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Walsh, Susan ORCID:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2564-0608> and Johnston, Alan ORCID:
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Volunteering during Covid-19: Leadership Matters – The Case of Scrubs

Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has tested every area of daily life for the world's population. This narrative study will be of value and interest to an emerging body of empirical evidence that will explore the leadership of spontaneous volunteer activity during a global pandemic. Participants told their stories, and these narratives form the focus of this research, exploring leadership in this group. Empirical evidence confirms that leadership was effective in producing successful results, and resulted from, a knowledge of the community, leader skill, authentic behaviours, and an adaptive style, however no one style of leadership is identified. There is a need for further research into this area of leadership, to understand how leadership of spontaneous volunteers can be effective to the community, in crises and disaster response.

Keywords: leadership, volunteer, crisis, authenticity, ethical practice

Introduction

Effective leadership, the role of a leader and what theoretical leadership style is superior are some of the many questions, that remain contested, in the field of leadership research. Leadership could be considered an enigma, requiring the ability to influence (Northouse, 1997), provide vision, empowerment and even the opportunity to exploit situations (Kotter, 2013), with the overall aim to achieve a shared goal (DuBrin, 2012). The arrival of the Covid-19 pandemic has, arguably, provided the greatest leadership challenge of a lifetime. The

pandemic brought unprecedented challenges to communities in the UK, and as a result, vast numbers of spontaneous volunteers stepped forward to help. This research explores how a group of these volunteers came together to help their community, and the leadership that developed during the group's existence.

Background

The global pandemic brought anxieties, fear, and change, demanding new ways of living, working and, therefore, new ways of leading. The Public Sector faced extraordinary demand with hospitals and healthcare providers at the fore. Public Service Leaders sought creativity in delivering services, with increasing demand on financial budgets already reduced from a period of austerity. The Private Sector coped with legislative lockdown restrictions, with retail and hospitality sectors perhaps hit hardest (BBC News, 2020). Leaders were required to provide innovative solutions, to ensure businesses can survive the turbulent times that Covid-19 brought and continues to bring.

But what of the Third Sector? Leadership in the Third Sector is complicated (Harris et al, 2016). Membership of this sector is varied, made up of huge international charities, small community centres, arts organisations, support groups and so many more. One such 'group emerges in response to crises' and brings together spontaneous volunteers. These emerging community groups have been widely reported by the media in the UK, during the pandemic's first wave, providing an uplifting example of the British 'spirit'.

This research considers how one of these emerging community groups of spontaneous volunteers began, formed, functioned, and ultimately 'achieve a shared goal' (DuBrin, 2012). The research explores leadership in this context and seeks to provide insight into the characteristics and skills necessary for leading volunteers in such extreme circumstances.

Value

Following the UK Government implementing a 'lockdown' on the 23rd of March 2020 (Gov.uk, 2020a) supply and demand chains became disrupted. Essential goods, such as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), was in short supply as the global supply chain struggled to respond effectively (Gov.Uk, 2020b). This research explores a community group that emerged, in response to a need for PPE in their community. Many hospitals, care homes and surgeries found themselves without PPE to protect themselves, and their patients, and throughout the UK, groups were formed, often using social media platforms, to address the need. The findings of this research will provide a valuable insight into the motivations, and personal qualities, of people who established, and joined, these groups, and those who became effective leaders in extreme circumstances.

The research is particularly important in providing indicators for future responses to crisis management, the use of volunteers as a workforce, and how this can be effective in producing exceptional outcomes and may be of particular interest to those working with voluntary and community groups.

Aim of the Research

The overall aim of the research is to identify the benefits of the leadership role present in community groups and asks:

How does leadership affect spontaneous volunteers within a Scrubs environment, in emerging groups, during their response to Covid-19 in Northern England?

The significance, and uniquely critical nature, of the environmental context, demands an approach that promotes the understanding of the reality of situation (Gilgun, 1994). This research will retell the stories of the group; it is important that these stories are heard, and

the impact of this group is known. This paper explores leadership, including the perspective of context, the behaviours and actions that have developed to meet the demands of Covid-19 in their community. It will also consider evidence to uncover any indicators of why the communities, themselves, came together to 'lead' effectively in a unique, global situation (Turnbull-James, 2011). The work builds on the work of Terry et al (2020) who suggest a lack research into management practice within the voluntary sector. They identify the "plurality of leadership" (p105) using the banner of Collective Leadership in which they highlight the importance of sharing responsibility between two or more people.

As such the research identifies and provides insight into the leadership of volunteers in a stressed environment. It identifies the key skills and characteristics of leadership that came to the fore and notes the importance of leadership authenticity and ethical practice in achieving shared goals.

Literature Review

No consensus exists as to the meaning of leadership, and this section explores leadership in context, acknowledging the uniqueness of the coronavirus pandemic's impact on the role. The purpose of this research is to identify how spontaneous volunteers formed community groups responding to the needs of their communities and how these groups were led. As such, literature is reviewed for each of these areas.

