3, non ASR trustee). She explained the importance of this being there for people who are too often turned away or overlooked because they are “a non-priority in the whole country” (Interview 3, non ASR trustee). In my observations I did see absolute consistency in the respectful and compassionate way that the trustees and manager responded to ASRs approaching them, irrespective of the place, time or mode of communication they were contacted through. This shared ethos of compassionate responsiveness is something that can be difficult to evidence through data although it feels material to how the charity is led. The pattern of casework and the provision of goods are examples of how it is expressed in the daily leadership practice of the charity, albeit a practice that has a challenging or dark side to it.

6.3.4. Responsive practice beyond the immediate

The examples of leadership practice given in the last two sections are largely driven by the desire to be able to react to ASR needs quickly and, as far as possible, in the moment when they present themselves. This section is concerned with different elements of leadership practice in which the charity’s manager and trustees proactively set the direction of activity by planning ahead the best way to meet the needs, which they have come to understand through working with ASRs. First, I will focus on the women’s group which aims to provide activities that will help foster the longer-term wellbeing of the women and help generate supportive and integrative networks of women across the city. There are other examples of this type of leadership practice at the charity including the
work that goes into organising cultural and recreational trips around the region for members, family
holiday clubs on the beach and gardening projects. The motivation behind these activities, as
described by the trustees, is to alleviate some of the depressive feelings that can build up whilst
people live in limbo awaiting outcomes of their claims for asylum. As an activity that could be more
effectively COVID proofed, the women’s group was a big focus during my fieldwork. The following
vignette evokes the relational and material way that the group’s activities contribute to ASR welfare.

Vignette 4 - Hello hands

“Hello hands, how are you today?”

It’s a blustery autumn day and the leaves on the tall trees have turned golden, they blow down and
catch in our hair as we begin today’s dance. First, we greet our hands and warm them up with some
distinctly new age free movement, then move on to our elbows, shoulders and hips before ‘passing
the groove’ by sharing our dance moves around the circle. This is the women’s group in the time of
COVID-19; a dance class in the city’s lovely large central park.

The beauty of the women’s group is its simplicity; women get together on a Friday morning and
share an activity which presents no barriers of language or ability, for example, crochet, painting or
dance. Children are allowed and, if possible, childcare is provided to give the women a break. If that’s
not possible the children are welcomed and encouraged to join in. Through my year with the charity
women come and go as new babies, home schooling and Home Office decisions punctuate their lives,
coming back to the group when circumstances allow. Despite the individual and shared external
disruptions of the year the group continues, online where necessary and in the fresh air where
possible.
As a part of the group I come to appreciate the calmness and togetherness that such activities can bring, especially in the midst of rapid change and unsettling disruption. At the end of the session on that autumnal morning, by the time we are giving each other a virtual hug, it is clear that the barriers of ethnicity are less visible and the sense of individual and collective wellbeing is enhanced.

The vignette aims to evoke the feeling of the women’s group as a shared, reliable space in which people can come together to support themselves and each other. The role that it played in the women’s lives came through clearly in my observations and the data I collected which brought it to light as an example of leadership through relational practice with the clients. In her interview one of the volunteers described it as:

“just coming alongside people and really just being like ‘hi again’ and just being, it’s amazing how relationships can be formed by merely just being in the same place at the same time”.

(Interview 14, women’s group volunteer, non ASR)

The importance of the group in peoples’ lives was also expressed by the members in poignant ways. For example, at one of the park sessions described in the vignette a member said:

“I saw the new (COVID) restrictions last night and I couldn’t sleep all night thinking we wouldn’t be able to meet today and then this morning I saw the message that we could come to the park and I was just so relieved”.

(Extract from field notes)

Another woman who had been absent for several months having given birth to twins popped up on a zoom session and said:
“I am exhausted, I can’t dance today, but I just had to come on and see you all, I’ve missed your faces!”. (Extract from field notes)

Unlike the drop-in’s social side, the women’s group doesn’t rely solely on opening up space for interaction, it also provides expert led activities. The purpose of hanging the group’s meetings on the hook of a shared activity is multifaceted. Firstly, choosing activities that do not exclude women based on language or skill means they can be encouraged to get involved with something together thereby opening up channels of communication. As one volunteer observed in her interview this “helps to create community across those language and cultural barriers” (Interview 16, women’s group volunteer). Secondly, choosing activities that other local groups and practitioners specialise in, the women’s group has been able to bring ASR women together with local residents. Examples of this have included dancing with older local women and felting with a local women’s arts group. Experiencing the women’s group feels relaxed, informal and a space for natural interaction. Underpinning the simple structure of the group is gently directive relational leadership practice, planned by the manager, initiated by the teacher and enacted by all the participants.

A benefit of working with local experts who deliver activities at the women’s group is that the charity has been able to secure several joint funding bids which have focused on the group’s activities as much as its participants. These complementary elements of the women’s group are consciously planned by the manager and show how this element of the charity’s leadership practice takes a holistic and deeper approach to improving ASR welfare than some of the earlier examples. A final advantage of focusing on shared activity that came to light during the COVID-19 pandemic was
more serendipitous. Thanks to its focus on lesson type activities, the women’s group was allowed to continue for a far greater proportion of the year under COVID-19 restrictions than the drop-in. It was also able to switch to online dance lessons during times of complete lockdown. This is a good example of how relational leadership can be adaptive and change direction in response to context without losing sight of the overall leading purpose of the activity.

I have selected women’s group as an example of leadership practice for two reasons. Firstly, because of the ways in which it improves the welfare of the women involved which is central to the mission of the charity. Secondly because it demonstrates the capacity the charity has to proactively develop projects that respond to ASR needs which go beyond their immediate practical concerns. Unlike the examples of direct responsiveness explored earlier in the theme, the women’s group is a project that has been planned from the outset rather than having evolved. The manager was recruited partly because of her experience in running this type of group, which had been identified as a priority by the trustees. As the reasons for selecting group activities show, the group has been thought through in a strategic way. This is so that, as well as directly helping women, it finds synergies with local groups that can open up funding opportunities and encourage integration. This focus on integration reflects an aspect of the charity’s mission to increase ASR welfare which is not obviously served by the earlier examples of simply giving out ‘stuff’ or providing advice.

6.3.5. Mission nudge vs mission drift

What the examples in 6.3.2-4 demonstrate is that how the charity goes about delivering on its mission in the long term is determined to a significant degree by what its people do in the shorter term. There is a kind of determinedness in the mindset of the charity’s manager and trustees to be
what the system fails to be to ASRs; to be a face of kindness, of solutions and of connections. This ethos leads to the charity’s time being dominated by activities which focus on the here and now and ensuring they can respond to client needs in the moment as they arise. As a trustee put it in her interview “I think we are rightly or wrongly primarily responsive... but there’s so much to be responsive to” (Interview 2, chair of the charity’s trustees, non ASR). This commitment to responsiveness allows a bottom up process of letting day to day activity shape the overall picture of what the charity does. There is also an element of caution about becoming led by external forces. A founding trustee said in her interview:

“I mean we’ve always been aware of the danger of chasing the money and ending up with mission creep, saying ‘well we could get this money which means we should do X’, we’re very aware of the danger of that and we definitely have always tried to avoid that and that is a real danger I think”. (Interview 5, non ASR founding trustee)

Mission creep, or mission drift as it is sometimes referred to in the literature, can be characterised as a top down process of charities being led to change their direction in order to access funding (Milbourne and Cushman, 2013). In the case of the charity, it is more influenced by a kind of mission nudge from beneath whereby it is the clients’ needs as they present themselves that guide what the charity does. Its leadership practice then can be characterised as highly responsive and driven by clients’ needs.

The caution against falling prey to mission creep is part of a wider scepticism among the trustees about the risks, as they see it, of becoming a larger charity that is more concerned with developing according to sector norms. As a founding trustee put it:
“to me it is not a failure if the service stays the same because we’re doing it for different people, you know funders say we want innovation we want you to do something new, what are you going to develop? Well, what we need to do is carry on doing a good job for new people in an old situation”. (Interview 5, non ASR founding trustee)

This statement evokes the feeling among the trustees that they are there to tackle the situation of ASRs on their doorstep, not develop as an organisation for its own sake. It also highlights the very direct link between context and leadership practice at the charity; the Home Office keeps dispersing new arrivals to the city and so the charity keeps serving them with the type of support they know people need early on in their journey. The manager assessed the situation as follows:

“some of the trustees think because the charity is small it can still stick to all of its principles...there is this pattern that develops in other charities as they get bigger they end up putting themselves out to tender ... and you then end up shifting a lot to having to do all those strategic things, those larger charities can still try and keep their clients at the centre of that, but maybe they (the trustees) feel it’s harder”. (Interview 25, charity manager)

Meanwhile when I asked the chair if she would consider being a trustee of a larger regional ASR charity she said:

“I’d say no because it’s a bit too big and corporate and slick, which I know they’ve got to be. I’ve seen the chief exec talk and he’s a brilliant face for the organisation but I’m not him and I wouldn’t want to be”. (Interview 26, chair of the charity’s trustees, non ASR)

These quotes evoke the commitment to responsiveness on one hand and the general sense of wariness of larger and more professionalised VSOs on the other hand, which is shared by the trustees. I characterise this shared commitment among the trustees as constitutive of leadership
practice because it influences the direction of the charity’s work; against growth for its own sake and in favour of shaping the charity’s activity entirely in relation to its own specific client base.

The commitment to responsiveness and scepticism of larger professionalised charities fed into a general sense that strategic planning was a waste of time. An annual planning day was scheduled for early in my fieldwork. When I asked how long it would be I was told by one of the trustees “as short as possible” (field notes 2nd December 2020) and the strategic plan that a funder had helped the trustees put together was described as “worse than useless”. A third trustee said, “I mean we have the planning meeting coming up, even a lot of that will be responsive” she then went on in a laughing tone “or you know we could do this blue sky thinking where you just get ideas out the blue, or is that a bit too Dominic Cummings?” (Interview 2, chair of the charity’s trustees, non ASR) referring to the British prime minister’s controversial adviser who was in the press at the time. In the event the annual planning day, the first for two years, lasted two hours and focused on existing governance tasks and regular activities rather than any longer term or wider ranging topics. This wariness towards strategic planning was a contrast to the charity’s governance standards which it took pride in. One trustee said in her interview “we’re getting really good governance from her (our chair)” (Interview 1, non ASR trustee), another said she was happy to become a trustee because “I found they were very professional they were very well organised” (Interview 3, non ASR trustee). These views are borne out in the relationship the charity has with a handful of grant funders whose rigorous assessment and review processes audit their governance arrangements regularly. So, it is not that the charity is against being organised and professional in terms of standards, but that leadership practice should be about bottom up influence, not top down thinking.
In spite of this anti planning, bottom up approach to leadership practice, there have always been elements of pro-active planning and mission development within the trustees work and in key strategic steps in the charity’s development. For example one of the reasons for registering as a charity was to be able to source funding for projects that would extend the activities beyond the drop-in. Similarly, one of the reasons for hiring the manager was to expand the offer further by forming the women’s group. These new developments were based on the trustees ideas and understanding of ASR needs that went beyond day to day practicalities and were determined to make this happen in a proactive way. During my time with the charity the appetite for formalised forward planning continued to increase. The trustee who dismissed the idea of strategic planning as “too Dominic Cummings” in early 2020 and said, “I don’t spend a lot of time thinking what more the charity could be doing in different directions” (Interview 2, chair of the trustees, non ASR), had by the end of the year become chair of the trustees and set up a subcommittee to work on the COVID recovery and strategic planning of the charity. This development may be a modest iteration of the kind of planning that created the manager’s role or could be more fundamental as the charity emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic. Observing that is beyond the remit of this study, but it is important to note that leadership practice at the charity does weave in some elements of more strategic, less in the moment, thinking.

6.3.6. Theme Summary

This section has explored the ways and extent to which responding directly to ASR needs makes up leadership practice at the charity. Looking at the examples of casework and the distribution of goods I have evoked the ways that responding to need crowds in on the manager and trustees in relation to both time and space. This crowding is a source of tension internally but also aligns with the shared commitment to being highly responsive to and available to the clients. It is also an example of how
the material environment can constitute leadership practice, in this case a side of leadership practice that has dark sides to it. The flipside of the responsive ethos is that the trustees share a healthy dose of scepticism when it comes to the norms of VSO development and are in favour of allowing mission nudge and avoiding mission drift in the charity’s leadership practice. This stance is countered to some extent by the more strategic elements of planning that do exist at the charity. These are exemplified under this theme by the women’s group which was proactively created to meet the longer-term needs of female ASRs and has been allowed to flourish through relational practice.

6.4. Chapter conclusion

This chapter has presented the findings for the first two themes that have emerged from my data, those being ‘Collaboration in leadership practice’ and ‘Client driven leadership practice’. These themes are primarily concerned with the ways in which people with formal roles within the charity’s structure relate to those who don’t, in ways that constitute leadership practice. It has shown that leadership practice at the charity is highly collaborative and its success depends on being able to work with other service providers that can improve the welfare of ASRs. It has also shown that where the charity’s people deliver direct support to ASRs they are committed to being extremely responsive to need as they perceive it and as it is presented. The charity’s people have allowed its mission to be nudged along by the demands of clients on their time and energy. Alongside a commitment to this client led leadership practice and a scepticism towards growth and planning for its own sake, the charity’s trustees and manager have also carved out some space for forward planning and more pro-active approaches to enhancing ASR welfare. Both themes have illuminated examples of the highly relational way of working that is central to leadership practice in my study. The next chapter will continue to present the findings of my thesis, considering the last two themes which relate primarily to practice that happens within the organisational boundaries of the charity.
Chapter Seven- Looking within; exploring leadership practice inside organisational boundaries

7.1. Introduction to the chapter

This chapter explores the second two themes of my findings. These themes relate primarily to dynamics that take place within the organisational boundaries of the charity. They focus on how people within the charity relate to each other and, as with the first two themes, the relational and material aspects of leadership practice are brought to the fore in the examples I present. The first part of the chapter explores theme three ‘Collectivity in leadership practice’ and the second part explores theme four ‘The relational shaping of leadership practice’. The chapter ends with a conclusion covering all four themes and setting the scene for the Discussion chapter which follows.

7.2. Theme Three- Collectivity in leadership practice

7.2.1. Theme introduction

This theme explores how the people who have a formal role in management of the charity relate to each other, those being the trustees, staff and volunteers who manage areas of work. Drawing on the data collected it demonstrates how the everyday interactions and working patterns of these individuals collectively constitute leadership practice. It steps back from the methods and strategies for improving ASR welfare that were the focus of themes one and two. Instead, it has the more
traditional leadership focus of who makes the decisions and how they are made. It does this through the L-A-P lens, looking at interactions as the unit of analysis. The first section explores the partnership between ASRs and non-ASRs on the charity’s board. Next, I explore how leadership practice is delivered through a structure which has both collective and hierarchical elements to it. Then I explore what happens when the charity’s structure is reconfigured in response to changes in external context, in this case in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally I discuss how agency is shared between staff and the trustees.

7.2.2. Leadership through partnership

The charity is seen by the trustees as a joint endeavour between ASRs and longer-term local residents. It began as a response by local people to new arrivals and its mission includes the goal of aiding integration of ASRs into the wider community. Having long term residents and ASRs both involved as volunteers is one of the ways that this is made possible, as relationships are formed through working together. The trustees also felt from the start that in order to effectively serve ASRs, the trustee board needs to properly understand ASR needs. It is the view of the trustees that this can be best achieved by ensuring people with lived experience of migration and the asylum system play an active role in the charity. As one ASR trustee put it:

“The major thing the charity does is to support asylum seekers so how do you support someone when you don’t know what they’re thinking or how they’re feeling? You cannot pretend to be in their shoes, it can never be the same, so having these people in such organisations … wherever they have issues that have to do with asylum seekers it is very necessary that asylum seekers should be represented”. (Interview 13, ASR trustee and client)
In day to day practice it is common to hear trustees and volunteers refer to ASR clients with terms that give a sense of shared ownership including ‘our guys’, ‘our supporters’ and ‘our members’. This is a recognition that the people who make the charity’s work necessary are also those who make it possible.

ASRs have positional leadership roles at the charity including at board level where three of the eight trustees are refugees and a further three have experience of migration to the UK. There are no formal policies about what proportion of the trustees should be from ASR backgrounds and no written guidance on the expectations of trustees. An unofficial principle of trying to maintain a board where 50% of the trustees are ASRs was mentioned to me by two of the trustees. The norms of governance apply, for example a trustees meetings need to be quorate for decisions to be made but this does not formally guarantee ASR voices are always present. There is also a recognition that ASR members may be less present or active in the charity’s work than non ASR members. In one of her interviews the treasurer explained that:

“In the past people (ASR trustees) have attended and made a contribution but to be fair not often done a lot of work, but that’s fair enough, they have different pressures from us, but what we’re obviously seeking to do is get their perspective in our decision-making process and so that is lacking in our meeting if they’re not there”. (Interview 5, non ASR trustee)

In other words, though the hours contributed by ASRs on the board may be less, ASR input is of such unique value that it is worth accommodating this imbalance on the board. This pattern of asymmetric activity between ASR and non-ASR trustees is a characteristic of leadership practice at the charity and demonstrates that the board values ASR voices in decision making.
Ensuring ASRs can continue to take a meaningful part in trustee decision making is ongoing work for all of the trustees. On the part of the non-ASR trustees, they seem content to carry the larger part of the burden in terms of spending volunteer hours delivering the charity’s services and doing the bulk of the administrative work associated with governance. Before COVID-19 all the non-ASR trustees attended the drop-in on a weekly basis managing areas of support e.g. the kitchen or the gym and swim programme. They also tended to take on extra responsibilities such as bookkeeping in the case of the treasurer or buying items for new arrivals in another case. Non ASRs also occupy two of the formal leadership roles on the board; that of the chair and treasurer and there was understanding that the secretary, who is a refugee, may need to be absent from some meetings due to college or other commitments. On the part of the ASR trustees there was an extraordinary level of commitment to participating in the decision making of the charity. One ASR trustee was sometimes only able to attend part of the meetings; on one occasion because she was moving house and broke off to join for 10 minutes, on another occasion she dialled in from the break room of a shop where she was working alongside PhD studies and caring for her family. Another trustee took only one meeting’s break when her family attained refugee status and were moved into a hotel room, dialling in for the subsequent meetings from their single room whilst family life went on around her. These ongoing efforts demonstrate that leadership is what emerges from ongoing relational practice driven by peoples’ commitment. Whilst that commitment is not a matter of formal policy, the partnership approach to leadership is delivered through it.

