Navigating the neoliberal discursive environment: An inquiry into the experiences of employees in the Voluntary and Community Sector

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Abstract

This doctoral thesis explores how neoliberalism as a mode of governance impacts on the experiences of front-line employees in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). The political and economic context, largely underpinned by a neoliberal ideology, has led over the past 30 years to changes in the funding environment for the VCS. There is a substantial body of research on the implications of these changes at organisational and management levels which has noted negative effects, such as financial instability, increased demands for the implementation of performance management frameworks and the drive for organisations to adopt commercial values and strategies to survive in an increasingly competitive market. However, there has been less focus on how these changes affect the experiences of those operating at the sharp-end: the front-line employees.

This multi-site instrumental case study examines the discursive environment of two medium-sized VCS organisations, through the lens of Foucault's notion of neoliberal governmentality. Adopting an ethnographic-informed approach, interviews and observation methods were used to collect data from managers and front-line employees to explore how neoliberal governmentality operates through technologies and everyday practices to create the neoliberal subject. The selected theoretical framework provides scope to go beyond the existing literature, which primarily highlights the material impacts of changes for front-line employees, by providing a detailed analysis of how macro-level changes are consolidated within organisations and impact on the micro-level experiences of front-line employees. This is achieved by illuminating not only the material impacts but also the discursive and subjectification effects for front-line employees. The theory is operationalised through the use of Bacchi's (2009) 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) approach, by examining how contextual challenges are problematised within the organisations and identifying the solutions adopted at management level to govern employees in a way which accords with neoliberal values.

The findings suggest that the management's proposed solutions to challenges facing the organisations, such as financial uncertainty and the demands to professionalise, were largely underpinned by the political rationality of neoliberalism. Problems caused by external issues were constituted as being remediable by changes in employee behaviour and attitude, through developing a sense of resilience when faced with an unstable context. The neoliberal discursive environment elicits a new type of employee: one who is agile and responsible for structural constraints. The new subject is refashioned through a range of technologies which have material, discursive and subjectification effects for front-line employees. The research highlights how forms of technology serve as disciplinary mechanisms, creating division in the workforce and leading to the stigmatisation of some employees and the decollectivisation of the workforce.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where states otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.

Dedication

This doctoral thesis is wholeheartedly dedicated to my phenomenal daughter, Cassia. You have always been my number one motivation. You inspire me every time I see your face. I want you to know that you can always achieve whatever you want: you can break any ceiling and your potential is limitless. Walk in your strength; know your power; live your life in a way which fulfils your every desire. Stay strong-minded; embrace every challenge that aligns with your goals; strive for progress, not perfection. No one is YOU and that is your power – own it. Cassia, you are here to do what no one else has ever done – be YOU because you are HERE. #iamhere

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List of Abbreviations

BAME – Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

HRM – Human Resource Management

KPIs – Key Performance Indicators

MCD – Methods Collection Database

NPM – New Public Management

PDR – Performance Development Review

VCS - Voluntary and Community Sector

VCSO - Voluntary and Community Sector Organisation

WPR - 'What's the problem represented to be?'

Chapter 1: Introduction

This doctoral thesis aims to investigate the impacts of the neoliberal discursive environment on front-line employees in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) in England and to contribute to the literature on the VCS and employees' experiences of wider political and economic changes, which have filtered down to affect the organisation of work in Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations (VCSOs). It explores how external challenges facing VCSOs are problematised within the organisations, what solutions are proposed, what rationalities underpin the solutions and technologies and how, together, they affect the working experiences of front-line employees. Unlike earlier work in this field, which has primarily focussed on the material effects for employees as a result of the changing landscape, this research also aims to examine the subjectification and discursive effects. In this introductory chapter, I explain how my interest in the VCS developed, provide some context for the research, identify the gaps in the literature and then map out what approach I have taken to achieve the aims of this research. Finally, I provide an outline for the overall thesis,

My interest in this research area was generated by a journal article by Ian Cunningham (2001), entitled 'Sweet Charity', which I discovered during my undergraduate degree in non-profit management. After spending the first two years of my degree learning about inequality and how much the VCS contributes to social justice, I became especially interested in why working conditions were deteriorating, an element highlighted in Cunningham's work and this interest was further fuelled when I undertook a work placement in a medium-sized health VCSO. It was an invaluable experience, which launched me into a career of working as a Project Manager, and later consultant, in the management of health initiatives for marginalised communities in the sector. However, during this time, I also experienced significant periods of chaos and uncertainty; I witnessed staff come and go, move from project to project and be forced to change their working hours on a monthly, or sometimes weekly, basis to accommodate variations in funding income. I observed the incongruence between the funders' requirements and the outcomes desired by managers in the organisations I worked for. I

experienced inadequate budgets and insufficient time to fulfil the requirements of the work but, more than anything, I saw stressed and burnt-out staff who were continuously committed to just getting the work done regardless of how much it took out of them. When I attempted to speak out on the working conditions, I was told I was not focussing on the right things and this gave me the motivation to investigate further the impacts of uncertain funding regimes and the effects of this instability on employees, especially those caught between meeting the wishes of management and fulfilling the requirements of the contracts. As an undergraduate student, I was confused by the tensions and dissonance in organisations, despite seeing both managers and front-line employees alike committed to the social justice agendas and passionate about their work. I arrived at some rather simplistic conclusions about differences in funding agendas, but these still did not seem to explain what was happening: I wanted to know why and how these changes occurred, why nobody resisted, why employees were not in a position to talk truth to power in organisations for whom this was a key value. Three years after leaving the sector and taking on an academic role, I decided I wanted to investigate this issue.