Leadership Theory

Taylor's Scientific Management Theory encouraged organisations to consider how to improve and deliver efficiencies in their organisations (Taylor, 1911), and many other contributions have followed, resulting in the development of numerous theories. More recently, transformational leadership refers to leaders who 'articulate vision' (Jackson and Parry, 2011, p.31). However, it is suggested that the emphasis remains on individual

leadership and achievement and fails to recognise the various factors that lead to that success (Diaz-Saenz, 2011). Changing leadership challenges have led to a demand for new leadership models, and Pearce and Conger (2003, p.2) suggest that even the top leaders may not possess 'sufficient and relevant information to make highly effective decisions in a fast-changing and complex world', resulting in a need to share leadership, through collaborations and creative initiatives. Contemporary "leadership involves multiple actors, who take up leadership roles both formally and informally, and importantly, share leadership by working collaboratively" (Turnbull-James, 2011, p.4). Post heroic leadership theories focus on the collective, rather than self (or individual), and collaborative practices promoting learning, thus representing a paradigm shift (Fletcher 2004).

Traditionally theories of leadership style centre around two paradigms, the people versus the task orientation, and the directive versus the participative approach (Schedlitzki and Edwards, 2018). Alternatively, Adair (Mullins, 2005) adopted a model of 3 elements notably the individual, the team, and the task. Critics of the one best way approach highlight the dynamic nature of organisational life and changing circumstances, which gave rise to situational and contingency approaches to leadership. Participative leadership, which may often be referred to as shared, collaborative or team leadership (DuBrin, 2013), adopt an approach that includes gathering opinion from others before decisions are made. This may take several forms including consultation, consensus or democratic levels of engagement and involvement along a continuum. More common in non-profit making organisations may be Distributed Leadership (Terry et al, 2020), Transformational Leadership (Bass, 1990), Ethical Leadership (Brown and Trevino, 2006), and Authentic Leadership (George, 2003).

Authentic Leadership (George, 2003), arguably one of the most current of the contemporary theories, alongside a plethora of developing ideas and emerging theories, have shifted current thinking away from traits and characteristics to define leadership, to a collection of processes displayed through actions, and that considers effective leadership as a practice

(Raelin, 2016). Authentic leaders build credibility, trust, and respect through the personal values they hold, guiding their behaviours (Avolio et al, 2004). An increasing focus on the types of behaviours that leaders exhibit has led people to consider the morality of their actions. The expectation that Leaders will be ethical, display high standards, and demand those closest to them mirror these characteristics is increasing (Crane and Matten, 2016).

The Leadership Function

Covid-19 arrived without warning, and restrictions followed quickly, resulting in new community groups emerging, harnessing the enthusiasm of spontaneous volunteers, and led by people who saw the opportunity, and responded to that need. DuBrin (2012) offers a leadership definition of relevance to this research: “the ability to inspire confidence in and support among the people who are needed to achieve organisational goals” (p.28). Daft & Lane (2008, p.4) discuss the importance of a leader’s influence in achieving shared purpose and this idea is reflected in Bertocci’s (2009, p.7) definition that introduces the idea of an inspiring and motivated leader, that can compel others to accomplish goals. Considering and reflecting on the function of a leader, will increase the validity of this research when the findings are considered.

Organisational culture is considered by some as a rare, and valuable, strategic resource capable of contributing to success (Barney, 1986). Leadership of volunteers is not concerned with ‘bottom line’ figures or competitors, however the creation of an effective culture, in any organisation or group, will bring desired benefits. Culture is created through leadership style, mechanisms, job design, and power structures, and effective leaders must learn, and understand, how to manage culture (Klein et al, 2011). An effective leader will encourage innovation, and promote communication, with employees able to challenge ideas (Pisano, 2019). Effective cultures are shared, and understood, amongst the stakeholders (volunteers), with goals clearly identified, and collective endeavours made to meet them

(Hofstede, 2001). It is highlighted, that to be considered a resource, it must also enhance the performance and success of the organisation (Mannion & Smith, 2018).

Third Sector Leadership

The Third Sector (TS) is an umbrella term for voluntary organisations including charities, social enterprises, and community groups in the UK (Hodges & Howieson, 2017), traditionally known as the Voluntary Sector. The range of organisations, and the vast differences in objectives, aims and focus amongst them leads to questioning if this really is just one sector (Alcock, 2010), and if so, which organisations should be included, or excluded, considering the 'fuzzy' boundaries of the sector (Billis, 2010). The Scrubs group, which is the focus of this study, is considered part of this sector and so the perspective provided by TS Leadership Theory is of considerable interest to this study.

A sizeable amount of Third Sector research is dedicated to the actions and functions of leaders, such as Human Resource issues, and the models, styles, and philosophies of leadership (Hodges & Howieson, 2017). Much of the literature emerges from North America, and authors, such as Handy (1988) and Perry (2010), use the term 'Non-profit' to describe this complex network of organisations. Less literature exists that offers theory from a UK perspective or reflects the extent of organisational diversity and variety of context that exists in the UK (Hodges & Howieson, 2017). The voluntary sector is complex (Gilligan, 2013) and with many differing structures, styles and approaches emerging from the sector, leaders of Third Sector organisations face complex challenges.