The relational ties board members feel to each other go beyond a shared commitment to delivering the charity’s work and extend into concern and some level of responsibility for each other’s welfare. For example, when one ASR trustee had been the subject of abuse, the first part of the trustee meeting was given over to hearing from her and discussing how to improve her situation. One trustee took on the role of supporting her in her dialogue with the police, another offered to come
and physically protect her in the evenings until the trouble passed. This scenario exemplifies the ambiguity in roles that is explored more in section 7.3.4. It also demonstrates the level of personal commitment the trustees take to making leadership through partnership work. By valuing and accommodating difference and allowing more personal concerns into the governance space, the charity’s trustees are effectively functioning as a partnership. It is however something that requires continual effort through relational practices that foster care for and understanding of each other.

7.2.3. Sharing duties across leadership structures

As with all UK charities, the case study has a board of trustees which formally shares the duties of governance and ensuring the delivery of the organisation’s work. The existence of this board is an expression of the influence of the regulatory environment on the charity’s decision making. It is a legal requirement of charities to have trustee boards and the charity formed its board when it decided to register as a charity. One founding trustee described this development in her interview, saying “a formal structure and a pattern of responsibilities seemed important, so we were happy with the fit of being a registered charity” (Interview 5, non ASR founding trustee). The literature on charities would suggest that merely having a trustee board is no guarantee of collective or shared leadership practice taking place. Rather the roles of trustees and staff are constantly renegotiated in the practice of leading a charity (Cornforth and Macmillan, 2016). However, it is important to note that the reason the charity has a board is regulation and its work can be seen as flowing from that starting point. What follows then is leadership practice that occurs when the regulatory environment interacts with the principles and approach of trustees in a real world environment.
In their interviews all the trustees of the charity said that they did feel they were leaders of the organisation and felt a responsibility to help make decisions about its work. This sense that leadership was genuinely collective was largely reflected in the practice I observed during my time with the charity. The business of governing the charity is organised mainly through monthly trustee meetings, an annual planning meeting and an annual general meeting (AGM). A planning action tracker, maintained by the chair, is kept which details semi regular or longer term tasks such as keeping the client member list up to date and updating organisational policies. Trustees volunteer for various tasks from this and are held to account by reviews at the annual planning day or during the year as required. The trustees meetings are organised by the chair and a regular set of items including the manager’s report and finance update from the treasurer are added to on an ad-hoc basis as new issues for discussion arise. This system of meetings and associated documents can be seen as the administrative backbone of the charity. This backbone plays a role in leadership practice in two ways. First, it is the up to date record of the governance, planning and review activities of the charity and reflects the way responsibilities have been divided. Secondly, with several different authors taking responsibility for the different documents and the actions, it documents and formalises the way responsibilities are shared across the group.

This success of sharing duties is dependent on the relational interactions between the people involved. As with the principle of partnership in leadership, the principle of sharing the workload is not achieved by setting it down on paper but by continual relational effort. I noted several times in my field journal the lack of any other agenda among the trustees and the lack of ego in their dialogue and approach. There was also a sense of shared purpose that I observed in decision making at trustees meetings and all of the trustees described in their interviews, with statements including “we do have a common purpose which is to serve clients” (Interview 3, non ASR trustee). Flowing from this shared and simple focus, there is also a clear willingness among the trustees to adapt their
own position as needed to best serve the collective goals of the charity. The following quote, taken from my notes on a trustees meeting, is typical of the playful but respectful dialogue that takes place around decision making:

**Trustee one**- “I think was getting a bit power crazy at that point and put my name against that too”

**Trustee two**- “that’s alright, you’ll have to try harder than that to tread on my toes”

Another example is where the chair described her role as “just the manager’s messenger” (field notes August 2020) during a phase of the COVID-19 pandemic when she had begun working almost full time with little time to prepare in order to keep the charity’s work going. This adaptability and humility is characteristic of decision making at the charity. This is driven by the feeling that, as the chair put it, “we’re all in it for the same reason” (Interview 26, chair of the trustees, non ASR).

During my time with the charity sharing responsibilities across the administrative backbone was not always a harmonious process and there was a more difficult side to this aspect of leadership practice. During trustees meetings I attended there were two awkward moments of tension where new responsibilities came up and the members of the board were asked to volunteer but none did. These responsibilities were taking ownership of the membership list and taking on the role of safeguarding lead at the charity. At these times I could sense the frustration of members who felt they had taken on more than their share of tasks in recent times and the annoyance of others who felt put on the spot. In each case a volunteer eventually came forward from among the trustees who had taken on relatively less work in the preceding months. It is hard to know to what extent this ill feeling was due to the expectation that people had to take on their ‘fair share’ and to what extent it was the manner in which roles were proposed publicly with little or no prior notice or time to think
the commitment through. Whichever is the case, it was clear that sharing the power is sometimes a clunky process at the charity; drawing on and possibly exploiting the commitment that the trustees feel towards the organisation’s clients.

7.2.4. Reshaping leadership structures

Perhaps one of the best tests of collective and shared leadership models is how they stand up in challenging times when teams need to adapt and change their approach to delivering their goals. The following vignette provides insight into how the charity’s people managed this in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

---

**Vignette 5- Formation of ‘The Three’**

*Monday 16th March 2020- the effects of COVID-19 have been creeping in over the past couple of weeks. My journal notes on 6th March that the women’s group decided to cancel the bring a dish element of their international women’s day celebration. On 11th March I arrived at the office to bulk orders of hand sanitiser and disposable hand towels and the manager had cancelled fresh food deliveries for that week’s drop-in. Over the weekend, via email, it has felt like things are coming to a head with some of the trustees increasingly concerned about the safety of the drop-in and starting to suggest they won’t be able to be present.*

*Now on Monday morning I am in the office tidying the remnants of a display the manager had been working on for the women’s group. She is at home with swollen glands. The chair and the treasurer arrive, one with a car load of donated clothes for us to sort through. When that is done a meeting is*
called, we sit around the now clear square of tables, newly conscious of how close it is ok to sit. There was no plan other than to gather here and discuss arrangements so I suggest putting my phone on speaker and calling the manager so the other two can talk with her. This is done, and in a few minutes the key decisions are made; the drop-in must close, Facebook, the website and WhatsApp groups must be updated so the clients know. The work of working out how to keep clients informed and how to support them in the absence of clear guidance from the government will have to be ongoing.

It is proposed and agreed that the three on the call become a core decision making group, able to bypass the collective of the trustee board as needed for the duration of the pandemic, whatever that may be. Later that day this is agreed via email by the wider group of trustees. And just like that it’s done, the charity has taken on a new configuration; one that will hopefully see it through the turbulent months ahead.

This vignette provides an insight into how the shared leadership practice of the charity is able to adapt to changing circumstances. The formation of the decision-making group of ‘the three’ was a response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the need to change process in order to be able to continue to operate. With other trustees drawing back from their normal level of commitment and the government guidance relating to the pandemic rapidly changing, a quick and streamlined decision making function was needed. Friedrich et al memorably likened leadership to the game of “whack a mole” (Friedrich et al., 2009, p. 934) in which the leaders pop up in the moment they are needed. This sense of people popping up at the moment they were needed and felt able to take the strain was a theme during my time with the charity. It happened in the first few weeks when a chair stood down at short notice and a trustee who had said in her interviews just a few days before “possibly I
should push myself out of my comfort zone to do more stuff” (Interview 2, chair of the trustees, non ASF) agreed to take on the role. It happened again when an ASR volunteer who had turned down the offer of becoming a trustee in the past put herself forward for the role, just as another ASR trustee stepped down. One trustee said in their interview that the charity had “so far... stumbled along with an adequacy of volunteers” (Interview 5, non ASR trustee) and watching the charity work, this does capture the sense of people coming forward at the last moment just when they are needed in order to keep the charity functioning.

The ability to flex and adapt roles may be reflective of the trustees’ willingness to put the shared agenda first. However, my data suggests there may also be a tendency to shut down discussion of ways to expand or develop the charity’s remit beyond its somewhat narrow responsive outlook. The scepticism which long term planning was viewed with has already been explored in 6.3.5. In my interviews with trustees, it was expressed that being part of the board meant compromising and sometimes suppressing ideas that the group was unlikely to support. One trustee said that “you’ve got to think about how far you’d be prepared to compromise and I like that” (Interview 2, chair of the trustees, non ASR). For others it was a less positive dynamic, with one trustee saying:

“I mean I have rocked the boat.. and it’s never got me anywhere so I think often in these situations you have to be working with people instead of against people...but there are things that do get me worked up sometimes, things that are not achieved, things that have dropped by the wayside”. (Interview 3, non ASR trustee)

A third trustee, talking about her view that the charity should do more to support people with their legal representation said:
“this position is not new to people who have been the old members of the management committee but two or three years ago we did take a vote on it and it was like, you know culturally we are democratic, so I can’t do other things about it but that is what I seriously believe that we should do”. (Interview 13, ASR trustee and client)

So, whilst communication between the trustees tends to have the tone of polite appreciation and humble humour, there is also some inhibition or even suppression of ideas that may be more controversial. It was my impression that these ideas may have been more than usually suppressed during my time with the charity due to the overwhelming necessity to focus on how best to deal with the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this darker side of collective leadership practice reminded me as a researcher that I needed to be alert as much to interactions that are not happening as those that are. Conducting interviews that provided different perspectives and interpretations on practice were extremely useful in illuminating these somewhat hidden dynamics.

7.2.5. Distributing authority between staff and trustees: a relational dance

Whilst the charity’s trustee board may be seen as an example of shared or collective leadership, this is not the whole story when it comes to who leads at the charity. There are also elements of hierarchy and more individualistic leadership notably in the case of the employed manager. These dynamics echoed Cornforth and Macmillan’s observations of how relationships between boards and staff evolve over time and put me in mind of a kind of relational dance between the manager and the board (Cornforth and Macmillan, 2016). In the case of the charity manager, the post was initially titled Project Development Worker but was changed to Manager after a year in the post. This was a recognition that the manager took a greater level of ownership over the charity’s work and held greater decision making authority than was envisioned in the initial job description. At the time she was appointed the founding trustees felt extremely overstretched and wanted to be able to hand
over much of the growing workload to an employee. There was a clear sense that this shift in responsibility had been achieved and even surpassed. As one trustee put it “we have the manager which is, thank god, without her we wouldn’t have functioned, we wouldn’t have functioned” (Interview 1). Although the manager maintained that “I don’t feel a responsibility for everything” (interview 20, Manager) it was clear that through the practice of doing the job, the roles of manager and trustees had recalibrated in relation to each other with the manager coming to play a more prominent role in leading the charity. Her interactions with the clients, the trustees and external partners have been the focus of many of the examples given in these findings chapters (6 and 7). These examples have demonstrated both the centrality of her work to day to day activity and the influence that relational interactions she is part of have had on the direction of both the charity’s work, and beyond this of work to support ASRs in the city more broadly.

In terms of the decision making structure, the manager is line managed by the treasurer and is empowered to make day to day decisions about the running of the charity independently. She is then expected to run slightly more strategic decisions e.g. about whether to go for certain funding opportunities past the treasurer. She is also expected to report her work in detail to the trustees on a monthly basis and for the largest strategic decisions that come to her e.g. whether to formally partner with another organisation, she is expected to seek trustee approval. Whilst the manager is answerable to a highly engaged board and does have a clear and active line management relationship, she is in effect often functioning as a lone worker, taking a high level of individual responsibility for the work of the charity. During my time with the charity the manager had a very productive and warm relationship with both the treasurer and (new) chair of the charity. Their dialogue and the mutual support they offered each other appeared mostly frictionless. However, the potential for friction in these relationships was evident. The treasurer observed in her interview:
“I think it’s very weird for the manager to be employed by a bunch of amateurs, I think if I were she I would find that quite troubling frankly”. (Interview 19, non ASR trustee)

Also, the previous chair who stood down early on in my time with the charity did so after a drop-in where she had not been informed of a change of plans personally by the manager. This was later described to me as the straw that broke the camel’s back for the departing chair. The manager in turn expressed her frustration to me at the idea that she had to inform the departed chair of ‘every little thing’ (field notes April 2020). It may be that this potential for friction was lessened when ‘the three’ was formed of a group of individuals who related well to each other. Any frustrations the three may have felt with each other may also have been suppressed for most of 2020 due to the unique experience of working together in the context of an unprecedented pandemic. As I mentioned before, in this context, concern for each other’s welfare and the work of the charity tended to drown out any other concerns.

What this exploration of the manager’s role shows is that leadership is not simply evenly shared at the charity. Decision making power does reside more heavily in some individuals than others and most notably in the manager. It is also another reminder that all leadership is relational; the potentially weird or inverted power dynamic of an experienced ASR/voluntary sector professional being employed by people with little previous experience in the sector worked well during my study. It worked because the charity had recalibrated the manager’s role in relation to the board as her influence at the charity had grown and because the individuals in the posts relate well to each other. It may also have been fostered by an extraordinarily challenging context which heightened the already clear sense of ‘being in it together’. If any of these factors were to change it may be that the relations that produce leadership practice at the charity would be less harmonious.
7.2.6. Theme Summary

This theme has explored how people in formal leadership positions at the charity relate to each other in making the decisions that guide the charity’s work. It has shown that leadership practice in decision making is shared between ASRs and non-ASRs in a partnership approach. It has also explored the ability of the charity’s people to adapt their practice when the circumstances change, with a closer look at the way they responded to the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, it has looked at the ‘relational dance’ between the manager and the trustees. This demonstrated that whilst individuals’ work can form a substantive part of the charity’s leadership practice, this is mediated and enabled by the way they work in relation to others.

7.3. Theme Four- The relational shaping of leadership practice

7.3.1. Theme introduction

This theme explores the people power behind the charity’s work. It looks at the dynamics that bring people to the charity and which influence how they deliver improved welfare for ASRs in their time as a volunteer or member of staff. As themes one and two showed, the day to day work of the charity depends on human labour and direct engagement between people. The following analysis will show the dynamics of this labour, including how people interact with and use the material environment. These constitute the everyday interactions and working norms at the charity, which I have defined as leadership practice (see 6.1.1.). The following analysis looks first at the internal tension around how much of the charity’s work should be done by volunteers or paid employees. Next it explores the ambiguity in roles and the related challenges of drawing boundaries and
avoiding burnout. Finally it considers, through an example of one volunteer, the process by which volunteers ‘find their place’ and in so doing constitute leadership practice.

7.3.2. Volunteer led vs staff led

The charity was started by volunteers and most of the work for most of its existence has been undertaken by unpaid volunteers. It has only one paid employee who was taken on 14 years after the charity was founded. Voluntary action makes it possible for the work of the charity to be wider and deeper than would otherwise be the case on its current income. It also allows it to benefit from asylum seekers who are not allowed to work and retirees who are less likely to be in paid work. These groups, as previous themes have shown, play a crucial role in both integration of ASRs and the effective welcome and support of new arrivals. Figure six outlines the work of the charity and who is responsible for what. It shows that substantial areas of work are undertaken by volunteers. As one trustee put it “without volunteers I just don’t see how we could function as an organisation” (Interview 27, non ASR trustee). It follows therefore, that the interactions that constitute leadership practice at the charity very often involve volunteers.
There is a clear sense among the trustees that there is inherent value in voluntary action and that they have chosen to rely on it to the extent that they have rather than taking on more paid staff. The manager put it as follows in one of her interviews: “I think the charity is very much an organisation that wants to be voluntary led… but they want to be volunteers and they want volunteers taking on the main roles” (Interview 25, charity manager). A trustee put it simply that “the fact that they’re (volunteers) doing it and not being paid is just great, you know it’s a great principle of being kind” (Interview 27, founding trustee, non ASR). This trustee also felt that “the organisation has prospered because of the quality of its volunteers” and that these people are “the sort of person who is … not selfless but not motivated by a sense of self, they’re motivated by a genuine sort of a Samaritan drive to help other people” (Interview 27, founding trustee, non ASR). There is a sense then, that altruistic acts undertaken by people who are giving their time and energy freely, are an important element of how the charity delivers on its mission. This altruism both generates and sets the tone of many of the relational interactions that make up leadership practice at the charity.
As we have seen with earlier themes, taking a practice based approach to studying leadership means acknowledging that how the charity works is understood to be as important as what it does. A useful comparison to an alternative approach can also be made because there is an ASR charity in a neighbouring city which started as a voluntary set up at a similar time and shares several of the charity’s clients and volunteers. This other charity made the choice to professionalise early on and has grown into an organisation with an income of over £1 million a year and approximately 25 members of staff. Whilst the two charities work quite closely on projects together, trustees told me on more than one occasion that they see this other charity as a very different type of organisation and expressed some cynicism towards its more commercial approach. There is no evident jealousy towards its growth, rather it feels that the charity sees itself as having a different ethos and role to play.