The VCS has undergone a range of changes over the past 30 years, which have largely stemmed from a shift in public policy underpinned by a Keynesian ideology towards closer alignment with neoliberal thinking. The VCS's relationship with the state changed in that it is now positioned as a provider of public sector services, rather than as a partner of the state in providing bespoke and flexible services to communities which have traditionally been marginalised. This shift was characterised by a move away from trust and cooperation to a relationship underpinned by market values. One of the significant changes to emerge was the use of contracts with specific outcomes rather than grant-based funding; for example, over a five-year period (2000/1–2006/7) there was a 105% increase in the amount of contract funding to the sector, but a decline in grant funding (£4.6 billion to £4.2 billion) (Clarke et al, 2009:14). This change was associated with increased competition, timed-contacts and new management approaches bringing increased demands for accountability, informed by new public management (NPM). This overarching change to the funding

structure had a range of implications for the way in which organisations within the VCS were organised and managed. There was a requirement for them to operate like a 'business', with increased use of performance management tools and the adoption of market-style attitudes, which led to changes in the prioritisation of values-based work in the sector and inadequate human resource practices. To date, these changes have had implications for employees operating in this neoliberal environment: detrimental working conditions are increasing and there is an overall reduction in the factors which have traditionally motivated employees, such as values-based work, flexibility and flat management structures.

In sum, existing scholarship has focussed on the changes to the sector and organisation of work but the impacts of these changes on the experiences of front-line employees have been under-examined by researchers in the field. Some of the literature has focussed on the material impacts for employees, including deteriorating working conditions, such as low pay and short-term contracts, but has often excluded the voices of front-line workers, concentrating rather on management experiences and quantitative research into changes in working terms and conditions. The missing voices of front-line employees have been seen as a consequence of the uncertainty in the sector, causing workers to be cautious of speaking out through fear of further endangering their employment positions.

The literature discussing the experiences of front-line employees has begun to illuminate some of the impacts of the changes experienced in the sector; however, these could be unpacked further through the use of a neoliberal governmentality theoretical framework. My research approach adopts a Foucauldian theoretical framework to unpack how neoliberalism operates as a mode of governance in the VCS and examine the discursive, subjective and material effects of this for employees in the sector. In particular, this research adopts Foucault's theoretical concept of governmentality, concerned with the mentality or manner in which people are governed and also how they govern themselves. Based on the premise that neoliberalism is a mode of governance, a force which governs our behaviour and attitudes as individuals in relation to the ideals of the neoliberal subject, this

research aims to identify the effects on employees. Neoliberal governmentality is argued to construct subjects as self-determining, responsible individuals who are able to self-regulate and conduct themselves in line with a mindset of entrepreneurship and cost-benefit calculations, constantly striving to 'seek their own self-value' (Weidner, 2009:406).

To further achieve the aim of this research, the theoretical framework of governmentality is operationalised through the use of Bacchi's (2009) 'What's the problem represented to be?' (WPR) approach. The WPR approach suggests that, to identify which mode of governance is at play, one needs to interrogate how problems are constituted and what solutions are deemed intelligible. It uses a series of six questions (outlined in more detail in Chapter 2) to analyse how governing occurs and to identify its effects. This approach, therefore, complements my theoretical framework and underpins the analysis of the findings in this thesis.

Whilst the existing scholarship provides a valuable backdrop to my research, it highlights a gap in the research area: what are the everyday experiences of those working in an environment that is underpinned by neoliberal rationalities; how do these rationalities combine with technologies; what form do these technologies take and to what extent are they successful in constructing employees into neoliberal subjects? How does neoliberalism operate as means of governance within these organisations? If neoliberal governance is evident, what are its effects on employees, i.e. what are the subjectification and discursive effects on employees? Lastly, how are employees accepting or resisting neoliberal subjectification? These are the areas that this thesis aims to address and, in particular, to answer the following research question:

How does the neoliberal context shape the experiences of front-line employees in medium-sized VCSOs?

To answer this overarching question, a series of sub-questions are addressed:

- How has the neoliberal landscape changed the organisation of work in the VCS?

- How are current shifts in work organisation shaping employee working practices and interpersonal experiences?
- Can the emerging theoretical discourse on neoliberal governmentality adequately explain the restructuring of the VCS and its impacts on front-line staff?