This paper does not view it to be realistic, or helpful, to consider TS leadership using the same models as profit making businesses, when so many differences exist in the purposes, aims, operations, functions, and core values of these two groups. A review paper (Harris et al, 2016), presented by The Centre for Voluntary Sector Leadership (CVSL), found much of voluntary sector literature focuses on top leaders, viewed as heroic in larger

organisations. However, narrowing the focus to a limited demographic cannot provide a clear perspective into the diverse range of organisations that form this sector, as previously discussed, and therefore does not wholly identify the challenges of their leadership. Furthermore Teasdale et al. (2011) found that whilst the TS workforce is predominately female, this is not represented in the leadership of these larger organisations, however women were found to be leading smaller organisations and initiatives (Harris et al, 2016) Whilst these findings are not directly related to the objectives of this study, they are of value in demonstrating that the existing literature is not entirely representative of the Third Sector in today's world, with small and medium sized organisations underrepresented (Ockenden and Hutin, 2008). It is recognised that these leaders will experience different conditions and challenges to their counterparts in larger organisations, and as such, providing academic literature to reflect this is key to increasing understanding of Third Sector leadership.

Leadership during Covid-19

It is increasingly recognised that a dynamic environment requires a dynamic leader able to develop adaptive practices (Turnbull-James,2011) and this is never more relevant than now. The vast challenges that the pandemic present require an adaptive, dynamic response. As a world we have begun to adapt, and found new ways to live, work and socialise. Leadership, across the sectors, has been required to adjust practices to comply with necessary social distancing regulations, amongst many other challenges. Previous research suggests that this is not an easily achievable task, and that even the top leaders may not have relevant information to make highly effective decisions in a fast-changing and complex world' (Pearce and Conger 2003, p 2)

The Third Sector response to the pandemic has also seen customer-facing organisations adapt working practices swiftly, to ensure minimal disruption to services, whilst quietly coordinating an army of spontaneous volunteers (ThirdSector, 2020). Research studies are emerging and membership organisations, such as the (NCVO) have delivered conferences

devoted to the effects of Covid-19 on the sector. This developing body of literature is providing valuable insight into, not only the national response but how the voluntary sector in other countries have mobilised their members. The Voluntary Network have used online platforms to request researchers submit to their Network any research projects and findings that have a focus on the volunteering response to Covid-19 demonstrating the proactive response of the sector. The aim of the Voluntary Network project is to promote the valuable impact of the Third Sector and promote creative collaboration.

Crisis Leadership and Spontaneous Volunteering

The Third Sector workforce is a mix of paid staff and unpaid volunteers. The majority of volunteers in the UK are recruited by established TS organisations therefore, receiving targeted and specific training and may even work regular hours. It could therefore be considered that little difference exists between paid and unpaid colleagues from a leadership perspective. However, it is important to consider that motivations for work are likely to be different in paid and unpaid groups. Volunteering is work that is unpaid and can be formal or informal, planned, or unplanned, one-off, or regular (Cnaan et al, 1996; Penner, 2002; Snyder and Omoto, 2008), therefore theory supports the definition of Spontaneous Volunteers (SV) as a branch or form of volunteering. In the pre Covid world these volunteers offered their time in response to emergency situations such as natural disasters, acts of terrorism, fire, or major accidents. This study implements the term of 'spontaneous volunteer' to describe members of the case study group and as such adopts the following definition of spontaneous volunteering: "come together for the first time to pursue a specific task or series of related tasks prompted by changing, often unexpected situations requiring immediate action." (Britton, 1991, p.405)

Evidence of the extent and activities of spontaneous volunteering during the first wave of Covid19 is emerging but limited. It is therefore necessary to return to, and review, existing spontaneous volunteering literature and theory, whilst acknowledging that differences must

exist between the Covid-19 response, and those previously researched emergency responses. Perhaps the most notable difference being the increased time that the significant effects, of the pandemic, are interrupting daily life across the world, which are projected to be over 12 months. In contrast, previous emergency and crisis events usually only affect a percentage of a country, for a limited, and often predictable timescale. Each emergency incident could be considered differently, in many ways such as impact, numbers affected and planned recovery, and therefore reflecting on experiences and existing crisis leadership and SV literature is still of value to this study. Reviewing the literature further, it emerges that spontaneous volunteering is not always viewed positively by organised, recognised emergency organisations and their responders, as it does not always produce positive outcomes and can increase the financial costs, risks and supervision needed (Britton, 1991).

Emergent Groups

Twigg and Mosel (2017) offer a view of emerging groups, from a global perspective, and how these groups form following disasters, stating that emergent groups, along with spontaneous volunteering, are a common form of response to disasters, and stating their value in arriving before a formal response can be mobilised. They categorise emergent groups further, by recognising that many are citizens who may share a community, but who do not really know each other and come together entirely spontaneously, and it is this group formation that is of interest to this research. An important feature of these groups is their disinterest with bureaucracy, and the creativity and speed with which they can effectively respond to the challenge (Kendra and Wachtendorf, 2002), however their activities can overlap and intertwine with those of established services and organisations (Hollingshead et al, 2007).

Emergent groups are often viewed negatively by organisations and there are even occasions where Governments have intervened to prevent emergent groups taking action (Jalali,2002), however the UK Government has actively encouraged, and praised, the efforts

of spontaneous, emergent groups during the first wave of Covid-19 in the Spring of 2020, which may encourage valuable studies to be undertaken to uncover the value of this under-researched group.