Having made the positive case for the charity having chosen to depend on voluntary action, it is also important to acknowledge that there are financial reasons the charity has felt unable to employ more staff. None of the trustees have a professional background in the voluntary sector and fundraising, including for staff costs, is by and large left to the manager who has the ability but limited time to give to it. There are still painful memories for two of the trustees who spent over two years raising the funds to employ the manager and as such feel very cautious about the financial risks involved in taking on more staff. The treasurer, who is responsible for presenting the financial picture to fellow trustees, said in her interview:

“I personally, being timid, am absolutely appalled at the idea of having to get grant funding for a second person, you know I know I very very painfully know how hard it is”. (Interview 19, non ASR trustee)
At the time of my research it felt as if there was some movement towards a situation in which the charity would take on more paid staff. In their interviews all of the trustees suggested that more staff were needed and that they would, in principle, be happy to take on at least a second employee. This wasn’t suggested as an alternative to volunteers but a supplement to the hybrid that had already developed where the organisation shares its workload between employee and volunteers. The treasurer summed up the enthusiasm for volunteers but the growing need for staff by saying “I think if money was no issue, I’d employ two people and lots of volunteers!” (Interview 28, non ASR trustee).

Finding the right balance in this hybrid model can be an uncomfortable and contested process. There was an acknowledgement in all of the trustees interviews that more staff were needed because people, be that the manager, themselves, or fellow trustees, were currently overstretched. One way of understanding this overstretch is by observing particular pinch points in the charity’s operations. At these points, not having enough people accepting responsibility for certain areas of work can cause tension. One such pinch point during my data collection period was bookkeeping. During 2020 the role of treasurer included bookkeeping and payment of expenses for clients as well as strategic financial management. The current incumbent took on the role only reluctantly when the former treasurer retired. The charity has tried advertising for the post and to attract treasurers from among its current board and volunteers but without success. The manager is also very reluctant to have to take on bookkeeping again, having had to do the job when there was a gap between previous treasurers. There appears to be an emerging consensus that bookkeeping is a professional service the charity may have to pay for. However, when data collection ended in spring 2021, the current treasurer who is in her 70s and was due to step down in August 2020 was still in post. The trustees still felt there was no money to employ somebody in this role. This is an example where an approach that is so heavily dependent on voluntary action can leave gaps; both in terms of
who is willing to take on bookkeeping and in terms of who is willing or has the confidence to take on fundraising for the role.

7.3.4. Ambiguity in voluntary practice

The observation that people involved in charities often wear more than one hat and that roles often overlap with each other is sometimes called stakeholder ambiguity (Billis and Glennerster, 1998). In other words, they hold more than one stake in the organisation and can slip between their multiple roles. Being a volunteer at the charity reflects this and most people wear at least two hats. The nature of their engagement with the charity can also change at short notice. As discussed in 7.2, leadership practice benefits from the connection people feel with the charity’s clients but this ambiguity can also be disruptive as the following analysis will show. Figure seven maps out the three roles that most typically crossover, or the three ‘hats’ most people usually wear. These are colour coded and each section title is accompanied by an image of the ‘hats’ that are being referred to in the discussion.

Figure 7. Ambiguous roles at the charity

- **Client**
  - Attend events, access services
  - Contact charity for advice
  - Be part of social and integration activities

- **Volunteer**
  - Take on specific roles e.g. drop-in kitchen volunteer
  - Take management of areas e.g. bike project
  - Interpreting

- **Trustee**
  - Attend meetings and contribute to decisions
  - Take on officer roles e.g. Secretary
  - Take on specific areas of responsibility e.g. policies
Client Volunteers

The involvement of ASR volunteers shows that the inclusion of ASRs happens throughout the charity’s work and is central to day to day leadership practice. During my time with the charity, I heard many testimonies of clients who became volunteers and saw these people in action in both roles. For example, a conversation with and observation of a client volunteer drove home the mutual benefits for newly arrived ASRs and those who were more established in the city. The client volunteer in question had a complicated asylum case which had been tied up in the legal system for several years. She was suffering poor mental health and anxiety as a result of this and the experiences that had caused her to flee her own country. Unable to work and being a young single person, she saw volunteering for the charity as a lifeline that distracted her from her worries and provided a sense of purpose. Her native language was one that was common to many new arrivals during the COVID-19 pandemic and I observed her translating for several people, being their first point of contact in the country who spoke their language. The relief of the new arrivals was palpable, and the conversations opened up access to the practical help the charity could offer. This example demonstrates that, as with voluntary action more generally, making use of client volunteers is both a practical approach and one with inherent value of its own. This example demonstrates both completely free translation services for new arrivals and activity that improves the welfare of an existing client. This blurring of boundaries in day to day work is part of leadership practice because it helps to deliver on the charity’s mission in multiple ways simultaneously. The vignette below offers another example of how the hats of volunteer and client can be both be worn by one individual.
Vignette 6- Abel

The first time I meet Abel is at the volunteer induction. He is there to be inducted himself as a bike volunteer and to translate for a fellow volunteer.

The second time I meet Abel is at the drop-in where he is taking requests for bike repairs in between chatting with his friends. I learn he has been trained as a bike mechanic and now has the skills to do simple repairs alone.

The third time I meet Abel is when he knocks on the door interrupting a trustee meeting. He is distraught and calls the manager out of the meeting asking for help. It turns out his solicitor has called to say the letter containing the outcome of his asylum claim has been sent to his former address. He can see the post through a window but can’t get into the building or contact anyone who might be able to help. The manager makes a series of phone calls and a plan is formed to get a new copy of the letter and funding for the journey to meet his solicitor. Abel goes away calmer and having received both practical and emotional support.

The fourth time I hear about Abel is from the chair who says he’s been invaluable distributing food and support packages to people in his shared residence and neighbourhood through the first COVID-19 lockdown. He knows who lives where (information the charity only has partial access to due to data protection regulations) and he can translate for those in need of support.

This vignette gives a simple example of the ways in which an individual’s role at the charity can be multiple and overlapping. Abel has several roles including as a translator, a bike mechanic who also benefitted from training by the charity, a peer support to fellow asylum seekers and a client who is still very much on his own journey through the asylum system and in need of support through it. It also shows how involving clients is crucial to the leadership practice of the charity. Abel’s language
skills, his knowledge of where people live and their trust in him as a fellow asylum seeker are nonphysical resources that make it possible for the charity to deliver on its mission of improving ASR welfare and helps to determine how they go about doing this. The support given to Abel when he arrives unannounced at the trustees meeting also gives an example of the kind of in the moment responsiveness that is explored in theme two (6.3) and shows how stakeholder ambiguity can be disruptive to the direction of day to day work. Both the example of Abel and the volunteer translator show that individuals do not simply move on from being clients to being volunteers. Those roles co-exist and weave together over time and are sometimes indistinguishable from each other.

In section 7.2.2. I highlighted the level of flexibility that the trustees all employed to ensure ASRs could maintain a meaningful role on the board over time, even if their lives experienced disruption. A similar dynamic was observable with the inclusion of client volunteers. There were times that individuals were absent from their duties with little or no notice because they were called to Home Office meetings or in one case was removed from the country overnight. Others left permanently when they received their refugee status including a chef the drop-in had come to rely on for sourcing and producing high quality hot meals. The charity’s manager and trustees structured the practice of the charity around this unpredictability in such a way to make it an accepted working norm. Volunteering roles at the charity have a high degree of flexibility; individuals are encouraged to join in and help out and at the point they feel able to make a more regularised commitment they are invited to a volunteer induction and may be given a specific role. After this there are no formal agreements, review or line management arrangements; people are free to come and go as they feel able. This conspicuous informality is partly a capacity issue; the manager and trustees have very little time for volunteer oversight. It is also a recognition that asylum seekers are not allowed to work so formal volunteering contracts could be misinterpreted, and their lives are unpredictable so pressure to make and meet commitments is minimised. A third reason is that the trustees and manager
recognise the trauma and ongoing post-traumatic stress that many of the charity’s clients experience. They are conscious that involvement in certain types of volunteering e.g. speaking publicly about their experiences or translating for other ASRs relaying their experiences could be traumatic and people should not be obliged to undertake them. Whilst this inclusive approach does make it more possible for ASRs to get involved in volunteering, it also leaves unpredictable gaps in services that have to be filled by those who remain. A lot of the strain is taken by a small number of individuals including the manager and some of the trustees. This impact is considered in section 7.3.5 of this chapter.

Volunteer trustees

Historically at the charity trustees have started out as volunteers at the drop-in as the diagram below demonstrates:

- Casual volunteering at the weekly drop-in → establishing a regular role at the drop-in → invitation to observe trustee meetings → move to co-opt individual as a new trustee

During my research all eight trustees on the board had been recruited through this process. Up until the COVID-19 lockdown the majority of trustees on the board maintained regular volunteer duties at the drop-in in addition to their governance role. This means that they all wore at least two hats when at the charity. In some cases individuals wore all three hats, as described in the following quote from an interview with a trustee who is also a client and volunteer:

“I have been a service user with the group since about January 2014 when I’d just been relocated to the city by the home office so I started attending the drop-in sessions, got myself involved as a volunteer so yeah that was it participating in many of the activities so
that was it until 2017 when I was invited to be on the board of trustees.” (Interview 13, ASR trustee and client)

All of the people in positional leadership roles with the exception of the manager have also been in delivery roles at the charity. Being a regular witness to the needs of their clients, the trustees keep these at the forefront of their mind. The trustees meetings which are timed to happen straight after the drop-in serve to further keep individual ASRs situations front and centre of all decision making. This is an example of how the needs led and responsive leadership practice emerges as it is enacted by the charity’s staff and trustees.

The process of beginning as a volunteer and adding the duties of a trustee over time was one that the incumbents seemed happy with. The Treasurer noted that she felt it:

“...is a strength of the charity that volunteers could join and gradually find their home themselves rather than being recruited for specific roles and placed in them”. (Extract from field journal 22nd February 2020)

However, whilst this process has worked for those already on the board, it is not a guaranteed route to a complete or effective board. The risks of depending on the right balance and mix of people finding their way were highlighted when the COVID-19 pandemic hit in spring 2020. When the first lockdown came into force all of the trustees were unable to continue volunteering in the community due to age, childcare duties or health issues, with the exception of the newly appointed chair. This remained the case until spring 2021 when vaccinations began to reach the older trustees and schools re-opened relieving the childcare duties of the younger refugee trustees.
The stakeholder ambiguity explored in this section sheds more of a light on how the charity’s mission is delivered on. Understanding how the expression of peoples’ overlapping roles set the direction of activity in a moment by moment way demonstrates how this stakeholder ambiguity is constitutive of leadership practice. It is not always a productive or positive aspect of practice at the charity. The impact of stakeholder ambiguity and the other factors that lead to uneven distribution of duties on relational leadership dynamics are explored in the next section on boundaries and burnout.

7.3.5. Boundaries and burnout

It can be difficult to draw a line between the multiple hats that people involved with the charity wear. Equally it can be difficult for the individuals to draw a line between their personal lives and their work for the charity. There are positive aspects to this, and volunteers talked about the benefits they experienced from volunteering in their interviews with me. I have already mentioned an example of this, of the translator who is a client and volunteer. On the other hand, for some people it was also clear that there was a real danger of becoming overwhelmed and experiencing burnout as a result of over committing to the charity. In some cases, it seemed people had developed effective ways of drawing and maintaining boundaries around their role. This tended to relate to volunteers working directly with vulnerable clients. Examples of the boundaries included defining the times and places in which they would see clients and deciding that they would not accept personal invitations into clients’ homes. Another example was finding the correct referral pathways for members who were clearly in the course of a mental health crisis and in need of professional support. A third described the boundary setting process as:

“I’ve tried not to be here throughout the week because I need to set boundaries ... I’m quite happy to come in if the manager needs help with something but it has to come via her and I
will not do it directly (for a member) and these are my boundaries”. (Interview 3, non ASR trustee)

These boundary setting activities can be seen as a countervailing force against the very open relational channels between individuals discussed so far in this chapter. They are themselves leadership practice because they are interactions that redirect or limit that relational activity. They are not necessarily detrimental to delivering the charity’s mission because they are making practice more sustainable for the individuals involved. Where boundaries were not so successfully set, it was clear that individuals were at risk of burnout. One of the trustees encapsulated this feeling by talking of her volunteering at the drop-in where “you’re always overwhelmed and feeling at the limit of your capacity” (Extract from field notes February 2020). During my study two individuals in particular were at risk of and possibly experiencing burnout, those being the manager and the chair. What follows are two edited extracts from my field notes and interview transcripts. The first concerns the manager and the second concerns the chair.

The manager

The manager discloses she had a heart scare last year and isn’t supposed to do heavy lifting, which of course she does all the time.

The manager arrives having hurt her back- lifting everything in and out of her car for the women’s group is taking its toll.

The manager has shingles, she explains this is more concerning than normal because it suggests her immune system is weak at the moment.
The chair

“I think possibly I could push myself above the parapet a bit more often, but I wouldn’t say I have done hitherto no.”

“I went into that meeting and I hadn’t thought it through at all I mean I had no aspiration (to be chair), no wish, um, so it just happened you know....looking back into that month when I was in the role before lockdown I hadn’t thought of how time consuming it was going to be.....there’s a bit of a cliché going around that crises accelerate the pace of change um which obviously in lots of other areas is happening because of covid and I think with this as well yeah it would have taken me a bit longer to realise there’s a bit more to it but covid has sped that up definitely.”

The charity has taken over; I’m completely rearranging my life to accommodate it”

Source: extracts from conversations with chair of trustees- February, June and August 2020

These extracts vividly evoke the dark side of the informal, ambiguous and relationally driven way the charity’s work gets delivered by its people. During my time with the charity the manager consistently worked far beyond her contracted hours, cancelled annual leave and emotionally and practically supported ASRs at all times of the day and week. In the extracts above we can see that this level of work does take its toll on her health. Similarly, the chair’s workload for the charity accelerated and grew at enormous speed during my period of study to the point where it had a major impact on her life. The circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic which effectively grounded the majority of the trustees and the manager for long periods loom large here. The impact of these circumstances on
the people involved highlight the vulnerability of a small resource poor organisation to the impact of outside forces. They also highlight the lack of effective internal measures that may prevent individuals seriously overstretching and exhausting themselves in pursuit of continuing to deliver on the charity’s mission. It is not the policy of the charity that people should go above and beyond the role they have signed up for, but my observations suggest that it is the norm. This is a darker side of the compassionate client driven approach that characterises the leadership practice in my study; one that falls short in the care of those who deliver the work.

The trustees and manager are vocally appreciative of each other’s efforts and it would feel misplaced to say it is an organisation which intentionally exploits peoples’ commitment to the cause. On the contrary, trustees are aware of the issue and express the wish of making roles more manageable. In the case of the manager, the treasurer shared her frustration at trying to establish manageable boundaries: “she doesn’t respect working hours I always ask her how much overtime she’s done and I never get a straight answer” (Interview 19, non ASR trustee). The chair also maintained throughout my period of study that being active was a positive for her in the circumstances and that doing the extra work fitted with her lifestyle. However, even if the individuals involved were willing, this spiralling of responsibilities and pattern of overstretch is one that ultimately threatens the mission of the charity if the individuals find themselves unable to continue at this pace. It is also ironic that a charity, which prides itself on how it works being as important as what it does, allows its core team to exploit themselves to the point that it endangers their health. This shared culture of self-exploitation has sustained the charity up until this point, but at the time of my research it had led to questions about the sustainability of going on with such heavy reliance on the goodwill of a small number of people. This is the dark side of relational leadership and points to a potential weakness of L-A-P research if it focuses only on practice as emancipatory and democratic. This focus can be at the expense of understanding the repercussions
relational practice can have for practitioners’ own welfare when it occurs in a highly demanding context with few supportive structures in place.

7.3.6. Flexibility in volunteer roles

As was discussed in section 7.3.4, people are encouraged to come along to the charity’s activities and find their place over time rather than being recruited and placed in formal volunteering roles. There are formal milestones on the path of volunteering at the charity including becoming a member of the charity, attending a volunteer induction and role specific training. Beyond these, the volunteer experience is very much down to how the individuals relate to the charity’s activities and the other people involved. There is some pride expressed by the trustees in how welcoming and flexible the charity is to volunteers as well as an acknowledgement that with the unpredictable circumstances of the volunteer base this is a necessity. This approach to volunteer management has interesting implications for how leadership is practiced at the charity. The vignette below sheds light on this through the example of one long term volunteer and the role a material artefact plays in the leadership practice he is part of.

Vignette 7- The Mug

The mug is pink, it has a picture of a teddy bear and it lives on the windowsill of the upstairs; the large room above the charity’s main office which is a storage room cum bike repair shop. The mug is the domain of Mousab, who dresses in all black, has the walk of a confident young man and wears an enormous smile. Mousab, a refugee who has made the somewhat unusual choice of making his home in the city once getting his status, used to be the charity’s bike volunteer. Mousab was dispersed to the city in 2017 and, not knowing a soul there, the drop-in was the first place he met
people and began working out how to navigate life in the UK. He quickly became involved in gardening projects for the charity and being a mechanic by trade he took on the bike role. Having since started work and college he has stepped back from being the lead bike volunteer but has helped to train up his successor and during my first two months at the charity he is a frequent face at the office.

He is somebody who brings energy and warmth to the room. His motto is that you get back what you give and believes he has never experienced racism in the city because he smiles. Mousab is clearly at a stage where the balance of what he gives to and takes from the charity has shifted to the organisation being the beneficiary. This is demonstrated in practical ways, for example, the doorbell he fixes without asking, the surreptitious method he and the manager have developed for getting rid of old bike parts at the tip or the extra training and support he offers other volunteers. It is also characterised emotionally by the cheeriness and laughter he brings out in the manager who clearly enjoys his company and feels she can rely on his skill and commitment. This appears to be welcome respite in a role where most people depend on her for emotional support.