To investigate the experiences of front-line employees, I conducted an instrumental, multi-site qualitative case study of two medium-sized[1] charities in London, referred to in this thesis as Community Life and Healthscape. Both organisations provide a range of public health services to traditionally marginalised communities; the majority of their income is from the state. The fieldwork included collecting data via a range of ethnographically informed methods, namely, interviews with managers and front-line employees and observations of everyday organisational life. The methodological approach was adopted to give value to the context in which front-line employees operate, following the notion that the experiences of front-line employees have to be interpreted in relation to the wider discourse of which they form part.

I address my research questions and how they connect to wider scholarship on changes in the VCS through nine chapters. Following this introduction, Chapter 2 outlines the theoretical framework underpinning my thesis and introduces the WPR approach which details the six questions which illuminate the modes of governance in operation and their effects.

Chapter 3 presents a review of the existing literature in the field: firstly, it introduces the literature discussing the state's changing relationship with the VCS; secondly, it discusses the impacts this has had on the organisation and management of VCSOs; and lastly, it identifies the impacts of the contract culture on employees.

[1] According to NCVO (2019a) the following boundaries define the size of an organisation, based on its income: less than £10,000 Micro; £10,000 to £100,000 Small; £100,000 to £1 million Medium; £1 million to £10 million Large; £10 million to £100 million Major; More than £100 million Super-major.

Chapter 4 presents my methodological approach, outlining my philosophical stance of social constructionism and providing rationales for and detail of how the research was carried out in practice. It also introduces the two organisations selected for the case study research and reflects on the process of conducting research in unstable contexts and how this has contributed to my development as a researcher.

The findings and analysis from my research are presented across Chapters 5 to 8, of which the first two focus on the findings from Community Life. Chapter 5 presents the findings in relation to the problem representation and the proposed solutions, examines the climate of uncertainty and how managers problematise this and discusses how the solutions to organisational uncertainty are primarily targeted at refashioning employees' attitudes. This discussion is integrated with one on the discursive, subjectification and material effects for employees. Chapter 6 follows the same structure, with a focus on the organisation needing to 'prove' itself, followed by a discussion of the proposed solutions to this challenge and the effects for employees.

Chapters 7 and 8 turn to the findings from Healthscape, the second research site: Chapter 7 focusses on how managers problematise the challenges facing the organisation by constructing narratives of crisis and Chapter 8 moves on to discuss the solutions proposed to overcome these challenges and the effects these have on employees.

Whilst I have attempted to 'separate' elements of the WPR approach for clarity in the presentation of my findings throughout chapters 5-8, it must be noted that at times there are discussions where such separation is not possible, due to the intertwined nature of rationalities, technologies and their effects.

Chapter 9, the conclusion, draws together the findings from both case studies to look at the overall picture, in particular linking the results of the research to the wider theoretical dimensions and highlighting what has been learnt from the research. It draws parallels between the two case

organisations in relation to the demand for neoliberal subjectivity in the VCS and discusses how challenges are problematised as an opportunity or a force to limit resistance from employees in the VCS. Finally, I identify the limitations of this research, areas for possible future research and the original contribution this thesis makes to our understanding of the VCS.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I outline some of Foucault's 'sensitising concepts' which I have adopted as the theoretical framework for this thesis. These 'sensitising concepts' provide this research with a frame, a starting point which guides my inquiry, but of central importance is the idea that the participants' experiences will be at the forefront in shaping the outcomes (Blumer, 1954; Denzin, 1978). Thus, the aims of this research are guided by a set of presuppositions, developed both from my own reading of Foucault's work and from neo-Foucauldian scholars who have developed his works on governmentality. Governmentality is the central lens I use to analyse my research findings; however, it is necessary to draw upon some of Foucault's earlier works on discourse, subject, power, knowledge and discipline to fully grasp what Foucault meant by the term 'governmentality', and I therefore explore these below. A further reason for drawing upon these 'additional' concepts is that Foucault does not seek to determine where one form of power supersedes another. Instead, the ambition should be to unpack and identify the complex forms of power, notwithstanding that different forms of power may shift over space and time, as may technologies which are continually refashioned. Therefore, by drawing on a range of 'sensitising concepts', insofar as they are useful, I am able to analyse the everyday practices within organisations and shed light on practical, yet complex, governmental problems.

Foucault himself notes that his earlier theoretical concepts on how humans are governed are not abandoned with his development of governmentality; instead, researchers should draw upon his work as they would a set of tools. In Foucault's own words:

> All my books ... are little tool boxes ... if people want to open them, to use this sentence or that idea as a screwdriver or spanner to short-circuit, discredit or smash systems of power, including eventually those from which my books have emerged ... so much better! (Foucault 1974:523–4)

Given the above, I will begin by defining some of Foucault's concepts, and then proceed to explain my use of these concepts as a set of 'tools' for illuminating some of the shifts in the VCS, and how these impact on front-line employees' subjectivity and working conditions. Lastly, I will present how I operationalise the concept of governmentality in my research, using Bacchi's (2009) research approach, 'What's the Problem Represented to be?'