Transactional and transformational leadership is cited by many as an appropriate leadership style for volunteers (Fogarty, 2020) and relies on building strong relationships between leader and volunteer, which results in a developing trust and commitment to the cause (Riggio et al, 2004). Transactional leadership is likely to produce extrinsic motivation, and transformational leadership behaviour is considered to increase intrinsic motivation in volunteers (Fogarty, 2020). Dwyer et al., (2013) recommend that transformational leaders will produce the best results and suggest that outlining the 'feel good factor' of volunteering will produce satisfied and motivated volunteers. It may be important to recognise that the characteristics of these types of leaders can also be viewed as authentic and may also promote the need for demonstrated authenticity as the ultimate 'feel good factor' for an individual (Gilstrap et al., 2015).

Summary

The importance of leaders possessing the skills, and emotional intelligence, to identify the critical elements of the organisation, its people, structure, and the context that it is operating within, to produce successful outcomes is clearly demonstrated. There is much discourse about the meaning and purpose of leadership and this research, whilst acknowledging this debate, does not focus on these issues. This study will be of value and interest to an emerging body of empirical evidence that will explore the leadership of spontaneous volunteer activity, during the Covid -19 pandemic.

Methodology

The decision-making process to establish the research design of this paper began with a recognition of the completely unique nature of the circumstances that shape the research question:

How does leadership style affect spontaneous volunteers within a Scrubs environment, in emerging groups, during their response to Covid-19 in Northern England?

Consideration of the following issues was important, and necessary, to ensure the appropriate approach was chosen:

- The presence of the Covid-19 global pandemic.
- The challenges for emergent groups.
- Response time available.
- The production of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) has regulated production specifications.

Qualitative research offers the opportunity to understand “real world settings” (Patton, 2002, p.39) and the five features of qualitative research outlined by Yin (2011) show this research approach to be appropriate to the objectives of this study. Reflecting not only on theory, but also considering personal experiences and knowledge, resulted in a case study approach selection and the key approaches of Stake (1995), Merriam (1998) and Yin (2013) reviewed. A further benefit to this research design is it enables the participants to tell their stories, developing a closer collaboration between researcher and participant than other approaches and promotes the understanding of the researcher (Crabtree and Miller, 1999).

Narrative research values the lived experiences and shared stories of individuals and offers a way of understanding these experiences (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990). A Narrative inquiry enables the researcher to collaborate with participants, enabling the study to view these stories as phenomenon under study (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990). The approach demonstrates the value placed on the knowledge shared by the participants and the

contribution it makes to our understanding of these experiences. It may be considered that an understanding of leadership styles, and the impact a style may have on volunteer performance and motivation, can only be clearly reported, and understood when the individuals involved are able to retell their experiences of leadership.

The case was chosen because it is of significant interest. Stake (1995, p.3) describes this as an 'intrinsic case study' because we "need to learn about that particular case". Many groups emerged to respond to the challenges of Covid-19 in a variety of ways and many of those became known as 'Scrubs' groups because they were producing uniforms/scrubs for medical and healthcare staff. The media reported on the network of Scrubs groups throughout the UK, however this group was different and remarkable. Distinguishing features of this group include it generating funds to support its' activities whilst other groups relied on donations of fabric, this group was able to purchase items. The group also had a planned end date for the project that reflected the arrival in the UK of large stocks of PPE mimicking the behaviour of project management. The output of produced high quality items, and the logistics that accompanied this, set the group apart from others and make the research of leadership of this group worthy of exploration.

The interview provides the main source of data for this research. The structure of the interview process, and the introduction of questioning, required thought, to produce data of value to the overall research question. Careful consideration was given to how to encourage a flow of narrative and not produce a structured interview that would prove restrictive to the storytelling. Valuable data is produced when the interview is fluid, and the participant feels able to retell their stories, and so the use of an unstructured open-ended interview to uncover the knowledge of the participant will be implemented (DeMarrais, 2004).

To allow a narrative to develop a semi-structured approach was taken. The interviews began with 'Tell me about the beginning...' type questions and allowed the participant to then retell their story without interruption. A list of guiding questions was produced, and used where

necessary, however it should be noted that because the interviews were conducted in the weeks following the end of the group the interviewees were able to talk without much need for prompting, and so the researcher took the role of an active listener. Several physical artefacts were produced by the group and a full list can be found at Table 1. These documents support the accounts and stories shared by the group members.

Lieblich et al (1998) offer a two-strand approach to narrative analysis which this research adopts. The research unit of analysis must be first defined as a category or holistic. Categorical analysis enables the analysis to consider the findings of all the participants of a selected phenomenon, which in this study represents the emerging Scrubs group and is best used when analysing an experience that has been shared by a group of people. Content or form dimension must be considered next. When interpreting and analysing the data, themes emerge through patterns and connections, and these are identified and discussed in the Discussion section of this paper.

Findings

The purpose of this research was to understand how, in such extreme and challenging circumstances, a group of spontaneous volunteers, is formed and produces successful outcomes. A narrative case study approach was used to investigate the informal, emergent group of spontaneous volunteers to answer the research question: How does leadership affect spontaneous volunteers, in emerging groups, during their response to Covid-19 in Northern England?