So, what of the mug? On arrival at the office Mousab’s first action is to retrieve his mug from its windowsill and make a coffee. On departure his last action is to wash it up and return it upstairs to its windowsill. When the manager offers one day to pay for Mousab and an occasional volunteer he worked with closely to go out for a coffee at a café he says “what, go outside? Ok, but I’ll take my coffee here too first”. When asked if he doesn’t want to leave the mug downstairs in the cleaner kitchen area and have it washed up regularly, he is clear that no, the mug stays where it belongs till he is next at the office, it saves his place and reminds us of the part he plays in the life of the charity.
The mug reminds us of the work of one particular volunteer and in so doing it symbolises that in a practical sense voluntary action is a large part of how the charity delivers on its mission. The volunteer in question is a client himself and as such he wears more than one hat at the charity. He was helped with advice and support as an asylum seeker and went on to help others by running the bike scheme. Above and beyond these two practical points, the mug helps to demonstrate how this volunteer has carved out his place at the charity and relates to it in less measurable and timebound, but still significant, ways. This particular volunteer is a sunny character who improves morale at the charity and his story provides some level of reassurance both that volunteers can provide and clients can achieve good outcomes. The positioning of the mug feels like a statement of power; a reminder of the individual even when he is absent. In another’s hands or a different setting this may be an intimidating expression of control over an area of activity, but in this case, it feels reassuring. The final thing I hear from Mousab during my time with the charity is when he pops up on the volunteer WhatsApp group in March 2021, an emotionally low point for many of the volunteers in the depths of winter and the UK’s third COVID-19 lockdown. His message reads “Hello to all friends. How’s you all? I wish that everything is going well, if there is anything I can help with, please no hesitation”. The example of Mousab is a positive one; a demonstration that allowing people flexibility over their role and how they relate to the charity’s work can be an effective element of leadership practice. The flipside of this, is that the charity cannot always rely on or predict what volunteers will be prepared to give or how their relational actions may impact on the work and welfare of others.

7.3.7. Theme Summary

This theme has shown how voluntary action is central to leadership practice at the charity. Firstly, it forms the bulk of the work delivered and it has been a positive choice to work in this way as
opposed to employing more people. This choice has meant the charity benefits from people who may not otherwise be able to contribute and has made it an inclusive organisation which helps to deliver on its goals by how it works not only what it does; an important facet of the practice view of leadership. It has however left some gaps in areas of work and caused internal tensions. It may be that the balance towards professionalisation shifts in coming years. Secondly there is ambiguity in the roles people take on at the charity. This is a positive because it helps make volunteering inclusive, but it is a challenge because it can lead people to overstretch and burnout, and it may not be sustainable going forward. Finally, the charity embraces a flexible relational approach to work among its volunteers. Through this it benefits from all the energy people are willing to give. As a small organisation the charity is relatively resource poor, but it is rich in its pool of willing volunteers. As such their efforts and the way they relate to each other constrain and enable the way in which the mission is delivered and play a role in setting the direction of the charity’s work on a day to day basis. In other words, they are central to leadership practice.

7.4. Conclusion to the findings

The two findings chapters have presented and contextualised the data which I have identified, through reflexive thematic analysis, as most relevant in answering the research question: how is leadership practiced at an asylum seeker and refugee charity? I have grouped the relevant findings into four broad thematic areas and explored and evidenced the data I collected through the use of quotes, diagrams, vignettes and analytical narrative. When combined, the four themes give an in-depth and holistic picture of leadership practice at the charity. In keeping with the L-A-P lens the findings incorporate insights into how the smallest and apparently mundane practices and artefacts become material to the delivery of the charity’s mission. At the other end of the scale the findings
also show an appreciation for contextual factors on a larger scale including asylum policy and local attitudes, impact on the direction of the charity’s work.

In the first theme I explored leadership practice at the charity that is concerned with joining the dots between the fragmented system of support for asylum seekers to provide a more consistent and effective support network. I also discussed how the charity’s people work to forge ties of understanding between local people and ASRs that can help counter local hostility and build a supportive base for people rebuilding their lives in the city. In the second theme I explored the ways in which the charity directly plugs gaps in the support network for ASRs and aims to offer a level of compassion and responsiveness that is often lacking in the local and national asylum system. It also considered the extent to which the charity allows its mission to be defined and driven by this practice of immediate responsiveness versus the extent to which it looks at longer term needs and engages in more proactive planning. In this way we see the interactions of a broader set of actors being considered as part of leadership practice than in traditional leader focused leadership studies. In the third theme I looked at the relational dynamics between staff and trustees of the organisation. I explored the continual effort that goes into ensuring the charity works as a partnership between ASRs and longer-term local residents; a form of leadership that emerges from putting principles into practice. It highlighted how the board was able to draw on its adaptive capacity in the face of COVID-19 and the ways in which trustees and the manager participate in a ‘relational dance’, with varying levels of harmony and antagonism. Finally, in the fourth theme I explored the dynamics of work and volunteering at the charity. I identified that leadership practice driven by altruism is core to the charity but a pragmatic hybrid model that makes use of both employed people and volunteers is emerging. I also explored the ambiguity that exists in the charity’s volunteer roles, the benefits of allowing flexibility through relational leadership practice and the very real challenges of burnout.
Taken together these themes give us the nuts and bolts of leadership practice at the charity. They show what delivering on the mission means in terms of day to day practice, how that practice is resourced, how the decisions about it are made and to what extent external forces influence what that practice looks like. In the Discussion chapter (8) which follows I will relate these findings back to the extant literature to see how much they tell us which is new about leadership practice, what is different or reinforced by other studies and what lessons can be learned and taken forward.
Chapter Eight- Discussion

8.1. Chapter Introduction

The findings chapters have provided an in-depth and holistic account of leadership practice at the case study charity. This chapter will draw on those findings to further develop my answer to the research question and explore how they relate to the literature and context discussed in chapters two, three and four. The chapter is structured in three parts. The first part (8.2) relates my findings back to the post heroic and critical leadership theories I have drawn on to conceptualise leadership practice at the case study charity. This section ends with a short conceptual summary of leadership practice at the charity and a visual overview of how I have answered the research question. The second part of the chapter discusses how I have developed an account of leadership in this thesis. To do this I reflect on the process of conceptualising leadership practice as I observed it in my data, how I was able to use L-A-P as a particular way of looking at leadership and the extent to which this may be applicable in other studies of small charities. This part of the chapter helps situates my thesis within the emerging L-A-P approach in leadership studies. In the third part of the chapter, I locate my thesis in the wider voluntary sector literature with a particular focus on how it relates to previous studies of small charities, migration and the ASR sub sector. This part considers how my thesis moves these strands of the literature forward. The chapter concludes with a summary of the discussion and sets the scene for the final chapter of the thesis.
8.2. Answering the Research Question; a conceptual discussion

The research question of this thesis is *how is leadership practiced at a small asylum seeker and refugee charity?* There are three stages answering that question. The first is a practical laying out of data which provides a holistic account of leadership practice in a clear and evocative way. This is what the findings chapters provide. The second is a conceptual explanation of leadership practice at the charity and the third is a conceptual summary; these final two stages are provided in the discussion that follows. The conceptual discussion draws together the findings with theoretical understandings of leadership practice that fall within the scope of the L-A-P approach as I have presented it in this thesis. The stages of answering the research question are not mutually exclusive but build on each other and I have signposted the theories I will be drawing on in the language of the findings chapters. The following discussion is structured around the four themes, followed by consideration of some cross cutting ideas drawn from L-A-P scholarship and the dark side of leadership which feed into my understanding of leadership practice at the charity in a multifaceted way. This way of answering the question depends on drawing out elements of post heroic and critical leadership theories that fit together and complement each other to form a holistic account without necessarily seeking a perfect synthesis between theories. In other words, it accepts and embraces L-A-P’s magpie approach to leadership theory. This way of conceptualising leadership is discussed in more depth in section 8.4 of this chapter and its limitations are acknowledged in the Conclusion (Ch.9).

8.2.1. Collaboration in leadership

Theme one is mainly a study of collaborative working between the charity’s people and those from other agencies. In this theme I use the metaphor of a safety net woven between the charity and its
collaborative partners. This theme is intentionally discussed first because it is a process I see as being the bedrock of the charity’s leadership practice; a net that underpins and supports everything else that it does. Without this collaborative leadership practice it is likely the charity would have a very different profile and may be more limited in terms of what it could achieve for its clients. As it is, with a focus on working through collaboration, the charity does find synergies and achieves more than it could do alone, or as Huxham and Vangen would have term it, collaborative advantage is achieved (Huxham and Vangen, 2005). There are several examples of this in the findings (and many more in the data) including the new arrivals data sharing programme shaped by the ongoing collaborative work between the charity’s manager, the housing provider and the regional migration partnership. Another example is the drop-in which is the charity’s longest running service and is an example of collaborative practice that achieves practical welfare benefits for its clients by bringing together the resources and expertise of many partners. I frame this as leadership practice rather than just practice because it orients the work of the charity’s people towards the relationship building and nurturing that is necessary to achieve its mission. The charity’s people persist with this even where those relationships can be hard work, where it feels like goals may be irreconcilable or progress is so slow as to feel like it has hit collaborative inertia (Huxham and Vangen, 2005; Vangen and Huxham, 2003). Examples of this are also evident in the data including the work on the seemingly never to be finalised welcome pack for asylum seekers and the tension between the local authority who want to resettle new arrivals on the outskirts of the city and the charity’s people who see the need for them to be centrally located. In these cases the paradox of collaborative work in which organisations have different and sometimes clashing objectives are brought to the fore (Vangen, 2017).

This thesis provides a case study of one small charity and the majority of my findings focus on what happens within the organisational boundaries of that charity. However, they also demonstrate that
it is impossible to consider leadership practice without an understanding of how underlying power structures and contextual factors impact on day to day work. The concept of complex wicked problems and the need to work collaboratively to address them is reflected at a local level in this study (Grint, 2005). It is in communities such as the one in this study that the repercussions of bigger geopolitical concerns play out in peoples’ daily lives. In this case we see how the conflicts and challenges that lead to refugee flows, and the UK government’s response to them, create a pool of people far from home in what can be an unwelcoming city where they are expected to navigate a partial and fragmented set of services that are poorly equipped to understand their needs. The charity was established in response to this situation and in the findings we see its people working to join together those fragments, fill the gaps and weave a safety net that can hold and support its ASR clients. Beyond this it feeds back into the deep rooted issues that make the problem of how to care for ASRs such a complex one. For example, the charity’s people work to change mindsets through talks in education settings and projects that bring people together across social divides. The charity’s manager also invests substantial time in multiagency meetings and communicating with larger agencies that have the ability to influence policy change at local and national level. It is by bringing these different groups together and finding where interests do overlap that collaborative leadership which moves beyond the core work of the charity and contributes to addressing a long running wicked problem in society happens.

This section has drawn on scholarship that talks explicitly about collaborative leadership and has not been published under the umbrella of L-A-P. I have chosen to draw on this literature to help conceptualise leadership practice at the charity because I found collaborative leadership was a standout feature of that practice. I particularly wanted to explore the contribution Huxham and Vangen’s work could bring to my analysis that previous L-A-P literature could not by crystallising relational dynamics into clear concepts including collaborative advantage, inertia and paradox.
This study helps to extend these concepts by affirming their relevance in a setting which is not a formally structured collaboration. I also wanted to return to Grint’s concept of wicked problems and the need for collaboration to resolve them because my findings echoed this dynamic at the local level whilst also showing how leadership practice at the grassroots relates to, and to some extent influences, larger scale power dynamics and social issues (Grint, 2005).

8.2.2. Client Driven leadership practice

Theme two explores the ways in which the needs of the charity’s clients shape how the charity’s people work and the overall principles and direction of the work. The sense that the charity’s trustees and manager allow their practice to be led by the needs of their ASR clients comes across in the data. This dynamic is illustrated in the findings by the examples of case work and the distribution of goods, where requests from beneficiaries are a driving force for the manager and trustees work. This was associated with a strong compassionate ethos among the charity’s people. The dynamic also has a darker side to it in that it allows the charity’s people and resources to become overstretched. The findings grouped under this theme resonate clearly with relational understandings of leadership. A claim of relational leadership theory (and L-A-P) is that the researcher is freed from predetermining the participants in leadership (Crevani, 2015; Raelin, 2016a). However, as Ford points out, thus far research has tended to remain in the traditional domain of organisations and their teams (Ford, 2016). In my study I was looking at such a small and porous organisation that looking only internally at the organisation and its team would have been to blinker myself to some of the most influential relational dynamics occurring in front of me. Drath et al.’s new ontology for relational leadership provides one conceptual route to taking those blinkers off (Drath et al., 2008). Their work looks not at types of people but types of activity; proposing an
approach based on direction, alignment and commitment, rather than leaders and followers (Drath et al., 2008). This resonates with my work where it is, as one trustee puts it the “ethos of being kind” (Interview 1), expressed through responsiveness to client needs that is a leading force. From a different angle, Nicholson and Kurucz apply the concept of “ethics of care” (Nicholson and Kurucz, 2019, p. 25) to relational leadership in which the central driver of leadership direction should be care for the people and/or cause the organisation seeks to serve (Nicholson and Kurucz, 2019). This chimes with my particular analysis where it is the cared for driving the behaviour of the carers. Ethics of care also has explanatory power for the darker side of being beneficiary led in that it acknowledges the possibility of the carer subjugating their own needs in favour of those they care for (Nicholson and Kurucz, 2019). This dynamic is something that chimes with the overcrowding of the charity’s premises, overstretch of its resources and burnout of its people, associated with being as hyper responsive as they are.

There is very little, if any clear blue water between L-A-P and relational leadership theory. There is in fact significant overlap and relational scholars have also contributed to L-A-P literature (Crevani and Endrissat, 2016). However, I have chosen to separate out relational leadership alongside collective and collaborative leadership as separate strands of thought in this discussion. The reason for this being, relational leadership theory texts have resonated with my findings and offered specific concepts that I feel help to explain elements of practice well. This is particularly in relation to the findings grouped under theme two discussed here and theme four discussed later. These concepts have allowed me to express the way in which beneficiaries have a far greater and more influential role in leadership practice than allowed for in most leadership literature, in which they are either framed as followers or left out of the picture altogether.
8.2.3. Collectivity in leadership practice

Theme three of my findings explicitly explores collectivity in leadership practice. If collaborative practice is the *what* of leadership practice at the charity then collectivity is, at least in terms of its structures, the *how* of leadership practice. As I entered the primary research phase of this project I was aware that collective leadership was understood to reside in the system at the charity; in keeping with some published research which uses collective leadership theory (Ospina et al., 2020). It was clear when I interviewed a trustee of the charity as part of my scoping study and in my initial conversations with the chair and manager that the charity’s people saw it as being collectively led by its trustee board. This was further confirmed in later trustee interviews. Although even here, comments were made that the manager’s work had come to drive the charity’s direction day to day. It became apparent over the course of data collection that collective leadership at the charity, whilst very real and valued by the board and manager, is not as simply structured and deployed as it may appear on paper. During the course of the study collective leadership was practiced but how this was done was reconfigured over time and in response to circumstances. Texts from collective leadership scholars resonated with some of the dynamics I observed. For example I couldn’t help but think of Friedrich et al.’s whack a mole analogy as I saw the formation of the decision-making group in response to the COVID-19 pandemic happen in the space of a morning in real time. Looking at a more intentional, idea driven process, collective leadership practice can also be seen in the commitment to including both ASRs and non ASRs on the trustee board. The acceptance of asymmetries in participation and the ongoing relational work to ensure all trustees still had agency in decision making was a refreshing example of leadership practice that is inclusive of potentially marginalised voices. This example of collective leadership existed both as the structural idea of maintaining a mixed board but also the daily practice of making it feasible for all members of the board to contribute whatever else was going on in their lives. This intentionality and movement
towards an ideal echoes what Quick found in her longitudinal study of collective leadership towards a shared “imaginary” (Quick, 2017, p. 452).

In this study I found collective leadership practice alive and well in a real life setting, particularly in the data presented under theme two. I also found it to be a complex and multifaceted way of practicing leadership; that could reside in a system and in the way that people reshaped that system. It was also driven by principle but emerged only through the daily actions of making that principle a reality. As discussed in chapter two there is very little to separate collective leadership from L-A-P. I am choosing to separate out collective leadership as a separate approach in my conceptualisation of leadership practice because, as with relational and collaborative leadership, I am drawing on texts which were developed explicitly as collective theory texts rather than L-A-P texts.

8.2.4. Relational shaping of leadership practice

Theme four returns to relational understandings of leadership to dig a bit deeper into the dynamics that occur between the people and environment that can be considered to operate within the organisational boundaries of the charity. Ospina and Foldy (2010) make the case that paying attention to the relational aspects of leadership is one way of understanding the conditions that can foster changes in the underlying power structures that Ford warns L-A-P is in danger of neglecting (Ford, 2016; Ospina and Foldy, 2010). In their work Ospina and Foldy are looking for the preconditions of more collaborative work in social change organisations (Ospina and Foldy, 2010). Informed by their approach, I also sought to understand the relational interactions that underpinned what I came to understand as a genuinely inclusive form of leadership practice at the charity. By this I mean leadership practice that goes beyond attempts to be representative, but which actively seeks
to include and give power to people who may typically be excluded from it, both within charities’ management structures and in wider society. In 7.3 I explore the idea of ‘finding your place’ in which volunteers relate to the charity’s people and environment in whatever way works for them and which enables them to make tangible contributions to the direction of the charity’s day to day work with examples including the vignette about Mousab (7.3.6). I also explore the multiple roles people come to inhabit at the charity and the way in which stakeholder ambiguity brings multiple perspectives to the governance and delivery of the charity’s work. This resonates with Ospina and Foldy’s conceptualisation of daily practices that drive inclusivity in organisations’ work (Ospina et al., 2020). The difference in my study is that the darker sides of this practice are also explored including the challenge of building reliable services that are dependent on volunteers and of creating boundaries when peoples roles are ambiguous.