2.2 Discourse, Power/Knowledge and Subjectivity

For Foucault, discourse creates and shapes systems of meaning and 'regimes of truth' for the social world. As Laclau and Mouffe (1985) describe, a discourse can be explained as a system which provides meaning, and signals what can be said or done in a particular context, as in this case, in the VCS. Foucault asserts that some discourses hold value and status, shaping how we conduct and organise ourselves in the world, while other discourses are disavowed and marginalised. There are various elements and interpretations of discourse; however, according to Hall (1997:73–74) Foucault paid particular attention to six aspects:

- Statements which give us knowledge about certain things;
- Rules which govern what is thinkable or sayable about things;
- Subjects –'who personifies the discourse?'
- How knowledge acquires authority;
- The practices for 'dealing with a subject...whose conducted is being regulated';
- Discourses will emerge, transform, discontinue over periods of time and space.

All aspects of discourse are interrelated and serve to help understand power relations in a set space and time, as Foucault proposes that power relations are inseparable from discourse. Discourse operates as a means of producing truth and knowledge, from which power follows as we accept what is claimed to be reality. In Foucault's words, power relations:

> are indissociable from a discourse of truth, and they can neither be established nor function unless a true discourse is produced, accumulated, put into circulation, and

> set to work. Power cannot be exercised unless a certain economy of discourses of truth functions in, on the basis of, and thanks to, that power. (Foucault, 2003:24)

Therefore, the notions of power and knowledge (discourse) are interdependent; one cannot exist without the other. They complement one another and exist simultaneously. Foucault asserts:

> The exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power. ... It is not possible for power to be exercised without knowledge, it is impossible for knowledge not to engender power. (Foucault, 1980a:52)

Foucault goes on to highlight that truth is created in the midst of constraints, while at the same time inducing power:

> Truth isn't outside power, or lacking in power. ... Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its régime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourses which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true. (Foucault, 1980a:131)

Given the relationship between power and discourse, it becomes necessary to unpack how certain discourses are prioritised or marginalised, to identify the effects on subjectivity within the organisation (see point 3 in Hall's list). For Foucault, a deeper understanding of how discourses operate is crucial: he suggests that a plurality of practices operate in different sites to legitimise one discourse over another; these are discursive practices which have effects (Foucault, 1980a; Foucault; 1991). For Foucault, discursive practices construct the subject position. The power of discourses 'construct certain possibilities of thought' (Ball, 2012: 17-18) and make available certain subject positions – consequently, subjects then make sense of the social world from this position (Bacchi, 2009: 16). Further, subjects position themselves in relation to discourse: it may be that they do not adopt a discourse, but they still position themselves in relation to the discourse and thus still operate within the remit of the power-knowledge relationship. For Foucault, it is not possible for subjects to

operate outside the discourse. He acknowledges that individuals may contribute to knowledge, but they are still operating within the discursive field or in his words 'the regime of truth' (Foucault, 1977: 23). Given this view of discourse and its effects on the subject, this thesis aims to identify the discursive environment in Healthscape and Community Life and to analyse how this may construct different subjects.

2.3. Governmentality

In Foucault's later theorisations of power/knowledge and subjectivity, he becomes more specific in his assertions, while not abandoning earlier works, which suggest that individuals are not passively subjugated, but instead active agents who are both constituted as subjects and constitute themselves as subjects. Foucault extends his theorisation of the subject position in relation to the term he coined, 'governmentality'. Governmentality is concerned with the mentality or manner in which people are governed and also how they govern themselves.

When examining this notion of governmentality, Foucault argues that power cannot be solely conceptualised in terms of sovereign power; instead, he is interested in the micro-physics of power (1977) or, as he says, this approach 'roots [power] in forms of behaviour, bodies and local relations of power which should not at all be seen as a simple projection of the central power' (1980b:201). He underlines that power is about guidance and the scope for shaping the possibility of actions (Foucault, 1982), and thereby raises questions regarding power and how it is dispersed, embodied and enacted amongst subjects. As Dean neatly poses the question, 'How is it possible that the headless body often behaves as if it indeed has a head?' (Dean, 1994:56). For Foucault, here power becomes more about what courses of action are made intelligible, 'governing the forms of self-government, structuring and shaping the field of possible action of subjects' (Lemke, 2002:3). This guidance, however, does not operate in isolation; instead, it occurs with the government of self. Here, Foucault (1977) builds on his ideas, presented in *Discipline and Punish*, relating to disciplinary power whereby individuals can be seen as measurable, manageable and transformable subjects. It is through various disciplinary

technologies – hierarchical observation, normalising judgement and examination – which render individuals visible, that individuals begin to discipline themselves in line with what is considered normal within a discourse. For Foucault, this form of power operates alongside technologies of the self. Foucault describes technologies of the self as ways which:

> … permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (1988:18)

Such technologies are not necessarily created by oneself; instead, they are developed, measured, monitored and evaluated by experts, and deployed by individuals to self-discipline and regulate. They can be seen in systems such as accounting. Therefore, for Foucault, government is concerned with technologies of the self and how they interact with technologies of domination (Foucault, 1988).