Leadership is the central focus of this study; however, it is suggested the most important feature of this research is rooted, in the ability of the participants to talk fully and freely in retelling their stories, and the impact it had on them personally, and on their community. Remote semi-structured interviews, lasting an average of 30 minutes each, were held with

8 of the group, which included the groups' founder. The participants were able to retell their stories with few interruptions or prompts required, and the data collected is presented in this section.

The study involves volunteers who received no payment, or payment in kind, for their work. They were provided with the materials they needed to complete their activities; however, some chose to donate materials through purchasing, or using, their own stocks. All participants have been given pseudonyms to protect their identities and stories, and ensure anonymity, and these participants are introduced below.

Kate. Kate is the founder of the group and was responsible for the setting up of the first Facebook page and crowdfunding page. "I started it from a phone call...a request...from a GP surgery and I very foolishly asked if they needed anything else (laughing)". Using the Facebook page to recruit volunteers to help, the scrubs group began. She requested donations of money and materials, stitchers, pattern makers and drivers. In the first week of the group, she was contacted by Steve offering to help, and then Steve's partner Amy became involved. Within 10 days, Kate explained to me, that over 130+ stitchers had joined the cause. "It mushroomed out very quickly into this group who everyone thought I was the leader but in actual fact it led itself...(pause) to a point it led itself" (Kate). This view is in part true – everyone did view Kate as their leader, and it became clear why. Stories emerged of long days, and endless collecting, packing, and delivering of materials and finished goods and as it grew "it became this other thing that happened, this scenario that there was this sense of community that carried them all through and I think that was the best bit" (Kate).

Steve. Steve was involved printing 3D visors, for another Covid-19 group, when he saw the Facebook post that Kate had set up the Scrubs group, in his local community, and was appealing for mask clips to be crocheted. He improvised, and cloned a 3D design, and then

replied to Kate offering his help. They lived a short distance away from each other, and so he drove to meet her, adhering to social distancing, and they got on “really, really well and she explained what she wanted to do ... and where she was at ... and I’d never met anyone like Kate before...hit it off straight away... and got on board with the story and wanted to help”. It was decided that he would help with the logistics because he had work experience of the area and technical expertise. Steve was on a weeks’ leave when he became involved and chose to take a further 2 weeks holiday. They were “inundated with volunteers...set up automated forms, and to place orders... and day by day they would be a call with Kate, organise a delivery run, up to ten drivers .in the morning and another ten in the afternoon.... monitoring 24/7.” Steve implemented logistical systems, and made improvements as the project moved forward, and the information systems can be found, in full, at Table 1 (pg. 41).

Amy. Amy became the fundraiser and marketed the group. Amy and Steve are partners. She was viewed, by the group members, as an organiser and someone who could be relied upon, able to provide answers. Having two of the organisers living in the same house had its benefits and its drawbacks “...it was taking a lot of time from 7.30am, he’d be up on Zoom ...until 9(pm) ...carnage...couldn’t really sit on the sofa... 1000 pieces of material to...pack... I can’t explain how much it completely took over our lives in a good way.” “We were fundraising because we wanted people to be part of it, rather than having to buy your material...” (Amy). The working relationship between the three key people was a success, “...just fell into our roles and we’d get together on a night-time (remotely) and doublecheck the lists for the next day, so no one missed anything”.

Elizabeth. Elizabeth is well-known in her community for her sewing and dressmaking expertise and was approached by Amy to join. The first ten sets of scrubs that Elizabeth

made for the group were produced from donated duvet covers. "I made about 10...some with angels on...some with rabbits on...(laughing)...checked ones. They went off and I didn't think at the time it was going to be as massive as it was." (Elizabeth).

Louise. Louise was part of the stitching group and produced a large number of scrubs, including the 1000th 'Peppa Pig' scrub. She had really enjoyed sewing at school and began working 8 until 8 in the evening when she joined the group, as a first-time volunteer.

Rebecca. Rebecca was furloughed during lockdown and was normally a very busy working mum. She returned to work, in the education sector before the group closed. She made scrubs, hats, and bags during her time with the group and she "felt like a little bit, done a little bit and that, for me, was important" (Rebecca).

Esther. Esther is a retired nurse of 41 years and "felt compelled to help" and is an "avid sewer". "I was part of this community and I didn't know anybody...but I felt overwhelmingly part of a community. I really did feel part of a group" (Esther).

Hilary. Hilary was "new to sewing" and produced hats. A first-time volunteer and involved her 9-year-old in the group, who also produced an item. Hilary articulated the views of many regarding the leadership, "the people leading were very approachable...I messaged...and he just rang me straight back...easy to take part" (Hilary).

Using the social media accounts, to regularly update, and appeal for help and donations, was successful, and their community responded positively to the group. Initially the fabric donated was duvet covers, and similar items, to be cut up. Sewing patterns were produced and hand cut by volunteers, and a local wedding shop, until a B & B owner stepped in and

began to print patterns in bulk. Then the crowdfund began to take off, swelling to £11,000+. With money donated the group was able to purchase rolls of fabric, and the local NHS donated rolls of fabric for production of scrubs, for the local hospitals. Systems improved, and changes were made in response to increases in volunteer, and production, numbers. “The more we did, the simpler it became... it became more streamlined, wasn’t really a massive change, we just evolved into that ...because Kate was doing it” (Louise).