8.2.5. Cross cutting ideas

Thus far the discussion has drawn on leadership theory that has been written from traditions of leadership thinking that predate or sit outside of the banner of L-A-P. This next section will look at how ideas taken directly from the L-A-P canon helped me to conceptualise leadership practice at the charity. It will then go on to look at one final cross cutting theme, that of the dark side of leadership. These ideas are ‘cross cutting’ because they do not neatly align to one or other of the themes but cut across them all and underpin my process of analysis throughout the findings. In chapter two I detailed how I would adopt an L-A-P lens for this research including that I would use interactions as my unit of analysis and I would remain particularly alert to materiality, mundane activity, power structures and contextual influences in my data analysis. These areas of focus overlap with Raelin’s (2020) conceptual building blocks of L-A-P (Raelin, 2020).
8.2.5.1. Interactions as the unit of analysis

In this thesis, I have used interactions as my unit of analysis which means I have sought to understand how leadership practice has emerged from the spaces in between people and their environments. This understanding of leadership emerging from interactions is akin to Raelin’s explanation of agency understood through an L-A-P lens. He suggests that in L-A-P agency can be understood as a force that is mobilised in the space between people and he sees this force as continually influencing entities as they interact (Raelin, 2016a). Capturing this idea of agency as something in between entities is one of the conceptual challenges of L-A-P, not least because in order to say where the agency is you first have to consider the entities it emerges between (Simpson, 2016). I found writing vignettes a useful way to first understand this agency that emerges from within interactions and then evoke it for the reader in the findings chapters. For example, the dialogue that forms ‘the three’ (7.2) can be seen as creating a ‘moment’ of collective agency in which people interact together to produce shared practice (Raelin et al., 2018). The placing of Mousab’s mug in 7.3.6. can be seen as a form of leadership agency emerging from this volunteer’s interaction with the environment (Simpson, 2016). Understanding agency as something that happens in spaces in between, i.e. that emerges in between the entities that are interacting, is a useful discipline in L-A-P analysis that I found kept my focus on interactions and prevented me being drawn too far into the more traditional approach of studying individuals. I saw this as a foundational conceptual block that helped me in the process of seeking out leadership across what became my four thematic areas.

8.2.5.2. Materiality

In L-A-P material artefacts are seen as more than objects and can be understood as contributors to leadership practice (Raelin, 2020). This can be the case where objects help to shape a leadership identity as we see with Carroll’s koosh ball (Carroll, 2016) or Mousab’s mug (7.3.6) in my study.
Artefacts can also play a more coordinative role, an example from the literature being Viviane Sergi’s study of a shared project planning document which helped to guide team work (Sergi, 2016). In my findings, several objects are referred to because they are material to the activity being explored. My phone in the ‘formation of the three’ vignette in theme three for example plays a coordinative role in discussing a way forward through COVID-19. The ‘welcome pack’ in 6.2.3. is another material artefact, in this case a document that ties together a range of agencies in the collective endeavour of producing a guide for newly arrived asylum seekers. The apparent stalemate in completing the pack gives a sense of the contradictory agendas that need to be accommodated in the document and the apparent lethargy or lack of motivation to get the project completed.

Beyond the idea of specific objects playing identifiable roles in leadership, there is a broader sense of the materiality of leadership in my findings. Ropo and Salovaara’s (2019) study of “Spacing Leadership” (Ropo and Salovaara, 2019, p. 461) looks at how leadership can be embodied in the material environment it happens in. I find resonance with this idea in my own findings, for example in the ‘hello hands’ vignette (6.3.3.), the impact of the natural environment of the park and the shared physical activity on the women is evident. This environment encourages the kind of sharing and bonding the sessions are intended to enable; an approach that is likely to be recognisable to anyone that has been part of a staff away day. The impact of this environment, interwoven with the inclusive approach of the dance teacher and the participation of the women can be seen constitutive of leadership practice as they weave together because together they determine how exactly the activity enhances the participants’ welfare and therefore helps to deliver on the charity’s mission. The setup of the chairs and table in the ‘Drop-in’ vignette in 6.2.1. is another example. In this case the environment creates a space where people can both enjoy casual social interaction and more.

---

11 This example also highlights my own influence on the practice I was observing which, as discussed in 5.5, was something I remained alert to in my fieldwork and data analysis.
formal engagement with service providers, and where the material environment makes these activities possible. In the short vignette ‘stuff’ in 6.3.3. I evoke a more obstructive, overcrowded space which is a physical cause of irritation and stress to the trustees and manager, thereby influencing what is and what is not possible in terms of organisational development and mission delivery. An appreciation of materiality as part of leadership practice is one of the more distinctive offerings made by L-A-P scholars that help to mark it out as a new approach to conceptualising leadership12. I found that being alert to the part material objects play in leadership practice a particularly helpful part of my observations where no positional leaders were active, but nonetheless the direction of the charity’s work was being shaped. The vignette about Mousab and his mug in theme four is one example of this. Being able to account for how the direction of activity is set in this way offers insight into leadership practice and marks L-A-P out as breaking from other leadership approaches which tend to start with a position or a structure and explore how influence flows around it.

8.2.5.3. The mundane

Mundanity is not listed among Raelin’s conceptual building blocks of L-A-P but it is a term that is referred to alongside materiality in L-A-P texts to give a sense of the type of everyday, apparently unremarkable, work that should be observed in L-A-P fieldwork (Carroll, 2016; Ropo and Salovaara, 2019; Sergi, 2016). It is also a concept that has implications for how L-A-P research is carried out in that it suggests research needs to be able to take account of mundane activity in the setting being studied. The way I achieved this in my study was through incorporating a large amount of observational work and in doing this I was able to draw out the significance mundane activity can

---

12 The influence of neo materialist work (van der Tuin and Dolphijn, 2010) and aesthetic dimensions of leadership (Hansen and Bathurst, 2011) notwithstanding.
hold in understanding leadership practice. The observation of the frequency and consistency with which the manager and trustees responded to ASR’s requests for help and advice was what helped me to form an understanding of how client needs were driving leadership practice in 6.3. The extent and influence of this way of working on leadership practice would likely not have been discernible from interviews or document review alone. Case management is not formally part of the charity’s work and in the interviews it arose as something that was hard to avoid. However, it was only though physically observing in person, in zoom meetings and in WhatsApp client groups that I was able to get a sense of just how significant this work was and the extent to which it drove and overstretched the charity’s people. By focusing on, rather than filtering out the mundane I was able to form an understanding of leadership that is grounded in what practice actually is rather than what the charity’s people may aspire to it being.

8.2.5.4. Context

Raelin refers to context as the “embedded circumstances” (Raelin, 2020, p. 494) in which practice is occurring and suggests that studies of L-A-P should take into account how these circumstances can “lend meaning” (Raelin, 2020, p. 494) to practices. He proposes that context needs to be understood at the macro or structural level where large scale institutional forces are found, the meso level where regular organisational interactions occur and the micro level where particular experiences or expressions influence practice (Raelin, 2020). In my findings, context in leadership practice is mainly expressed as macro context having an influence on leadership practice at the meso and micro levels. The two larger macro contexts in which the charity operates; the UK voluntary sector and immigration system are both experienced by the trustees as challenging external influences that should be engaged with cautiously. Whilst collaboration with the local voluntary sector is shown as being central to day to day leadership practice, engagement with what is seen as the more remote
funding agencies and working practices associated with larger charities is shown to be treated with caution and some scepticism. The charity’s trustees are wary of mission drift and the commercialisation they see associated with growth in income. In this way the context of the wider UK voluntary sector and what the trustees see to be sector norms can be read as being a factor that limits the charity’s growth and development.

The trepidation with which the wider voluntary sector is approached is put in the shade by the outright frustration and apparent fatalism with which the immigration system is treated. The perception that the charity is powerless in the face of Home Office decision making and government policy is shown in 6.2.4 and 6.2.5. The findings also show how this apparent powerlessness plays out at a micro level for example, the vignette about Abel the bike volunteer in 7.3.4 demonstrates how the institutional forces of the immigration system can change the circumstances of a person in an instant. This in turn redirected the energies of the manager from routine governance work to case work which disrupted the collective leadership practice of the trustees. Through this granular example we can see that macro context has a tangible influence on the micro-level interactions which play constitutive roles in leadership practice. In terms of the overall direction of the charity’s activity, the immigration system influences the focus that is given to meeting immediate needs in a quick and kind manner and the provision of activity that makes life more bearable in what is seen to be the inevitable state of limbo ASRs live in during much of their time in the city.

At the meso level the impact of local hostility is also shown to limit and direct the charity’s day to day activity (6.2.5). It has a suppressing effect on promotional and fundraising activities and leads the charity to engage more in integration and educational activities aimed at increasing understanding of ASRs in the city. This pragmatic response to the meso level context is similar to the
approach taken to tackling the effects of the macro-level context of the UK voluntary sector and immigration system. Despite the apparent fatalism and scepticism in regard to this context, the findings show that the charity’s people actually have quite significant success in mediating and softening their impact locally. For example with the data sharing policy in 6.2.2. These activities show that the way leadership is practiced by the charity’s people can influence change beyond their immediate operating environment. Overall then, context is seen as having a significant influence on the direction of activity at both the day to day level and in terms of setting the charity’s norms of working practice and as such it is constitutive of leadership practice. This is not simply one way though and the collaborative and relational way that the charity’s people work allows them to ameliorate the effects of a difficult policy environment and send influence back up to the meso and macro level through changing mindsets and providing practical ways of working that help make the immigration system more liveable.

Understanding leadership practice as something that is shaped by its context is an increasing focus for researchers concerned with bringing traditions from geography into the study of leadership. Place based leadership research sees local context playing a constitutive role in forming a localised type of leadership (Collinge and Gibney, 2010; Jackson, 2019; Potluka et al., 2021a). In my study it was hard to escape the influence of place. The impact of local hostility has been discussed but there was also the constitutive impact of immigration policy. The charity exists because the city is a dispersal area, its mission is framed in terms of improving the welfare of ASRs in the city who are overwhelmingly there because of dispersal. Section 6.2 relays in detail how the charity’s trustees, manager and volunteers have shaped their work as a direct response to this context. As it develops further, place based leadership may lend L-A-P a new resource in its conceptual toolkit, particularly in considering the role of context (Jackson, 2019, p. 218). It is also the case that L-A-P may offer a new perspective to place based leadership because it enables the researcher to focus on the
influences that exist around and outside of traditional leadership structures and roles. This includes the impact of the local material environment; an important dimension of place.

8.2.5.5. Power

The concepts of agency and power are closely related and, in his guide for researching L-A-P, Raelin draws on Weber to define power as “the capacity to act with an effect on another” (Raelin, 2020, p. 495). His main focus with regards to power as a conceptual building block for L-A-P is the distinction between hard power and soft power. Hard power being forces which exclude people from participation and soft power being the force which can include them by working in ambiguous spaces to construct emergent group and individual identities (Raelin, 2020). My findings add nuance Raelin’s characterisation of hard and soft power. First, as the previous context section showed, hard power in the form of immigration policy does influence leadership practice and this was illuminated through my use of an L-A-P lens. This shows that although L-A-P scholars may choose to exclude hard power from their analysis it can provide important insights if the researcher chooses to let it in to the analytical framework. Second, soft power is not straightforwardly a source of empowerment. Chapter seven considers internal dynamics at the charity and can be seen as rich in examples of the kind of emancipatory soft power that Raelin and Carrol argue are an important part of L-A-P. The open space for volunteers to ‘find their own place’ and the enabling of ASRs to be part of the trustee board’ are two examples of this. They also demonstrate a flexible and embracing form of practice that offers a contrast to the harder power of the external forces of the immigration system that the trustees feel they are unable to influence. However, this openness and flexibility has also been shown to have a dark side for volunteers in the tension between trustees that can build up, the unhealthy culture of self-sacrifice and associated experiences of burnout (7.3.5). Including these darker sides of leadership practice in my findings has been important to give the holistic account of
leadership that answering my research question requires. My question is about understanding all of leadership as it is rather than uncovering or developing an account of what is good about leadership practice at the charity. Conceptualising power as one building block of leadership practice has been helpful in illuminating these dark sides as well as the emancipatory practices at the charity. In that sense this is another useful facet of the L-A-P lens but it is one that I have used to give a more balanced understanding of power dynamics than it has been argued L-A-P scholars have used it for before (Collinson, 2018).

8.2.5.6. The dark side of leadership

Throughout the findings chapters I refer to the ‘dark side’ of leadership practice. This term is borrowed from critical leadership scholars including Tourish. Tourish calls in to question the adequacy of heroic leadership theories for explaining what goes right, and wrong, in real world practice and the danger of relying on these approaches in leadership development (Tourish, 2013). In working out how to mitigate the problems associated with the dark side, Tourish argues for a more relational, post-heroic, understanding and approach to leadership (Tourish, 2013). My study is part of that post-heroic tradition in leadership studies. However, by understanding leadership as relational and even by studying organisations where the people involved consciously nurture collective and relational approaches to leadership, we do not eliminate the dark side (Collinson et al., 2018). Throughout my findings I draw out and discuss where things don’t go so well or there are negative aspects to outwardly positive relational and collective practice. Examples include the culture of self-exploitation in theme three and the burnout experiences in theme four (7.3.5). L-A-P has been sharply critiqued for its idealistic leanings that paint collective working in rose tinted colours (Collinson, 2018). Having the luxury of time and word count that a PhD affords, I have felt able to unpack the negative as well as the positive aspects of leadership understood as practice. I
have also found terming these negative aspects as ‘dark sides’ a helpfully clear term that is already established in the leadership parlance.

8.2.6. Answering the research question; a conceptual summary

The purpose of this thesis is to provide an in depth and holistic account of leadership practice at my case study charity in order to help researchers and practitioners develop their understanding of how leadership happens at small charities. The research question I formulated in order to generate this account is as follows: how is leadership practiced at small asylum seeker and refugee charity? The findings chapters offered an in depth and detailed answer to this question by laying out what leadership practice looks like in the real life work of the case study charity. The first part of this chapter has built on that account by providing a conceptual discussion of the findings that relates them explicitly back to post heroic and critical leadership theory. What follows now is a summary statement that draws together and condenses these accounts into the most concise answer to my research question:

Leadership practice at my case study is driven by collective agency which includes both the beneficiaries of the work as well as those that deliver it. This leadership practice is embedded in relational interactions and the fluid, flexible nature of the work allows practices, people and the environment to recursively shape each other over time. The daily work of the charity’s people is also shaped by relational interactions with external stakeholder agencies. The manager and trustees work collaboratively with these agencies to practice leadership that will help enhance the welfare of ASRs. The contextual factors of local hostility and the local repercussions of immigration policy are seen as powerful external forces that impact on how leadership can be practiced. These forces limit the
charity’s public facing activities but also help drive the charity’s people to channel time and resource into responsive and collaborative work that helps to build a safety net capable of supporting ASRs through the hardest of times.

The language in this summary has been carefully chosen to represent the key ideas and terms used in the findings and in the conceptual discussion. The four themes and cross cutting ideas are identifiable and form the building blocks of this summary, which can be seen as the tip of a pyramid of information that has gone into answering the research question, as illustrated by figure 8.

Figure 8- Answering the research question

This diagram shows that, although the conceptual summary draws together the data in a slightly different configuration, it is essentially a distilled version of the findings and conceptual discussion.
8.3 Developing an account of leadership

Having discussed what my account of leadership at the charity is, I will now turn to a consideration of how I went about developing that account. Most particularly I will look at the usefulness and limitations of adopting an L-A-P lens in my research. This discussion sets up one of the major contributions of this thesis which is to develop L-A-P as an approach to research and to recommend specifically its usefulness in studying leadership practice at small organisations and small charities in particular.

8.3.1. Conceptualisation of leadership in the findings

My intention for this study was to provide a thick description of leadership practice at the case study, I did not want to test the extent to which one or other theory of leadership could best explain leadership practice there. Inspired by other practice focused scholars (Carroll, 2016; Ospina and Foldy, 2010), I wanted to provide an 'eyes wide open', all-encompassing overview of how the charity delivers on its mission to improve ASR welfare in the city where it operates. This broad understanding of leadership sits well with L-A-P which aspires to find leadership “wherever and however it appears” (Raelin, 2017, p. 216) and to appreciate "whole worlds” of leadership practice (Carroll, 2016, p. 96). However, in adopting an L-A-P lens for this study I have aligned myself to an approach which, as Raelin asserts, has an “arm’s length association with theory” (Raelin, 2020, p. 500). I take this somewhat enigmatic phrase to be an acknowledgement of the fact that L-A-P, having emerged in the last 10-15 years, is very new as an approach and as such there are limited examples of empirical studies or theory building under its banner. Thus far L-A-P work has focused primarily on the understanding and development of practice in real world settings rather than abstraction and theorisation that can be further generalised (Raelin, 2020). A challenge for my study
therefore is to explore the limits of L-A-P as a theory and find, where it is lacking, if and how it can be developed further.