Thus, Foucault argues that individuals govern themselves and this self-government is integrated with how they are governed by others; the contact point between the two is what he calls 'government'. Government is an equilibrium that does not require force, instead, it operates 'with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself' (Foucault 1993:203–4). Rose (1999) elaborates on Foucault's conceptualisation of governmentality, suggesting it involves a range of political rationalities and technologies which produce a subjectivity that is both self-governing and self-disciplining. In his work on governmentality, Foucault suggests that specific political rationalities could be found in particular sites, underpinned by specific thoughts which may be linked to various calculations, techniques and practices.

Here, we turn to the neo-Foucauldian Dean (2010) who articulates that the mentality of government comes about through a series of languages and technologies. Fundamentally, such mentalities of government are usually taken for granted, insofar as they are left unquestioned; they also rely upon the expertise, vocabulary, theories and ideas available. Further, Dean highlights that

elements of such mentalities may include 'a-rationale' aspects, such as imagery, mythologies and/or the invoking of strong emotions, such as being in crisis or being under attack (2010:25).

Dean's work on governmentality further aids in making Foucauldian concepts practical in their analytical capacity. For Dean (2010:33), the analytics of government have four core aspects:

- characteristic forms of visibility, ways of seeing and perceiving;
- distinctive ways of thinking and questioning, relying on definite vocabularies and procedures for the production of truth (e.g. those derived from the social, human and behavioural sciences);
- specific ways of acting, intervening and directing, made up of particular types of practical rationality ('expertise' and 'know-how') and relying upon definite mechanisms, techniques and technologies;
- characteristic ways of forming subjects, selves, persons, actors or agents.

In asking questions relating to these dimensions, we begin to unpack how the art of government operates in a particular site.

2.4 Neoliberalism as Governmentality

For Foucault, neoliberalism is a mode of governmentality, a new regime of truth, a political rationality underpinning dominant discourses and practices in society. Therefore, if neoliberalism is a mode, or mentality, of government, it is vital to understand how such a mentality is embedded or considered a regime of truth.

Similarly to Foucault, Larner (2000) argues that neoliberalism can be conceptualised in three ways: as a political framework, an ideology or a governmentality. Larner's differentiation between

the interpretations of neoliberalism is significant to this thesis and its contribution to knowledge as the existing body of work in this field (and more broadly in studies examining the impacts of neoliberalism) largely discusses neoliberalism as a political framework or ideology, I undertake this research with the view that neoliberalism is a mode of government. Larner considers the limitations of viewing neoliberalism as a policy framework or ideology. Some of these limitations include the notion that neoliberalism is a coherent programme of things to be done and that hegemonic groups monopolise political discourse; consequently, neoliberalism is presented as a monolithic, top-down programme with little room for contestation. On the other hand, when neoliberalism is interpreted as a mode of government, accounts can be produced which destabilise the present and bring to light the fractures which characterise neoliberalism. Interpreting neoliberalism as a governmentality calls into question totalising accounts which present neoliberalism as a 'top down, state-initiated policy agenda with a unified political philosophy' (2000:15). Central to unpacking neoliberalism as a mode of government is to examine the rationalities, technologies and effects to identify how neoliberalism plays out for various actors and across different spaces. It is suggested that to adopt this framework of analysis, one needs to engage in the messy realities making visible the contestable, inconsistent, contradictory and complex forms of government which characterise the neoliberal project (2000:16). Similarly, Li (2007a) argues that governmental interventions often produce effects which are contradictory and therefore by examining the rationales or programmes, practices and effects together, the complexities of neoliberalism can be teased out. This can illuminate how programmes c hold value whilst also considering where the gaps, fractures and instabilities exists, how practices are interpreted by the audiences they intend to govern and what happens when governmental interventions 'hit the ground' (Li, 2007b:9) as the outcomes are not fixed.

So what is meant when we consider neoliberalism in the governmental sense? Neoliberalism in the governmental sense refers to more than just a set of free-market principles, but is a means to refashion subjectivity (Brown, 2006). In governmentality, the point of interest lies in how neoliberalism becomes a force which governs our behaviour and attitudes as individuals in relation

to the ideals of the neoliberal subject, in ways which both govern us and encourage us to govern ourselves. Foucault suggests that the neoliberal subject is the *homo economicus*, one who is radically different from the *homo juridicus* – the legal subject of the state. In Foucault's words, neoliberal governmentality encourages an individual to become the '*homo economicus [who]* is an entrepreneur, an entrepreneur of himself' (2008:226). Drawing on Foucault, Read (2009) outlines some of the critical aspects of the neoliberal subject, stating that individuals become companies of one, who need to invest in their futures, continuously updating and upskilling to keep up with the demands of neoliberalism. Further, he indicates that the neoliberal project encourages a cost-benefit way of thinking which pervades all areas of life, not only the economic sphere, whereby the neoliberal subject calculates risks based on self-interest and greatest benefit for the lowest cost. However, this subject needs to be brought into being. Hamann (2009) notes that a rational neoliberal governmentality recognises that for the '*homo-economicus'* to come into being, the subjectivity of individuals must be refashioned accordingly via a range of technologies.