Another local business began to cut the fabric, and this was a milestone moment, enabling the group to deliver packs of pre-cut fabric in various sizes to the stitchers who could get on and sew - “pre-cut scrubs...it was heaven sent!” (Esther).

Elizabeth was shielding and so the safety measures implemented by the Scrubs group was crucial to her, and many others, being able to volunteer. She expressed how proud and impressed by her community she was. “It was very clever. Knock on the door, they’d be a bag outside and you have to leave it outside for 72 hours. You put what you’d done in a plastic bag and left it outside and the collectors collected and waved as they went past the window (laughing). It was very clever ... my dentist was delivering ... but didn’t know most of them but we got to know them”.

Delivery drivers would operate from Kates’, dropping materials to stitchers throughout the day, and collecting finished items of scrubs sets, bags, and hats before returning them to Kate’s house that had now become the depot: the working day would regularly exceed 14 hours.

Chatrooms and WhatsApp groups sprung up to support the stitchers “...looking for group support...of how to make things...” (Louise), and the drivers. “...the communication...it helped people to be involved, to feel recognised” (Rebecca). A huge publicity banner

appeared overnight in the town whilst volunteers number grew, and the need to identify skills amongst the volunteers was identified. “I did more tailored things, we were asked what we were capable of doing...” (Elizabeth). And their efforts were rewarded with ‘thank you’ messages from healthcare staff, and photos of their scrubs sets and other items in action were shared on the online pages and groups. Amy “made (and shared) a video to show what people what was happening backstage” and morale was kept high with storytelling and success sharing so “every single person who sewed, or a driver completely knew they were part of the group” (Amy). With around 300 volunteers, Kate had created a group that produced over 1000 sets of scrubs. “...the day I met her and listened to what she wanted to do ... and she was so enthusiastic about it... her personality and her drive for what she wanted to do... that’s why we got involved.” (Steve).

Kate was clear she did not feel she was going to tell people what to do and spoke of enabling and empowering people to “crack on” and “fill your boots” and her good humour and passion was evident throughout her story. Perhaps the best example being “it escalated until one day I was talking to a man high up in the NHS in the North of England and he was talking to me like I was Mike Baldwin in a factory somewhere, and I was like ‘whoa...whoa, you say you want 120 sets of scrubs but we are just a group of women doing this , you can’t really stipulate what colour you want...we do what we do (laughter)” (Kate).

Some of the notable moments include a single donation of £2000 from an anonymous donor, a stitcher who made an extraordinary 75 sets of scrubs, an 8-year-old girl who stitched alongside her mum and produced a remarkable number of items for.

Perhaps the most remarkable achievements are found in the stories told by every participant. They modestly described how their participation, impacted not just their community but themselves. With sincerity, they recalled how this group lifted their spirits and gave them a purpose in the most difficult of times.

“...an amazing sense of fulfilment, yeh I know we’ve done something special...” (Steve).

“...we knew people needed it and we were sat at home doing nowt...try and help them, help loads of people (smiling)” (Amy).

“...I don’t know how I would have coped ...in total lockdown...it benefitted me as well. I just think it’s lovely to be part of the community...we are privileged” (Elizabeth).

“For me, it filled, a massive gap of having no purpose, and then suddenly had a purpose again” (Louise).

“You felt like part of something...they really needed it...to not feel useless” (Rebecca).

“I could see these butterfly bags, so I knew, absolutely... that they were mine and that was a fantastic feeling” (Esther).

“...contributing to a cause within the local community...I liked that” (Hilary).

The group planned to close down less than 3 months from when it had begun “We knew... from the NHS. a boat was coming in with 30,000 sets on...we knew very early on that when that boat docked, we wouldn’t be needed anymore” (Kate). Afterwards Kate received many requests for interviews and stories, but she declined as “she wanted to get on with life now...never wanted to go on telly...on radio... I only did those things to get money in the crowdfund... can I get on with my life now please?” (Kate).

The group raised over £11,000 and produced 1000+ full sets of scrubs (top, trousers, hat, and bag) and a significant number of visors and clips. Many of the stitcher’s group continued to make masks for the community after the main group closed, and these masks, like all the items produced by this group, were distributed into the local area. Table 1 below shows the tools, documents and mechanisms devised and implemented by the leadership of the group and was considered as part of the overall research.

Table 1. Administrative, logistical, and marketing documents and materials, and social media platforms developed and used by the Scrubs group.