If L-A-P has one unifying theoretical idea it is this: that leadership, understood as setting or changing the direction of a group or organisation’s work, can be illuminated by studying the day to day practice of that group or organisation (Raelin, 2016a). In asserting this overarching focus L-A-P takes its place among a broader set of ‘as-practice’ theories from the fields of management and social science (Carroll et al., 2008). However, unpacking the L-A-P approach further, to look at how different elements of practice can be treated as leadership, we quickly reach the limits of L-A-P theory and unearth the approach’s magpie like tendencies. Many of the contributors to L-A-P have also developed their research through different strands of theory, typically from collective or relational traditions. The 2016 book edited by Raelin on L-A-P demonstrates this through its diverse set of chapter authors who are associated with a range of different leadership theories (Raelin, 2016a). My conceptualisation of leadership is also a hybrid of ideas that I argue can help us to reflect on and develop a detailed understanding of leadership that emerges from applying an L-A-P lens to research. Even at the point of defining what leadership is I found myself adding to L-A-P’s definition in order to contextualise the particular organisation I have studied and to include the mission it is working towards. To me this approach felt like a practical way of drawing boundaries around what I was looking at which is necessary in case study research. It also provided clarity on what the overall direction of the organisation was in order that I could assess whether interactions were driving towards or indeed altering that direction. However, the precedents I drew on for these additional elements of my definition were from outside of the L-A-P texts (Drath et al., 2008; Quick, 2017). As the discussion in this chapter thus far demonstrates, this theory as toolbox approach continued throughout my data analysis as I drew on a range of post heroic and critical leadership theories to
shape my findings whilst underpinning all of these with cross cutting ideas taken direct from L-A-P and critical leadership studies.

8.3.2. L-A-P as a way of looking

Through adopting an L-A-P lens I have been able to build a thick description of leadership practice at my case study charity and provide an answer to my research question. L-A-P scholars have brought the concept of materiality to leadership thinking and a special sensitivity to other factors including mundane activity, the agency in interactions and context. These influences enabled me to have greater sensitivity to aspects of leadership practice which I may not have appreciated without this influence. Using the L-A-P lens I have also been able to be part of building the L-A-P approach from the ground up (Kempster et al., 2016). Specifically, I have demonstrated that the L-A-P lens can enable a study that is deeply alert to the influence of context and the underlying social structures that influence leadership practice at the micro level. I have shown that L-A-P’s appreciation of materiality extends to appreciation of the environment and wider place in which leadership practice happens. I have also shown that the L-A-P lens doesn’t necessarily need to be a rose tinted one and it can illuminate the darker side of collective and relational practice. Thanks also to that L-A-P lens, I have not been tied to a particular theory for understanding leadership but have been able to look at the whole world of leadership practice. For other dynamics I have been able to draw from post heroic and critical leadership approaches that overlap with L-A-P. The success of this magpie like approach relies on an acceptance that concepts from different leadership theories can be brought together to form a bricolage like description of leadership practice (a consideration of the limitations of this approach can be found in chapter nine). Having used the L-A-P lens for this in depth study I have come to the conclusion that its strength is in what it offers the researcher as a way of looking at leadership, rather than being the basis for a new theory of leadership to add to the already
crowded field. With its flexible guidance on what to look for and how to see leadership practice, L-A-P is more of a philosophical, ontological and quasi methodological perspective than it is a theoretical one. Therefore Raelin’s assertion that L-A-P’s association with theory is “arm’s length” (Raelin, 2020, p. 500) can be an advantage for researchers who wish to learn inductively from the data they gather.

8.3.3. Understanding leadership practice in small charities

My study builds on the work of Jacklin-Jarvis and Rees which demonstrates that L-A-P can provide a particularly useful lens through which to explore leadership in grassroots organisations (Jacklin-Jarvis and Rees, 2021). Broadening this point further, I make the case for using an L-A-P lens in studies of smaller charities. The first point in this argument is that L-A-P offers the researcher a uniquely and appropriately flexible approach to observing and understanding leadership. Small charities have historically been neglected in voluntary sector research and leadership development in the sector has tended to focus on individuals at the top of larger organisations (R. Harris, 2016a; Terry, et al., 2020). It is appropriate therefore that as we seek to understand these smaller charities better, we do not predetermine what we are looking for too closely. It would clearly be possible to add weight to an existing theory of leadership by exploring these charities through the lens of that theory. However, for researchers whose primary motivation is to understand practice at a particular type of organisation or context, rather than develop a specific theory, L-A-P offers an effective ‘eyes wide open’ approach.

Second, these charities have some shared characteristics which may make L-A-P a particularly useful lens through which to view them (Jacklin-Jarvis and Rees, 2021). Small charities have been shown to be more reliant on volunteers than larger charities and more responsive to and embedded with their
beneficiaries (Dayson et al., 2018). Small charities also have ambiguous boundaries and roles, with volunteers often being both beneficiary and leaders of the organisation (Billis, 2010; McGovern, 2017). This characteristic can be of benefit to the small charity’s leadership practice. Billis and Glennerster (1998) have already posited the theory of comparative advantage which suggests that, partly because of stakeholder ambiguity, smaller grassroots charities are best placed to meet the needs of vulnerable people (Billis and Glennerster, 1998). They don’t couch their argument in terms of leadership which, as chapters two and three have shown, has long been neglected in UKVSS. However, it does resonate clearly with my findings in which stakeholder ambiguity is clearly present and enhances the ability of the charity’s people to understand and meet the needs of their clients (7.3.4). In my study the relational interactions of people with ambiguous roles help to set the direction of the charity’s work and can therefore be understood as being an important part of leadership practice. It was use of the L-A-P lens that allowed me to focus on the informal relational and mundane activities at the organisation that surfaced this understanding of how the charity achieves what it does, as well as the strain stakeholder ambiguity can create for people.

The third point relates to the tendency among small charities to be localised organisations which focus on particular issues (Dayson et al., 2018). These organisations tend to have limited capacity in terms of personnel and income that can be used for organisational development beyond day to day service delivery. These features, taken along with their permeability suggest to me that small charities may be particularly influenced by context, as I observed in my case study charity. I found materiality, taken straight from the L-A-P literature as a particularly useful explanatory tool for unpacking how the material context influenced leadership practice in a way that has not yet been done as part of place leadership (see 6.2.2 and 6.3.2 for examples of this). Therefore, based on my experience of research and the characteristics of small charities already established in the literature, I suggest that L-A-P may be a useful theoretical lens for further studies of small charities.
8.4. This study as a Voluntary Sector study

Probably the biggest contribution my thesis has to make to the voluntary sector literature is to expand the very limited pool of sector specific leadership research as called for by Terry et al (Terry, et al., 2020). In particular it proposes L-A-P as a theoretical lens that promises to be illuminating when looking at the leadership of small charities. There has been a perception in the sector that leadership is an elitist endeavour and is not relevant to smaller organisations (R. Harris, 2016a). What my research shows is that using leadership theory in research on small charities can give us an understanding of the dynamics that help these organisations achieve as well as the tensions and influences that limit or challenge their work. My study also chimes with ideas about leadership that have already been explored as part of research on the voluntary sector. These include firstly the idea that narrative can be an important part of leadership work (Schwabenland, 2006) as in 6.2.5 where narratives have been used to counter hostility to ASRs in the city. Secondly, my research chimes with Kay’s suggestion that leadership should be understood as a social process that can be influenced by any actor involved in it (Kay, 1996) as we have seen in both 6.3.2 in which clients influence leadership and 7.3.2 in which volunteers do. Although there has been very limited research on leadership in charities to relate my work back to, my findings have also resonated with other voluntary sector literature concerned with small charities and those with an ASR focus. I discuss these connections below.

8.4.1. Small charities

In chapter three I covered a somewhat pessimistic narrative about service providing VSOs in the UK having become progressively more restricted and defined by their relationship to the state as funder
and regulator (Bennett et al., 2019; Kendall, 2000; Kendall et al., 2018; Mohan, 2011). The view of small charities’ fate in this policy environment was bleaker still with the feeling that smaller organisations were particularly vulnerable to isomorphic pressures and a shrinking pool of funders (Aiken and Harris, 2017; Thompson et al., 2017). The image of a hollowed out, externally governed organisation is in many ways the antithesis of how being embedded with the case study charity felt. In contrast its work is entirely mission and client led as elaborated in theme two of the findings. It is also both alert and resistant to, as one trustee put it, the danger of “chasing the money and ending up with mission creep” (Interview 28). My findings would suggest that at least in the case of this charity the idea of threat to independence is somewhat overstated in what has become a prominent discourse for the sector (Egdell and Dutton, 2017; Macmillan and Paine, 2021).

My findings share a greater resonance with voluntary sector scholars who explore alternative ways of understanding and framing small charities. Writing from a critical perspective, McGovern frames these organisations as resisting, the “neo liberalising” (McGovern, 2017, p. 7) of the sector through a reliance on volunteering, altruistic motives and a commitment to community focus. Similarly, Milbourne argues that smaller VSOs have the ability to resist the structural changes driven by the state through their ethos and communities of practice (Milbourne, 2013). This sense of resisting or avoiding wider isomorphic pressures relates to the charity which, as the discussion around volunteers vs staff in 7.3.2 shows, has proactively chosen to rely on mainly volunteer input over its 20 year history. In his book “The beat of a different drum” Rochester calls on us to rediscover volunteering as something that is more nuanced than simply a gift that of time that is analogous to a gift of money but can be understood to have a wider value including self-help and mutual aid (Rochester, 2013). Theme four of my findings (7.3) shows that volunteering at the charity is a complex activity in which the goals of ASR wellbeing and integration are achieved in part through the
act of volunteering itself, rather than it being a purely transactional way for the charity to get its work done.

Whilst McGovern, Milbourne and Rochester’s alternative narratives about smaller charities appeal to me and resonate with practice at the case study charity, there is a caveat. The charity also relies heavily on a professional manager and is seeking to bolster its paid workforce out of a recognition that volunteering alone can no longer be expected to deliver on the charity’s mission (7.3.2). The dark sides of practice at the charity which punctuate the findings tend to relate to tension and overstretch associated with an organisation trying to rely on a shoestring budget and a largely voluntary workforce. It may be effectively resisting the isomorphic pressures seen as negative in the literature, and indeed in the eyes of the trustees, but a price is being paid for this. It may be that a more balanced hybrid model could be attained. Rochester provides a typography of VSOs and suggests this type of hybrid exists and the model contains elements of bureaucratic organisation but retain associational elements (Rochester, 2013, p. 236). This is what the charity now aspires to. Charting its progress towards that is beyond the scope of this project but could be a focus for future research.

8.4.2. The ASR sub sector

As with the literature on the voluntary sector, the ASR sub sector literature that my study contributes to is not explicitly about leadership. It is drawn from UKVSS and migration literature which have not historically been approached using a leadership lens. However, as with small charities, my study shows that applying an L-A-P lens can help us to understand the dynamics of ASR organisations in a way that resonates or extends research that has gone before. So, the first thing to
say about how my findings relate to literature on the ASR sub sector is that they extend our understanding of an under-researched type of organisation which deserves more scholarly attention. In chapter three I commented on the dearth of studies of UK ASR VSOs. In their systematic review of literature on third sector organisations and migration up to 2016, Garkisch et al found just eight studies that were found that focused on the UK (Garkisch et al., 2017). This lack of research is an omission on the part of voluntary sector and migration scholars because ASR VSOs play an important and growing role in ASR welfare and integration. This role, and the number of small local charities fulfilling it, has grown substantially in the last twenty years since the start of dispersal (Findlay et al., 2007). Emerging grey literature that considers the work of small VSOs in supporting ASRs during the COVID-19 pandemic indicates that this role has only become more important through the period of my study (Dayson et al., 2021; Jolly et al., 2020). Themes one and two (6.2 and 6.3) of my findings demonstrate how the case study works with other agencies and in direct response to ASRs to try and create a safety net that meets the needs of people going through a difficult and complex set of experiences. My study therefore helps affirm the role ASR VSOs play and also demonstrates how an in-depth and insightful study can add to our understanding of that role.

The second point about how my findings relate to wider ASR research is that they shed further light on how stakeholders interact in ASR welfare and integration, which is a concern of migration scholars. The scene of the drop-in in theme one (6.2) demonstrates how the charity brings together the fragmented support system for ASRs in one place. Similarly, the relationship development work in theme one and the responsive work in theme two (6.3) further demonstrate how much of the charity’s work is about joining dots to provide ASRs with the support they need from multiple sources. This echoes Phillimore’s concept of a welfare bricolage for migrants where the processes of enhancing health and wellbeing draw in formal and informal actors from the public, private and third sectors (Phillimore et al., 2019, 2015, 2021). It also chimes with Darling’s work which includes
empirical research in the city this study is focused on and is focused on housing provision for ASRs (Darling, 2016b, 2016a). Darling makes the case that privatisation has disincentivised local authorities from engaging with ASR welfare and that private housing providers have a narrow focus on contract delivery. We see in ‘the welcome pack’ vignette (6.2.3) an example of how challenging it can be to bring together disengaged parties from the local authority and housing provider to deliver a simple resource for ASRs. Finally, Phillimore’s work also considers the role of settled communities in welcoming and supporting the integration of ASRs (Phillimore, 2020; Phillimore et al., 2021). My findings provide an exploration of the two way dynamic at the heart of integration. For example, the women’s group explored in theme two and the mixed volunteer base explored in theme four (7.3) are examples of how host communities and ASRs come together in the process of integration. So, my study helps shed further light on the role of VSOs in the complex environments of ASR resettlement and integration.

The third point about how my findings relate to wider research on ASR VSOs is that they help to develop the idea that advocacy is a paradoxical challenge for these organisations. There is a seam of literature on ASR VSOs that is concerned with the tension that stems from the commitment to advocate for policy change whilst also working with government to support ASRs (Cambridge and Williams, 2004; Ihlen et al., 2015; McGhee and Walker, 2016; Tonkiss, 2018). This tension was not immediately obvious within my case study because as theme one discusses, the charity does not publicly campaign and is not reliant on government funding (6.2.5). However, if unpacked a little further, theme one also shows how the charity’s manager builds relationships across policy divides with local government and the private service providers who are responsible for elements of the asylum system. It also works to change the hostile narratives towards ASRs that have been encouraged by government policy in recent years. In these ways the charity is also treading that tightrope of being with and against the UK asylum system. There was also the persistent sense that
the charity was ‘powerless’ against what felt like the external might of the Home Office which would be the ultimate arbiters of ASR welfare by deciding who had the right to remain, as well as deciding who would be dispersed to the city. The power of the charity, as demonstrated in 6.2.5 rests in how it responds to arrivals and shapes the local narrative around them, rather than determining who may arrive or may be able to stay.

The fourth and final point about how my findings relate to wider research, which is concerned with the literature on ASR organisations, suggests that developing organisations which are ASR-led is particularly challenging. This literature suggests that there are institutional barriers to formalisation that face people who are new to the UK’s managerial culture and who are likely to be volunteers with other commitments (Phillimore and Goodson, 2010; Zetter and Pearl, 2000). This literature is now somewhat dated and focuses only on refugee led organisations rather than partnership models which are led by both ASRs and settled people. However, the issue at the core of the studies; that it is hard for ASRs to meaningfully lead or even participate in the sector is still relevant. Themes three and four (7.2 and 7.3) of my findings demonstrate the challenges involved in leading a charity whilst also being an asylum seeker or refugee. In theme four in the ‘Abel’ vignette (7.3.4) we see the precariousness of Abel, whose status as a senior volunteer is pivoted in a moment to client in crisis. In theme three we learn about ASR trustees who find ways to participate in leadership despite being made homeless or working extra jobs alongside study and volunteering (7.2.2). The findings demonstrate that, in spite of these challenges, leadership practice at the charity is inclusive of lived experience and ASRs are influential in decision making. Inclusivity is achieved through a partnership approach to leadership practice which includes local residents, ASRs and a professionally experienced manager. This model offers a hopeful example of how some of the problems faced by ASR led organisations can be overcome as well as offering insight into the challenges and benefits of leadership through partnership.
8.5. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter has explored the meaning, relevance and importance of the findings presented in the previous two chapters. In order to build on the findings chapters and answer the research question, the first part is a conceptual discussion of leadership practice at the charity. For this discussion I draw on ideas from collaborative, collective and relational leadership theory that link closely to the four thematic areas, as well as cross cutting theoretical ideas from L-A-P and the ‘dark side’ of leadership. I end this discussion with a concise conceptual summary of leadership practice at the charity which provides the shortest summarised version of the answer to my research question. The second part of the chapter explores how I went about developing an account of leadership practice in this thesis. In this I show that adopting the L-A-P lens to data collection and analysis allowed me to appreciate the whole world of leadership practice and evoke it for the reader as well as develop the lens’ sensitivity to context, place and the darker sides of leadership. However I also found limits to the explanatory power of L-A-P which has only an “arm’s length association with theory” (Raelin, 2020, p. 500). Finally in this section I make the case that L-A-P can be a useful theoretical lens for understanding small charities if we embrace its toolbox approach to leadership theory and see this as an advantage in developing a holistic understanding of leadership practice.

In the third section of this chapter I discuss the relevance of my study to the wider fields of Leadership Studies and UK Voluntary Sector Studies. I discuss my study in relation to literature on small charities, migration and the ASR sub sector. Here I suggest that my findings counter the pessimistic narrative of small charities being hollowed out and compromised by government policy and the funding environment. I find closer alignment with literature on small charities which find
their own distinct purpose embedded in local action and voluntarism, albeit this approach is not without its own challenges of overstretch and burnout. I also find that my study is distinctive in that there are very few studies of ASR VSOs in the UK. Its rich insight into this type of organisation is worthwhile because of the important role VSOs play in ASR welfare and integration, something that is acknowledged by migration scholars. The study also offers a more optimistic reading of how charities are able to approach the paradox of being both part of and against the UK asylum system and be led by both ASRs and settled residents. I establish the relevance of my findings in this chapter by clearly relating what I have found back to the extant literature. I demonstrate that my findings both build on and help develop our understanding of leadership practice at charities. In doing this I build the case for the importance of my thesis which lies in the contribution it makes to the fields of Leadership Studies and Voluntary Sector Studies. These contributions will be discussed further in the next and final chapter of my thesis.
Chapter Nine - Conclusion

9.1. Chapter Introduction

In this final chapter I set out the answer to my research question and summarise the contribution my thesis makes to the fields of Leadership Studies and UK Voluntary Sector Studies. I also reflect on how my methodology developed in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and summarise the strengths and limitations of my approach. I end the chapter by looking ahead to future research that could develop and build on the findings of my thesis.