Gilles (2011) argues that the neoliberal context elicits an agile subject and can usefully be problematised through the lens of governmentality. The discourse of agility can be linked to the neoliberal discourse when considering the production of subjects, as they both call upon agents to become entrepreneurial, and to assume individual responsibility for structural factors. Further, the production of the agile subject goes beyond the call to be flexible, as it requires a more active reconfiguration of the self. The agile subject reconfigures themselves in relation to the demands of the market, anticipating changes and refashioning themselves accordingly. Simons and Masschelein (2006:53) add to this, asserting that the agile worker adopts a 'creative or innovative attitude to see opportunities in a competitive environment' through governmental technologies which work into the very being of the subjects. The call for an agile subject is valued in a neoliberal context, as market principles are universalised: it is accepted that any organisation may fail, but the agile worker is able to withstand these challenges and modify themselves according to emerging demands. Foucault (2005:131) refers to the *stultus*, the character who is unable to withstand external pressures and

unpredictability, a concept Gillies (2011) argues is closely linked to the modern notion of agility. He argues that agility is considered a 'weapon' to be armed with to be considered capable of survival in the ever-changing market. Consequently, agility is underpinned by the desire for security for oneself and the organisation.

Gillies suggests that the call to become an agile subject is problematic for three reasons: 1) it is underpinned by neoliberal principles and causes the world to be seen through the market; 2) the agile self is focussed on the individual as the goal is to survive the economic terrain, not to benefit the community or society; and 3) if agility is to be the overriding principle, to what degree are other principles marginalised at its expense. Therefore it is useful to consider what is at stake if the VCS employee is refashioned to become an agile subject.

Another fundamental aspect of neoliberal governmentality and the fostering of subjectivity is the notion of freedom as an obligation to be free. As Rose et al. (2006) highlight: 'freedom, as choice, autonomy, self-responsibility, and the obligation to maximise one's life as a kind of enterprise is a principal strategy of neoliberal governmentality' (p.91). In other words, the neoliberal subject is positioned as being a free, autonomous and individualised being whose role it is to recognise their potential through self-determination and self-regulation (Foucault, 2008; Rose, 1999; Lemke, 2001). The idea of having free will shapes individuals' thinking so that they view their life as a consequence of their own choices. This links to the idea of responsibilisation, another key aspect of the neoliberal subject. The idea of responsibilisation, whereby individuals assume responsibility for structural issues and all domains of life are framed as an outcome of their individual choices, can be seen in the neoliberal project, from the reduction of the welfare state to personal monitoring of health and wellbeing using mobile tracking applications. In all its forms, the notion of individual responsibility renders life outcomes and choices personal, whilst minimising social and structural issues. Pyysiäinen et al (2017) attempt to theorise the process of responsibilisation as part of neoliberal governmental rule, and suggest that the process may operate through two mechanisms: firstly, through the appeal

of freedom and, secondly, through the threat to personal control. This thesis explores how employees are responsibilised through discourse, technologies and practices.

To understand subject formation, one needs to examine the rationalities and technologies which constitute subjects through techniques, practices and strategies. McKee (2009a) has challenged the application of governmentality as an analytical framework as research has largely pivoted towards a focus on the rationalities and the use of textual discourse analysis. McKee suggests that this approach disregards the explanatory power expressed in the original formulation of Foucault's ideas. The drawback of focussing on rationalities through textual discourse is that it inhibits engagement in the messy realities of how neoliberal governmentality operates in practice; fundamentally, it 'neglects that subjection is neither a smooth nor complete project; rather one inherently characterised by conflict, contestation and instability' (McKee, 2009a: 13-14). When attention is given to the messy realities, by examining the rationalities and technologies and practices, it reveals the breaks and fractures of neoliberalism – advancing the idea that neoliberalism can be subject to challenges from below. Localised, empirical accounts of neoliberal governmentality which allow for an examination of the micro-practices which occur in a particular space and time play an important role in illuminating how neoliberalism as a mode of government plays out and is interpreted by different actors, what techniques and strategies are deployed and what are the consequences of this – both intentional and unintentional. Bevir (2018) also argues for closer attention to practices which enable an examination of the differences between discourse and practices and the ways in which these are enacted by actors in a particular context. Further, he argues that by undertaking a close and detailed analysis of local contexts, attention is given to alternative and competitive discourses which exist, suggesting diversity in contemporary government. Thus neoliberal governmentality studies must be sensitive to time and space and go beyond textual analysis, giving voice to the voices of the governed and attention to the mundane micro-practices which constitute subjects, in order to fully realise the explanatory power of governmentality as a framework for analysing neoliberalism (McKee, 2009a, Bevir, 2018, Brady, 2014 and Li, 2007).