Documents	Platforms, Webpages and Merchandise
Administrative and Logistical	Funding, Marketing and Social Media
Volunteers google form	Crowdfunding Page
PPE requests google form	TV interviews
Daily delivery schedule (min. 2 daily)	Radio interviews
Stitchers List	Newspaper articles
Drivers List	Publicity Banner
Goods to deliver (spreadsheet)	Facebook Publicity Public Page
Goods to collect (spreadsheet)	Closed Facebook Stitchers Group
Fabric/supplies stocks held	Closed Facebook Drivers Group
PPE delivery spreadsheet	Posters
Work in Progress Stocks held	Flyers
Covid-19 Guidance	Fabric 'Scrubs' garment labels
Health & safety instructions	WhatsApp Groups
Who needs...? List	
Covid-19 disclaimer	

Discussion

The aim of this narrative case study was to understand the role of leadership in an emergent group of spontaneous volunteers. Participants of this study told the stories of their

involvement and experiences, in the group. These narratives have been examined, and form the response to the research question: How does leadership affect spontaneous volunteers, in emerging groups, during their response to Covid-19 in Northern England? The study demonstrates a correlation between leadership (approach), and high amounts of volunteer motivation, well-being, and overall success. The study produces clear evidence in the data findings, to find the theoretical definition of an emergent group of spontaneous volunteers is proven.

In answering the research question, it raises another one. What is a leader? Drucker (1996) offers “The only definition of a leader is someone who has followers”. If only it was that simple. This research does not seek to define leadership, and instead considers the definitions, theory, and personal experience of leadership, alongside the reflections of the study participants, to providing answers to the research question. During every interview, participants reflected positively on their volunteering experience, often smiling, and laughing. If following the simplistic example of Drucker, the research question would be answered using any of the following: positively, we were privileged, gave me purpose, a fantastic feeling, all of which are taken from the narratives of those involved. However, with consideration, this discussion will continue to view a leader as defined in the literature review - the ability to identify (and exploit) opportunity, promote change, provide vision, and encourage others through empowerment, and empathy.

Team Motivation

Team building is a fundamental role of leaders – a great leader builds a great team (Zaccaro et al. 2008). Ammeter and Dukerich (2015) found that the behaviour of a leaders has a ‘powerful and pervasive role (p.9) in the actual success of a project, and the feelings of success experienced by the team members.

Members of the group clearly expressed their belief that Kate was the leader, and the style with which the team, and project were led exhibited elements of the 'self-managed' team perspective (Manz and Sims, 1987). This collective, participative approach to leadership is demonstrated in the sub-groups that formed within the main Scrubs group. With the support and direction of Kate, members of these groups, were able to share ideas and implement examples of best practice. The function of leadership in this situation, focused on facilitating a harmonious group, providing conflict resolution, when necessary, and the evidence indicates a low level of in-group conflict.

Belbin (1993) identified 9 different, personality types required to be part of an effective team, however in Belbin's previous works (1981, p.115), he discussed that it is possible for an individual to perform well in more than one role and this research supports that research. Kate displayed the leadership qualities that of both Co-ordinator and Shaper in Belbin's framework. Amy and Steve also demonstrated some characteristics of Shapers and Resource Investigators. The introduction of the sub-groups will have enabled other individuals to display characteristics and elements of leadership qualities, relationships to form, and may offer support the work of Belbin.

Inclusivity

The findings demonstrate an inclusive approach to building the team. Members of the group ranged from age 8, to the retired (70+), and held a variety of roles in their community: students, parents, carers, retired, educators, healthcare professionals and many others became involved. By implementing clear procedures regarding health & safety, the group was able to include anyone who wished to join – including those who were 'shielding'. Drivers, and regular deliveries meant that those who couldn't drive, or had no car, could be involved and the financial barriers were reduced further by the supply of all materials needed. This was of particular significance as many other Scrubs groups were working on a reimbursement system, which has cost implications for involvement.

Evidence of on-going support, through groups, online platforms, morale boosting stories, photo sharing and excellent communication channels fostered the building of an inclusive and co-operative team. The stitchers WhatsApp group is evidence of the empowerment of these volunteers.

Teams, inclusion, and self-worth were reported by Bidee et al. (2013) as important motivators for a workforce. The Scrubs leadership demonstrates they provided an environment that support Bidees' findings, even though this group never physically met together, they clearly expressed their friendships and sense of belonging. The findings of this research may be a valuable addition to the limited literature available exploring the role of the leaders in creating, and managing, effective teams (Salas et al., 2004, p.342).

Effective culture is shared and understood amongst the stakeholders, with goals clearly identified, and collective endeavours to meet them (Hofstede, 2001), and it must also enhance the performance and success of the organisation (Mannion & Smith, 2018). The viewpoint of this paper is that culture is a resource, able to be influenced and adapted (Mannion and Smith, 2018).

This research finds that the culture created in the group was an effective culture; participants were clear about how and why they were volunteering, and the success of the group develops from the 'community culture' that developed. The Scrubs group created an organisational climate, which may be considered a more, theoretically, appropriate term for their shared values, and 'the way we do things around here' (Deal and Kennedy, 1982, 2000) because culture refers to something that develops over time and the groups lifespan cannot wholly support the theory of a culture. Table 1 (page 41) highlights several 'Platforms' (column 2) that were introduced to encourage cooperation, communication and improve morale. These platforms also empowered the volunteers, and introduced an element of self-management, and ownership to the group. Whilst the use of technology is now

commonplace in society, the creative and innovative way it was used, to not simply inform but, to team-build is worthy of attention.

Creating a 'favourable climate' improves performance, retention, and wellbeing, (Aldbridge & Fraser, 2016) and stimulates positive job satisfaction, loyalty, morale, and commitment. This can be achieved through a climate that reflects open communications, team and work value, risk-taking behaviour, and staff development, facilitating success throughout the organisation (Krishnamacharyulu & Ramakrishnan, 2014).