9.2. Answering the research question

This thesis has a single research question that was developed iteratively over the course of the study, as discussed in chapter five. The question is how is leadership practiced at a small asylum seeker and refugee charity? I have answered this question by providing a thick description of leadership practice at a single case study charity and weaving it back into leadership theory. The final output of this is the conceptual summary of leadership practice at the case study charity. This was provided in the previous chapter and is repeated below:

*Leadership practice at my case study is driven by collective agency which includes both the beneficiaries of the work as well as those that deliver it. This leadership practice is embedded in relational interactions and the fluid, flexible nature of the work allows practices, people and the*
environment to recursively shape each other over time. The daily work of the charity’s people is also shaped by relational interactions with external stakeholder agencies. The manager and trustees work collaboratively with these agencies to practice leadership that will help enhance the welfare of ASRs. The contextual factors of local hostility and the local repercussions of immigration policy are seen as powerful external forces that impact on how leadership can be practiced. These forces limit the charity’s public facing activities but also help drive the charity’s people to channel time and resource into responsive and collaborative work that helps to build a safety net capable of supporting ASRs through the hardest of times.

This conceptual summary draws on several strands of post heroic and critical leadership theory and weaves them together to provide a holistic and complete picture of leadership practice at the charity. Elements of collaborative leadership and collective leadership sit side by side and are overlaid by the ideas that all leadership is inherently relational. The idea that practice, people and environment shape each other over time is drawn from L-A-P scholarship directly. The conclusion of the summary suggests that leadership practice at the charity does support ASR welfare and therefore its mission is being achieved. The ‘dark side’ of practice identified in the findings notwithstanding, it may therefore be inferred that this is an example of ‘good’ leadership. However, I did not seek out this charity as an exemplar of best practice in order to understand what good leadership looks like, as is often the case in leadership research (Tourish, 2013). I selected this charity because it felt representative of the resource poor, passion rich small charities working in environments that are challenging in terms of both societal attitudes and government policy. As leadership happens everywhere, I wanted to know what it looks like in the kind of context that many charity volunteers and workers are likely to find themselves working in. My hope then is that this picture of leadership practice at a small asylum seeker and refugee charity is an example of ‘real’ leadership practice that we can learn from, rather than an exemplar of good leadership that may not
be representative or attainable in the wider sector. The conceptual summary itself is not a generalised answer to my research question but is a specific answer which illuminates the complexity of leadership practice and the impact of an organisation’s particular context on how it is led. Considering how we can learn from this in a broader sense is discussed as part of the next section.

9.3. My contribution

The central contribution of my thesis is to extend our understanding of leadership practice in charities, particularly smaller charities and those working with asylum seekers and refugees in the UK. This contribution spans two fields of research and practice; that of Leadership Studies and Voluntary Sector Studies. The elements of the contribution that may be of most use to fellow researchers and practitioners going forward are slightly different in each field. In this section I will discuss each in turn.

9.3.1. Leadership Studies: developing the L-A-P lens

My thesis contributes to the growing body of research conducted through an L-A-P lens and as such contributes to this developing approach to understanding leadership (Raelin, 2016a). My study demonstrates that adopting an L-A-P lens when collecting and analysing data can be helpful when, as a researcher, you are seeking to understand practice rather than develop a particular theory of leadership. It also demonstrates that the conceptual building blocks of L-A-P including materiality encourage sensitivity in the researcher to aesthetic elements of leadership that may be missed when using other approaches. I found that the L-A-P lens does not provide a complete theoretical
framework for analysis of leadership practice. However, the tendency of L-A-P work to use leadership theory as a toolbox allows the researcher to draw together strands of critical and post heroic leadership theory to paint an in-depth and holistic picture of leadership practice in a particular setting.

A criticism of L-A-P has been that it neglects to account for the impact of underlying social power structures and hierarchies on leadership practice (Collinson, 2018; Ford, 2016). This may be partly as a result of the focus of early L-A-P studies on singular, micro-level episodes of practice and its normative alignment with developing collective leadership. For example, as Carroll puts it, the focus of L-A-P on “tiny drops of emancipatory choice” rather than “the tsunami of domination” that can come from underlying power structures (Raelin et al., 2018, p. 377). My study is an in-depth 14 month long case study which is particularly concerned with the impact of policy and social context on leadership practice. As such I was able to explore the impact of those macro level structures on micro and meso level leadership practice. I believe that this aspect of the study may begin to assuage the concerns expressed in the criticism of early L-A-P work. My study also brought into consideration the role of place in leadership practice and the role of actors who are not traditionally the focus of leadership research, in this case clients of the charity. In this way I have also demonstrated that the L-A-P lens can illuminate a wider range of influences on leadership than may traditionally have been allowed for in leadership research.

Overall, my thesis has shown that L-A-P can work well as a theoretical lens and I have made a particular case for its further use in research on small charities. These organisations are typically local, specialised in focus, dependent on volunteers with permeable boundaries and ambiguous stakeholders. The leadership practice associated with these characteristics can be well illuminated
through an L-A-P lens. This is because it frees the researcher from understanding leadership through the traditional entity or roles based structures and encourages an appreciation of contextual influences. This encourages the researcher freedom to observe and analyse interactions that feel material to the practice of leadership whenever they occur and whoever or whatever they occur between.

The debate about whether L-A-P is a new movement in leadership research or merely a reconfiguration and grouping of existing theories is likely to be ongoing. For my part, I have found it a useful way of approaching research that gave me the freedom to explore but enough theoretical framing to keep my study focused on answering my research question. The evocations of practice provided by previous L-A-P studies were influential in terms of helping me envisage how leadership practice might look and feel. They were also helpful when it came to communicating my findings to the reader, particularly in the use of evocative vignettes. My study now provides a new set of insights into and evocations of practice that will help to build the L-A-P canon and I hope may be useful to researchers interested in this flexible, practice focused approach to research.

9.3.2. Voluntary Sector Studies: understanding leadership and new insights

My thesis contributes to the small but growing body of work exploring leadership in voluntary sector settings. Terry et al, who assessed the state of this literature in 2018, have since suggested that collective notions of leadership hold most promise for leadership research on the sector (Terry, et al., 2020; Terry et al., 2018). My thesis demonstrates that collective theories, brought to light through an L-A-P lens, can be of particular value when exploring practice at small charities and my case study provides a rich and evocative example of this. My study has also shown how previous
voluntary sector concepts, notably stakeholder ambiguity, that have not been used in a leadership context can be brought to light through the L-A-P lens and help to explain the dynamics of leadership practice at small charities.

As well as furthering the work of VS scholars focused on leadership generally and at the organisational level, my case study is of relevance to researchers concerned more broadly with small charities and asylum seeker and refugee organisations. As chapter eight demonstrated my findings highlighted practice that chimed with Rochester, Milbourne and McGovern’s work on small voluntary organisations (McGovern, 2017; Milbourne, 2013; Rochester, 2013). I also discussed the resonance with migration scholars’ insights into the voluntary sector’s role in ASR welfare in that chapter (Darling, 2016a; Phillimore et al., 2019). Finally, my findings served to provide a new angle on the paradoxes ASR charities face in terms of both being with and against government policy and seeking to be inclusive of lived experience (McGhee and Walker, 2016; Phillimore and Goodson, 2010). A benefit of the holistic approach I have taken to understanding leadership practice in a single setting is that it has generated insights and evocations that may help further the understanding of researchers working across a range of fields that intersect with my area of study.

9.4. Reflections on the methodology and limitations of the study

My study found its path through what turned out to be an unexpectedly challenging and fluid context. In this section I reflect on that context and the strengths and limitations of the approach to research that emerged from it.
9.4.1. The impact of COVID-19

The data collection period of my study began eight weeks before the first national UK lockdown put in place as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and this had a major impact on my methodological approach. First, it was one of the factors that led me to change from a three case study model to a single extended case study. The result of this change is the ethnographically informed, in-depth approach outlined in chapter five. Second, the circumstances of the pandemic were a factor in me becoming a more active in the case study’s work than originally planned. The longer time frame, the impetus to actively volunteer that COVID-19 provided and regular reflective conversations with key research participants all moved me to enter into more engaged dialogue than originally envisioned. My research identity as a participant observer is also discussed in chapter five (5.5). Third and finally, due directly to lockdown guidance I changed many of my data collection activities from face to face to online methods including observing zoom meetings, online women’s group dance sessions and interviews conducted via skype.

The evolution of my approach to research was undeniably nudged along by the circumstances of the pandemic. However, alongside this influence were others that emerged as I followed the iterations of inductive and reflexive data collection and analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019). As I approached what should have been the third and final month of my time with the case study charity, I felt I had generated many more questions than answers about how leadership was practiced there. In the data I had gathered and analysed I had a set of emerging themes but did not feel they were settled. On the contrary, I felt I needed to go back and explore those themes from different angles including talking to stakeholders and finding time for the trustees and manager to speak to me in a more reflective space than was possible during the busyness of service delivery. Switching to a single case study and extending the time frame allowed me to do these things and continue data collection until
I had reached saturation (Saunders et al., 2018). I also found that entering into a more active
dialogue with the research participants helped me to draw them in to the reflective process and
feed into the themes that eventually emerged. This process included asking for them to feedback on
draft write ups of themes from as early as April 2020. Finally, I also found that switching to online
data collection methods gave me alternative ways of building relationships and gaining insights that
became some of the key building blocks of my findings. Rather than just methods for collecting data,
I found I could use interviews as tools for building relationships, something I have explored in a peer
reviewed research notes article (Vivyan, 2021).

I believe that the in-depth single case study model that emerged from my inductive approach and
the unexpected circumstance of the pandemic is a key strength of my study. This study is not a true
ethnography; it does not privilege observation over other forms of data and I didn’t spend as much
face to face time with the research participants as one might expect from ethnography (Hammersley
and Atkinson, 1983). However, it shares one of the strengths of ethnography in that my approach
was to inhabit rather than just visit the case study organisation. I suggest that this mode of study
and the longer time frame that allowed me to iterate between data analysis and collection was well
suited to the exploratory and flexible L-A-P lens I adopted. The research methodology was well
suited to the research question and broad practice focused theoretical framing that I adopted. I am
not unique in taking this longer term exploratory approach to practice focused leadership research
(Quick, 2017) but it is the case that published studies tend towards the shorter term and use either
interviews or observations as the basis for their findings (Carroll, 2016; Ospina and Foldy, 2010). An
advantage of being a PhD student is the luxury of time that allows for longer term more engaged
studies.
9.4.2. Limited generalisability

There are disadvantages to the road I ended up taking with my thesis. The first which was probably the greatest sacrifice of switching from a three-case study comparative model to a single case study is a reduction in the extent to which my findings can be generalised. An in-depth and interpretive understanding of leadership practice in one specific setting does not necessarily tell us anything about leadership practice in any other settings (Stake, 2005). However, my professional experience of working with large numbers of small charities as a grant maker and my scoping study of nine small asylum seeker and refugee charity both suggested that the chosen case study had characteristics that were similar to comparable charities. It was also the case that many of the elements of practice presented in my findings resonate with those in other literature. These are explored in chapter eight and include the resonances with voluntary sector scholars who study small and volunteer led charities and migration scholars who study asylum seeker services. By adding to this body of knowledge my thesis could build a wider understanding about practice or elements of practice in other settings. My thesis also demonstrates a new way of approaching practice focused research in a particular context. It applies a leadership approach to voluntary sector research that has rarely been used before, and it explores a voluntary sector context that has been neglected in leadership research (Terry, et al., 2020). In other words, it draws together two fields that have rarely crossed over in UK research and provides a practical example of high-quality research that combines the two. So, my study may not provide generalisable findings, but it does demonstrate a way of understanding that may be more broadly applied, as well as findings that may help build on and develop a broad set of research agendas.
9.4.2. Limits to the L-A-P approach

As a new way to approach research, and one which has ambiguous conceptual boundaries, using an L-A-P lens has created challenges for my study. One of these is the challenge of how to ensure what I present is a case study of leadership practice as opposed to merely practice. Defining where leadership begins and ends is part of the ongoing dialogue within leadership studies (see 2.2. for my discussion of this) and L-A-P serves to open up rather than narrow down what a leadership researcher can focus on. In my case study I have addressed this potential weakness by framing leadership practice as interactions which contributes significantly to the mission of the charity I have studied. This has provided a framework for which aspects of practice should be understood as leadership and those which should not. It gave me a rationale as to which themes that emerged from the data should be included in the findings chapters and which should not. For example early themes on fundraising and HR practice were excluded as the insights there, whilst interesting, did not feel highly relevant to how the mission was delivered.

Another potential limitation of my study that stems from use of the L-A-P lens is that my conceptualisation of leadership practice has depended on me drawing on ideas from across a range of critical and post heroic leadership theories. This approach could be contested because the theories are not fully compatible; for example collaborative leadership theory and relational leadership theory are both used in entity focused research, which L-A-P explicitly aims to move away from (Huxham and Vangen, 2005; Simpson, 2016; Uhl-Bien and Ospina, 2012). However, my approach is to pull out elements from each theory that are complementary and can enhance and extend what L-A-P tells us about leadership practice at the charity. I found this ‘theory as toolbox’ approach the best way to utilise the L-A-P lens to generate an in-depth and holistic account of leadership practice and therefore I suggest is a valid use of leadership theory and a useful development of the L-A-P approach.
A second potential limitation of using theory as a toolbox is that I have not generated new concepts through my data analysis. An alternative way of approaching the study would have been to use grounded theory\textsuperscript{13} to develop new concepts as an extension of my thematic analysis as we can see in other studies that have informed my study (Ospina and Foldy, 2010; Ropo and Salovaara, 2019). Through the process of data analysis and embedding my findings back into existing literature I found that existing concepts in L-A-P and related traditions offered an abundance of ideas that helped to crystallise and explain what I had found. On this basis I was able to develop the approach of using leadership theory as a toolbox and produce a bricolage of ideas rather than creating more of my own that may fit more comfortably under the L-A-P umbrella. Whilst it is hard to find an exact precedent for this approach in the literature it does feel in-keeping with efforts in the field to bring complementary approaches together (Ospina et al., 2020) and L-A-P scholars apparently relaxed stance on whether L-A-P necessarily needs to become a new theory in its own right (Raelin, 2020; Raelin et al., 2018).

\textbf{9.4.3. Application to practice}

The final aspect of my thesis that may be seen as a limitation is its limited practical contribution beyond the academic fields of leadership and voluntary sector research. Both UK voluntary sector studies and L-A-P tend to be associated with active engagement in the working world of the fields they study (M. Harris, 2016; Raelin, 2021). In the case of L-A-P, Raelin presents the movement as one grounded in leadership development just as much as it is in academia (Raelin, 2011, 2021). In his

\textsuperscript{13} Grounded theory was first developed by Glaser and Strauss and now has different strands which employ more inductive and more deductive methods. Thematic analysis overlaps with grounded theory but rather than just finding patterns of meaning in data, grounded theory explicitly seeks to draw systematic theoretical statements from inductive coding (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Heath and Cowley, 2004)
‘Toward a Methodology’ paper he advocates that researchers should actively engage in dialogue that will shape practice and encourages co-participation so that the act of research itself develops leadership practice (Raelin, 2020). There was ample scope therefore for me to approach this PhD as a piece of action research\(^\text{14}\) and aim for some practical outcomes to be achieved alongside production of the thesis (Greenwood and Levin, 2007). However, I have treated my thesis as a study of practice rather than a project that explicitly aims to develop practice or influence policy. This was in order to achieve the goal of deepening our understanding of what happens in an under-researched space, before considering whether and how to change practice there. In this way it is limited but it also has scope to be the basis for more active engagement and practice development. I have begun to cultivate this potential in the latter stages of the study. Once I had completed data collection, I was invited to become a trustee of the charity and I have produced a report and recommendations based on my fieldwork (Appendix v). As a board we are working through these recommendations, for example at the time of writing we are developing a new strategic plan and have recruited a second part time member of staff. This development of practice chimes with the non-classroom based approaches to leadership development including group reflection that Raelin champions in developing leaderful practice (Raelin, 2011).

The experience of conducting a PhD during a pandemic has been one in which some options felt closed but also in which doors were opened to alternative approaches. The route my research eventually took has produced rich data and a given me valuable experience as a new researcher. I believe it also ensured that the research methodology, question and theoretical lens all complemented each other extremely well. My approach provides an example of a way of understanding that could be useful to other researchers as well as providing rich subject specific

\(^{14}\) Action research is a collaborative approach to research in which the researcher aims to achieve changes to practice as well as studying it (Greenwood and Levin, 2007)
insights. As with any approach, the benefits are countered by limitations which provide points for consideration in the design of similar future research projects.

9.5. Potential for future research

As with any research project I have had to draw boundaries around the scope of this thesis and have not yet been able to pursue many of the interesting avenues for further research that the project has opened up. This section summarises those avenues as potential ideas for future research by scholars interested in leadership and how it is practiced in complex social and policy environments.

This thesis is part of the response to a call for studies of leadership in voluntary sector organisations (Terry, et al., 2020). My experience of using an L-A-P lens to shed light on leadership practice at a small ASR charity has highlighted its potential usefulness as a theoretical lens through which to undertake more studies of small charities. As discussed in the previous chapter, it is appropriate that as we build the body of research on this under researched part of both UKVSS and LS, that a flexible and broad theoretical approach is taken. I also identified a missed opportunity with this thesis in that I could have built a more actively engaged methodology that used action research to develop leadership practice as part of the study. Future studies of small charities using an L-A-P lens may therefore benefit from the kind of engaged co-participation that Raelin has recently advocated in L-A-P research (Raelin, 2020). Future studies of this type could make multifaceted contributions to our understanding of practice. They would help build our understanding of leadership practice in a type of organisation and whilst individual studies may not be generalisable when grouped together the learning may prove to be more broadly applicable. They would also have the potential to enhance
leadership development within the sector which, as discussed in the literature review chapter, has been patchy at best and often considered the preserve of an elite (R. Harris, 2016a).