To summarise, the neoliberal subject is seen as an autonomous, individualised, responsible individual who is able to self-regulate and conduct themselves in line with a mindset of entrepreneurship and cost-benefit calculations, constantly striving to 'seek their own self value' (Weidner, 2009:406) and solve their problems through their own development. Brown (2005:43) adds to this, stating that the 'ideal neoliberal citizen who is governed is one who acts as an individual, a rational entrepreneur, one who strategises for himself' and not one who seeks, together with others, to alter or organise social or political structures. To unpack how subjects are constituted attention must be given to the rationalities, techniques and strategies that occur in a particular space and time so that the fragments and breaks in what is attempted can be identified, thus revealing what is actually achieved in practice (McKee, 2009a).

2.5 Resistance

Returning to Foucault's ideas on subjectivity, I will now discuss the scope for resistance. For Foucault, where there is power there is resistance. In his own words, 'I'm simply saying: as soon as there is a relation of powers, there's a possibility of resistance' (1980a:13). While Foucault has been critiqued (Poulantzas, 1978) for presenting a view of power which neglects the possibility of resistance, I would strongly argue that he makes a case for resistance in his conceptualisation of power and its effects. For example, he suggests discourse is a fragile notion which has room for resistance:

> We must make allowances for the complex and unstable process whereby a discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy. Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart. (Foucault 1978:100–1)

At the heart of any discussion of resistance, one must consider the way in which Foucault conceptualised power. Foucault's conceptualisation of power, a capillary form that interacts with the very smallest details of everyday lives, allows the possibility of various forms of resistance which reflect the dynamic, yet at times, almost invisible relationships of power. Resistance may therefore

appear in ways which are not relatable to other hegemonic, totalitarian notions of power; but instead in more subtle, everyday forms. Another way to view this type of resistance is what Lilja and Vinthagen (2018) refer to as 'productive resistance', which may include strategies such as 'counter-conduct', whereby individuals may conduct themselves differently through other leaders, objectives or methods (Foucault, 2009:194–5). While Foucault (2009) suggests the term is badly worded, he states that the notion can be considered in the following way: 'counter-conduct in the sense of struggle against the processes implemented for conducting others' (p.201). The idea of counter-conduct is essential as it values the technique of resistance that sits on the cusp of the political – behaviours and actions that may be difficult to conceptualise in relation to traditional ideas of the power-resistance relationship – whilst at the same time being significant politically as they are enmeshed in relationships of power (Demetriou, 2016).

Other forms of resistance suggested by Foucault include the reversal of discourse and the potential to reformulate subjectivity through technologies of the self. Butler (1995:236) suggests that reversal of discourse may occur through the re-iteration, re-articulation and repetition of dominant discourse with an altered meaning. Secondly, the technologies of self may be utilised in ways that serve the dominant discourse or that serve alternative and/or subordinated discourses. That is, even when opposing a discourse it still requires interaction with that discourse and one can only resist based on the subjectivities and discourse available to them (Lija and Vinthagen, 2018:11). Moreover, if power is everywhere, then the focus of any analysis needs to recognise that resistance may at times be contradictory, subtle, counterproductive or compliant. Resistance in this sense, therefore should not be conceptualised as 'liberation from oppression' instead should focus on the micro-level to unveil the ways in which strategies are implemented by the subjugated to contest and reformulate governmental strategies which aim to regulate their conduct (McKee, 2009b). In this vein, Sharma (2008) argues that subject formation is not reduced to the idea that governmental programmes simply refashion subjects into passive neoliberal subjects, rather that neoliberalism is ambiguous and has uneven effects (2008:189) which subjects challenge from below.

2.6 Reflections on Foucault's Tools

Having outlined some of Foucault's theoretical tools, I now offer a brief commentary on how I endeavour to use these Foucauldian/neo-Foucauldian ideas in my analysis. Firstly, in relation to neoliberalism as a form of governmentality, we must reject the idea that it forms a coherent apparatus and instead focus on assemblages, which can be evidenced in the everyday practices of individuals (Brady, 2014). Assemblages give weight to the idea that society is complex, dynamic and fluid, and consist of varying components over time and space, components that are contingent but not necessary (DeLanda, 2006). The view that neoliberal rule can be conceptualised as an assemblage is echoed by Wacquant who suggests that:

> There is not one big N Neoliberalism but an indefinite number of small- n neoliberalisms born of the ongoing hybridisation of neoliberal practices and ideas with local conditions and forms. (2012:70)

I will explore the 'everyday' experiences within Community Life and Healthscape to identify how neoliberalism infiltrates the discursive space, and to what extent a range of governmental rationalities and technologies shape the subjectivity of employees to fit ideally within the neoliberal project. I also seek to identify how neoliberalism links with other rationalities and practices and whether potential competing and/or complementing subjectivities are evident.

I believe that Foucault's toolkit will facilitate in revealing the changes in the VCS, and how these have affected employees in these organisations. The toolkit employed helps to reveal how neoliberal discourses and related practices in the organisations shape the subjectivity of employees. I will focus on how the discourses and practices are constraining and changing ways of work and how employees buy into or out of the dominant neoliberal discourse. I will specifically focus on how neoliberal discourse is actualised through how managers problematise the challenges facing the organisations, and in turn, how the proposed solutions are legitimised through a neoliberal discourse. I explore in detail how the solutions operate as technologies of subjectification, shaping employee conduct, and marginalising some possibilities whilst foregrounding others.