The research supports 'community culture' being considered as a best practice approach for the leadership of spontaneous volunteers.

Leadership Style

Leadership styles and frameworks often appear to overlap. The Authentic Framework has similarities to other leadership styles, in part due to authenticity being considered a crucial characteristic of a Transformational Style (Bass, 1990), it also links to Ethical Leadership (Brown and Trevino, 2006), and the consideration, by some, that Authentic Leadership is a 'root construct' which all other leadership styles and frameworks are based (Luthans and Avolio, 2003). Kate's authenticity is demonstrated in setting up the group. The forming of the group, and all that happened thereafter, is a clear indicator of Kate staying true to her values and beliefs (Avolio et al., 2004), and acting "with deep personal values and conviction, to build credibility, and win the respect and trust of the followers" (Avolio et al., 2004, p. 806). It is suggested that Kate's authenticity enabled her to motivate employees, to produce desired results and outcomes (Luthans and Avolio, 2003). Whilst the creation of group, and individual, trust, engagement and wellbeing are demonstrated in this research, the findings do not support a definition of authentic leadership. The influence and impact of all the group, including the leader Kate, living in the same community, and strongly identifying as such, is not explored sufficiently to be excluded as an important contribution

to the success of the group, and the leadership style exhibited. Figure 1 below considers the overlapping and intertwined factors that produced leadership during a crisis situation during Covid-19:

Figure 1:



The Crisis Leadership Wheel

This case study suggests that leadership is much more than the adoption of a style or approach. The leader of this group was embedded in the community, understood, shared, and lived many of the values of those in the group. Those in the community that benefitted from the provision of PPE were the friends, family, acquaintances, colleagues, and neighbours of this group, and this impacted on the high level of motivation displayed by the group. The group were encouraged to be participative, and many mechanisms were introduced to promote collaboration, supporting the definition offered by Turnbull-James (2011) of an effective leader. These findings build on the research offered by Amit (2002, p.18), who found that positive interactions exist in formed communities because people associate, and care about, others with whom they share experiences and history.

The research has found that spontaneous volunteering, in emerging groups, can be inspired, and positively influenced, by a transformative, authentic leader.

Conclusion

This study identifies the functions of the leadership role present, in an emergent community group, and the research questions asked: How does leadership affect spontaneous volunteers, in an emerging group, during their response to Covid-19 in the Northern England? Following a narrative analysis of the data produced, it can be concluded that leadership had a positive impact on the participation and engagement of spontaneous volunteering activities, and the motivations and wellbeing of those volunteers. Spontaneous volunteers in the Scrubs group reflected positively, with warmth and a sense of pride and achievement in their contributions. The leader of the group provided clear leadership throughout the lifespan of the group, and whilst she undertook other roles in the group, the primary one was that of leader.

The results indicate that the creation of a 'community culture', by a leader who demonstrates authenticity, and shared values with those in the group, proved an effective approach to leadership in the context of this research. The research supports community culture being considered as a best practice approach for the leadership of spontaneous volunteers.

The research found evidence of a leader demonstrating authenticity, providing vision and shared purpose. A leader who identified an opportunity, and encouraged and supported others to share a purpose, resulting in the accomplishment of successful outcomes, and motivated, empowered volunteers. The results indicated an effective collaboration between three members of the group, whose skills and characteristics proved an ideal combination in this context and provides a useful insight into the qualities and competencies required in crisis leadership.

An unexpected, and valuable, insight of this research, was the wellbeing effects experienced by the volunteers, who all reported positive emotions and a sense of belonging and purpose during their time with the group, and this has research implications for areas other than leadership.

There is a clear need for an understanding of this area of leadership. This study provides an insight into how leadership of spontaneous volunteers can be effective to the community, in crises and disaster response. Furthermore, research is needed to determine the relationship of emerging groups, and the leader's place/role/residence within the community, and the affect this relationship has on effective leadership.

Covid-19 remains a global pandemic, and the UK has been subject to a variety of local, and national, 'lockdown' restrictions throughout 2020, therefore demonstrating the importance of this research in contributing to the developing big picture, and to inform future decision-making.

Limitations

The findings of this study are not generalizable to other research populations and settings. This was a unique and unknown global event, and the impact on individuals, and their subsequent responses cannot be repeated.

The sample size of this study was suited to the overall research design however the validity of the research findings may have been enhanced by a larger sample.

Implications for Theory

This study adds to the literature by identifying key areas of importance for the development of leadership within the Third Sector. It focuses on the emergence of leadership amongst

volunteers and the manifestation of key traits that enable it. Both traditional and contemporary models of leadership are in existence within the environment but common approaches to these do consider the nature of the volunteers and the crisis situation that they were responding to, given the environment at the time. As such this offers a unique insight into the complexities of leadership.

Further Research

While the situation is difficult to repeat, and we would hope not, further development in this area could seek to explore the development of leadership in a range of crisis situations and consider the characteristics and role of individuals in alternative crisis situations. This could include investigation of how individuals come to the fore and how prepared they may consider themselves or each other to be, notably considering the concept of the accidental manager.

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