Another area for potential future research is further exploration of leadership concepts and theories which have been highlighted in my findings and discussion. The first of these is the idea of place leadership which is a growing focus of leadership research (Potluka et al., 2021b). My study shows that the idea and influence of place comes through as a key influence on leadership practice at a small localised charity. My study also adds an appreciation of materiality as a dimension of place that can help to enhance our understanding of leadership. Overall then, my research suggests that similar organisations might be interesting sites of study for scholars looking to understand place leadership. The second idea that came through in my findings and may be an interesting focus for future studies is the role that people who are not formally part of an organisation’s internal structures play in leadership practice. In my study the role of ASR clients in shaping leadership practice was a particularly prominent features of the relational leadership dynamics that shaped practice. In chapter eight I mention both ethics of care (Nicholson and Kurucz, 2019) and the DAC ontology (Drath et al., 2008) as two theoretical frameworks through which this type of dynamic could be further explored in future studies.

The final avenue for future research that I would like to highlight is further studies of charities that may help extend our understanding of particular tensions they face in delivering their missions. Two examples of these tensions came through as particularly pertinent to small ASR charities in my findings. The first is the tension involved in trying to find the right balance between voluntary action and professionalisation in staffing the charity. This tension has already been explored in Rochester’s work and through the theory of comparative advantage by Billis and Glennester which remains
underdeveloped in UKVSS (Billis and Glennerster, 1998; Rochester, 2013). The second is how to navigate the paradox of working within a system that is hostile towards the people the charity aims to serve. This tension has been explored in relation to advocacy work and the development of refugee led organisations but is also underdeveloped in the extant literature (Phillimore and Goodson, 2010; Tonkiss, 2018). My study reminds us that these are still very real and current tensions in the sector that need to be understood and continually managed. Studies which explore how widespread these tensions are and different approaches to managing them could make valuable contributions to policy and practice in small charities and in the asylum seeker and refugee sub sector.

9.6. Chapter Conclusion

In this final chapter I have provided a concise answer to my research question that builds on and encapsulates the learning shared in my findings and discussion chapters (6, 7 and 8), which in turn were informed by the literature I reviewed and methodology I shaped in the earlier chapters. I have also reflected on the approach my research took and the limitations of the study. It ended by looking forward to the potential for future research that could build on or develop out of my findings and the extant literature they relate to. As with all worthwhile learning endeavours, this thesis has generated new questions and ideas for research. It has championed a focus on organisations that may seem small but play a role in society that is far greater than that which can be measured in the traditional metrics of staff, beneficiaries and income.
Bibliography


https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483381411


Crevani, L., 2015. ‘Relational leadership, in: Leadership Contemporary Critical Perspectives.’ 2, Los Angeles, SAGE, pp.223-247


Cunningham, 2001. ‘Sweet charity! Managing employee commitment in the UK voluntary sector’, Employee Relations 23(3)


Davis, Lewis, Gurney, 2019. ‘Talking Leadership - how generous leadership holds the key to unlocking potential for leadership development.’ London, Clore Social Leadership.


Dyke, S., 2013. ‘Utilising a blended ethnographic approach to explore the online and offline lives of pro-ana community members.’ Ethnography and Education 8(2), pp.146–161.


Friedrich, T.L., Griffith, J.A., Mumford, M.D., 2016. ‘Collective leadership behaviors: Evaluating the leader, team network, and problem situation characteristics that influence their use.’ The Leadership Quarterly, Special Issue: Collective and Network Approaches to Leadership 27(2), pp.312–333


Harris, M., 2016. ‘Where did we come from? The emergence and early development of voluntary sector studies in the UK.’ Voluntary Sector Review 7(1), pp.5–25.


Huxham, C., Vangen, S., 2005. ‘Managing to Collaborate: The Theory and Practice of Collaborative Advantage.’ Florence, UNITED STATES, Taylor & Francis Group,


Jolly, A., Dickson, E., Morgan, B., Qureshi, F., Bozena, S., Stamp, D., 2020. ‘Local Authority Responses to people with NRPF during the pandemic.’ Wolverhampton: Institute for Community Research and Development.


Merriam-Webster, 2021. Definition of HOLISTIC.


NCIA Inquiry into the Future of Voluntary Services.


SAGE Publications.


Birmingham, University of Birmingham Third Sector Research Centre,


Raelin, J.A., 2016b. ‘It’s not about the leaders: It’s about the practice of leadership.’ Organizational Dynamics 45(2).


Appendix i Participant information sheet and consent form

Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership
Faculty of Business and Law
The Open University
Michael Young Building, Level 2
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA

Leadership Practice in new Asylum Seeker and Refugee Charities
Participant Information Sheet January 2020

I invite you to take part in a research study. Below is some information about who I am, why this research is being done and what it would involve for you.

I am Sally Vivyan, a research PhD student with the Open University’s Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership. Previous to this research I worked in and with charities for 15 years; first in the
international development sector and more recently in the community foundation network. I am passionate about improving understanding of and support for the sector and believe that academically rigorous research is one tool that can help achieve this. This project has been reviewed by, and received a favourable opinion from, The Open University Human Research Ethics Committee, reference HREC/3430/Vivyan.

This study examines the experiences of new asylum seeker and refugee charities with a particular focus on how goals are set and delivered in the first few years of operation. Charities are a topic of public scrutiny and the needs they exist to meet are growing. In the academic literature there has been little attention paid to the experiences of newer charities emerging to meet these needs and very little research into those which a focus on asylum seekers and refugees. The study is being conducted as part of a PhD research project which will focus on a small number of in-depth case studies.

The charity you are associated with is one of the case studies for this research project. The case study research will involve me spending time with the charity over a minimum period of three months. During this time, I will observe every day activities including service delivery, day to day work, events and meetings. I will make notes of my observations that will form part of the data about the case study. I will also conduct and audio record semi structured interviews with representatives of the charity including yourself if you are happy to consent to this and time allows (there is a separate consent form you will be asked to sign if you agree to an interview). I will also review documents that shed light on the charity’s development; both those already in the public domain and any others you and your colleagues may share with me.

All information shared with me during the time I spend with the charity will be completely confidential. The data from this study will be analysed and the findings, including anonymised quotes, included in the PhD thesis. Information gathered may also be presented at conferences and other meetings and published in journals. A summary of findings will also be provided to you as a participant. Anonymised data may also be shared with fellow researchers for use in future projects. However, neither you or the charity will be named in any presentations, reports or publications. Only I will read any documents provided to me in the course of the research. I will transcribe the audio recordings of interviews myself. Any recordings will be erased once the data has been analysed. The collected data will be securely stored for ten years and will be protected with a password known only to myself.

Overall, this project aims to further understanding of how everyday practice helps charities develop and deliver on their missions. The audience for this work will be the charities themselves, the academic and voluntary sector communities. By taking part in this study, you are making a commitment of time and of sharing your experience which has the potential to go on and benefit practice in your own and other charities. However, if at any time you feel uncomfortable taking part in the research you are free to withdraw your consent to do so and any data already gathered will be
deleted. If you would like any further information or have further questions about the research at any stage, please contact me by email on sally.vivyan@open.ac.uk.

If you have any concerns and would like to talk with someone else about this research, please contact the Head of Department, Dr Nik Winchester on nik.winchester@open.ac.uk

Thank you for reading this and for considering taking part in this study.

Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership
Faculty of Business and Law
The Open University
Michael Young Building, Level 2
Walton Hall
Milton Keynes
MK7 6AA

Leadership Practice in new Asylum Seeker and Refugee Charities
Consent form January 2020

Please tick the boxes only if you agree

1. I have read and understood the information sheet dated January 2020 for the above study.

2. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and these have been answered to my satisfaction.

3. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during the interview. I can also withdraw my consent to all or part of what I share being used in the project for up to four weeks after the interview date provided below with my signature. Should this happen, data I do not
wish to be used in the project will be destroyed. After the four-week period this will not be possible as it is likely that the data will have been anonymised and combined with other data.

4. I understand that I can choose not to answer specific questions if I feel uncomfortable doing so.

5. I agree to being interviewed as part of the above study.

6. I agree to the interview being audio recorded.

7. I understand that information about me will be kept confidential and my details will not be shared outside of the research team.

8. I agree to anonymised quotes from my interview being used in publications resulting from this study.

9. I agree to information from my interview being used in publications resulting from this study.

________________________  ___________________  ___________________
Participant’s name  Date  Participant’s signature

________________________  ___________________  ___________________
Consent take by name  Date  Signature

This consent form has been drawn up in compliance with UK General Data Protection Regulations. This project has been reviewed by, and received a favourable opinion from, The Open University Human Research Ethics Committee, reference HREC/3430/Vivyan.
Appendix ii Interview schedule

Charities Interview schedule

1. How and when did the organisation begin?

2. What is the organisation’s mission?
   - How was it created?
   - Has it changed over time? How and why?

3. Can you describe if and how the organisation became more formal, organised or professional over time?
4. Who or what would you say ‘drives’ the organisation (people, mission, document, symbol, beneficiaries, policy environment, funding opportunities etc)?
   - What are the internal drivers and the external drivers?
   - How has this changed over time?

5. Do you think of yourself as a leader or somebody who makes things happen in this organisation?
   - Have you always or has this changed over time? In what ways?

6. Is anyone else in the organisation a leader?
   - How do you share or allocate leadership duties? Is this a planned process or something that emerges naturally?
Appendix iii Interview questions July 2020

So how are you feeling about (the charity) at the current time?

Do you think with (the manager) and (the chair) and the other volunteers and working with other groups (the charity) has had the manpower it needed to respond?

In terms of (the charity’s) back office it’s been quite interesting that on the one had the three of you have been given quite a long leash to get on with it and on the other hand all the trustees have made an effort to be on zoom and the meetings have been full attendance. How do you feel that’s gone and how would you reflect on that response?

With regards to the partnership working, as you say, there seems to have been a coming together of groups rather than going off into little silos. Is that something that’s been, has that dynamic changed?

How are you feeling more generally about how (the charity) is going to develop over the next few months; either in relation to coronavirus and recovery or more generally? Wherever your thoughts lead you
Do you think the drop-in will go back to what it was eventually or will what (the charity) offers have to fundamentally change?

And, if you don’t mind me asking how are you feeling because your plans with regards to (the charity) have changed?

Are there any other areas of operation that you feel as and when (the charity) gets back to normal that will need boosting?

---

**Appendix iv Data Management Plan**

Data Management Plan

Project Name: Leadership Practice in new asylum seeker and refugee charities

Principal Investigator / Researcher: Sally Vivyan

Date: 12th November 2019

Data Collection
### What data will you collect or create?
- Recorded interviews- on voice memo files, these do not need to be shared or stored once analysed
- Interview transcripts- on word documents and NVivo- these enable sharing and long-term access although they should not need to be shared
- Field notes handwritten and typed up versions in NVivo- these enable sharing and long-term access although they should not need to be shared
- Copies of documents and document analysis notes in NVivo - these enable sharing and long-term access although they should not need to be shared
- Documents in the public domain e.g. charity accounts will also be used
- Field notes, transcribed and organisational documents held for ten years in case opportunity arises to revisit material for the types of publications outlined in the consent form during this period
- Data may be visible to supervisors during supervisory discussion e.g. on my laptop screen, but copies with identifying information will not be provided to them and as professional academics supervisors adhere to confidentiality

### How will the data be collected or created?
- Voice memos and transcribing onto word documents and imported into Nvivo for analysis
- Voice memos will be transferred from voice recording device to one drive via an OU laptop
- Voice memos and transcriptions will be held on the one drive accessed via the OU laptop with names and dates of interviews in document name
- Training on transcription provided by OU core PhD training will be reviewed to help ensure consistency and quality
- Field notes and document notes will be typed into word and imported into Nvivo for analysis
- When new versions of any documents are created, they will be labelled v2 v3 etc
- Documents provided by case study organisations may be held in PDF copies, saved on one drive via the OU laptop and transferred to Nvivo for analysis

### Documentation and Metadata

#### What documentation and metadata will accompany the data?
- Transcriptions and notes will be in English and full scripts and notes produced in word documents

### Ethics and Legal Compliance

#### How will you manage any ethical issues?
- Consent will be sought before data is gathered
- Peoples names and any other identifying characteristics will be anonymised during transcription
- Peoples names may appear in field and document notes but will be anonymised when included in thesis drafts and final document
- Voice files be destroyed when analysed, sensitive data is not necessary for this study so if any arises it will be excluded from transcriptions

#### How will you manage copyright and Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) issues?
- The OU owns the data, it will not be shared with third parties

### Storage and Backup
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How will the data be stored and backed up during the research?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• There is sufficient storage on the OU one drive space provided (and accessed via the OU laptop) which is automatically backed up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How will you manage access and security?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Data will be held on password protected devices that only I have access to</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selection and Preservation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Which data should be retained, shared, and/or preserved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Transcripts, notes and documents will be kept or ten years with any sensitive data removed. This period of time is considered adequate to ensure the data is available to unforeseen research or publication opportunities which may arise and are covered by the consent form</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is the long-term preservation plan for the dataset?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The data will be held by the OU, there are no costs associated with this</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Sharing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How will you share the data?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The raw data will not be shared but documents and publications resulting from or including it will be shared as per the dissemination and impact plan for this PhD which is being developed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are any restrictions on data sharing required?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• The consent form seeks permission to use data in a wide range of publications and materials that may be useful to others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Responsibilities and Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who will be responsible for data management?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Data management is my responsibility as the sole researcher on this project</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What resources will you require to deliver your plan?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• For this stage no additional expertise or software is required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A voice recording device has been purchased to record the interviews and Nvivo has been installed on the OU laptop</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

**Appendix v Extract from report to ‘the charity’ May 2021**

This is a copy of the final section of a report produced for the charity’s trustees at the end of my fieldwork. The earlier sections of the report summarised findings and an early version of the study’s themes. Names have been changed in this appendix to protect the anonymity of the charity.

**Ways forward**

Three strategies for the charity’s future development emerged from the data:

Continue as is with further investment in core activities
There was broad recognition by interviewees that more paid staff were needed to sustain the commitments the charity already has. This strategy could have the advantage of continuing everything that is excellent about the charity’s practice and continuing to benefit new individuals as they arrive in the city. It may leave the charity vulnerable to competition from other VSOs doing similar work and it leaves it as an organisation that is primarily reactive to national and local policy.

Growth through specialisation

Some interviewees felt the charity should begin to deliver specialist services directly where they were either not available or not thought to be adequate locally. These included legal advice and support into work for refugees. This strategy could increase the benefit the charity’s work has in ASRs’ lives and help ameliorate some of the weaknesses of the other services that exist for them. It may also help the charity develop out of its vulnerability to competition and policy change by providing a wider rationale for its work. It would however require investment, probably in both fundraising and specialist staff. It would also have to be carefully managed so that new areas were not developed at the expense of the charity’s core strengths.

Growth through influencing

Some interviewees suggested that the charity could have a bigger role to play in improving the wider community’s understanding of ASR issues. This could be done through work in schools or other community based institutions. Potential advantages of this strategy would be that it helps to address the root causes of some of the problems ASRs face when resettling in the UK including racism and exclusion. As with specialisation it would require investment and it would be necessary to deliver the work in such a way as to not compromise the charity’s existing commitments.

What stands out about the charity? Author’s reflections

The charity is a mature organisation which has largely grown beyond the key challenges that beset charities in their early days including dependence on or dominance by a small number of key personalities and financial insecurity. Despite this it has not fallen victim to a watering down or diversion of purpose that can come with organisational age. The charity’s team maintain passion for and commitment to simple core values of responsiveness, compassion, inclusivity and voluntary action. It is notable when working with the charity that there are no agendas in the room other than doing the very best possible for the charity’s clients or ‘our guys’. The charity is also a strong example of several of the values and approaches that are seen as important to modern charities, those include:

- Adaptive collective leadership in which responsibility is shared but also flexible and able to respond to changing circumstances
- Effective and thoughtful governance and prudent financial management, all of which is compliant with charity commission and funder expectations but also pragmatic and adapted to circumstance
- Client centred and responsive approach to all of its day to day work and the longer term design of services
- Genuine valuing of diversity and lived experience; including lived experience in everything it does is inherent to the charity and has been a principle since it started
- Collaborative; the charity works productively with other VSOs and service providers even where their policy stances do not align or they may be in competition for funding. Collaboration goes
beyond formal co-operation into the development of partnerships where the whole can become more than the sum of its parts

This review of the charity’s work has not been about its impact but it does show that understanding how an organisation works can be fundamental to appreciating what its impact is on the world around it. This is particularly true of smaller and localised charities and the charity is a fantastic example of ‘the value of small’*. It has rightly been recognised for this work and is supported by more progressive funders in the field. However, as with all charities in these challenging economic times and in a funding environment which is still dominated by the need to show quantifiable outcomes, its funding pipeline, which needs to grow not contract, is vulnerable.

Finally, the charity is a stand out example of how charitable organisations can work to improve the lot of asylum seekers and refugees in the UK. The charity’s work exemplifies welcome, partnership, a sense of sanctuary and the promise of rebuilding. These values need to be at the heart of ASR charities which aspire to fill the hole and counter the cruelty created by international conflicts and our own ‘hostile environment’ to people who have survived to arrive in the UK.

*https://www.lloydsbankfoundation.org.uk/media/c2aphccs/the-value-of-small.pdf