So far, I have presented some of the theoretical concepts guiding my research, and I now move on to outlining some key questions that emerge from these. How much has neoliberal thinking colonised the VCS? What do we expect to see when neoliberal rule is in operation e.g. responsibilitisation, reduction of structural issues to the individual level, adherence to market style behaviours?

How is neoliberalism, as a political rationality, translated into technologies of self and other practices? What effects do such practices have in shaping and constraining ways of working in the VCS? What are the local effects and consequences for employees? To what effect does neoliberal discourse shape the subjectivity of employees, and to what extent is this challenged, complemented or contradicted?

I have explored some of Foucault's key concepts in understanding how power operates, with a specific focus on how neoliberalism may be a mode of governance which seeks to govern through the subjectification of individuals. I have also noted that neoliberalism as a governmental mode is multi-layered, and may appear in many forms and, further, that how the conduct of others is affected may require multiple strategies, which appear at different times in complex ways. When adopting this framing in my research, it is necessary to identify whether neoliberal governmentality operates in the VCS. In the next section, I will discuss in detail my analytical approach, which aims to illuminate which rationalities govern employees in Community Life and Healthscape and what the effects of these are for employees' subjectivity.

2.7 The WPR Approach: Operationalising neoliberal governmentality

To operationalise the Foucauldian ideas presented in the previous section of this thesis, I will use the work of the Australian academic Carol Bacchi as a background and overarching analytical strategy. Bacchi (1999; 2009) developed the WPR (What is the problem represented to be?) approach as a practical tool for systematic critical analysis of problematisations. The overarching aim of the WPR approach is not to identify 'real' problems but instead to interrogate how problems are constituted, and consequently what solutions are deemed suitable in response to the problem constitution. Informed by Foucault's concept of governmentality, Bacchi aims to provide a tool for researchers to ask questions with the aim of analysing how we are governed through identifying the problem representation – problematisation. The study of problematisation sheds light on the types of thinking and rules that comprise governing. The WPR approach consists of six questions, not all of which need to or can be answered within the scope of this research, but questions from the resource can be selected to assist researchers in formulating an analysis appropriate for their objectives. Bacchi (2009) makes clear that the WPR approach is not prescriptive and, as such, researchers should draw on the various questions as and when they are useful. The starting point of the WPR approach is based upon the simple concept that what we propose to do about something reveals the thinking about what the problem is. This starting point facilitates the process of reflection and the analysis of how governing takes place, how we become governed subjects and what the effects of this process are. The six questions posed in the WPR approach are:

1. What is the 'problem' represented to be?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the 'problem'?
3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?

5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?
6. How or where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been (or could it be) questioned, disrupted and replaced?

(Bacchi, 2009: xii)

The WPR approach, whilst traditionally and typically used in the policy analysis field, has served as a useful background and overarching analytical tool to unpack my findings in Community Life and Healthscape. Bacchi (2018) argues that the WPR approach has utility in areas other than the analysis of policy, as the approach rests on the presuppositions that governing also takes place in non-governmental institutions.

Further, knowledge can be produced and reproduced by experts, organisations and physical spaces, that is, proposed actions can be developed in various formats (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016:18). Botrell and Meagher (2008) also suggest that WPR is a critical approach in understanding how interventions can be unpacked to understand what a problem is represented to be, as the interventions themselves shed light on what the problem is understood to be. This same view is shared in relation to concepts, for example the notion of equality can be interrogated to understand what is problematised (Bacchi, 1996). The WPR approach is thus critical in understanding not only policy, but what is problematised and how, to make particular courses of action intelligible via a range of various forms.

Having briefly outlined the WPR approach, I will now examine each question in turn to provide a more in-depth insight. Although I address each question in turn, it must be noted that there is a relationship between all the questions and hence, some explanations are placed under a particular question but also serve as a foundation to follow-up questions – these questions and their answers are inextricably linked throughout my analysis.

Question 1: What is the problem represented to be?

The initial question asks the research to interrogate what the problem is represented to be by working back from the proposal to bring about change. This process illuminates the implicit problems, based on the suggested solutions: looking at the proposals makes visible what is being problematised. According to Foucault, practices are how objects and subjects are created. As Bacchi (2009) notes, this is best illustrated in Foucault's study of madness. Foucault argues that madness is not an object and the mad are not a subject until they are produced via practice. Therefore, examining the practices which are in place in the VCS enables identification of what is being problematised. These practices may also be known as technologies, defined by Bacchi (2009) as the practical methods and techniques used to govern human conduct – that is, the concrete arrangements by which rationalities (I will return to this concept) are put into practice. Dean elaborates on this definition in his work on analytics of governmentality: 'the techne of government is [to consider] … [through] what means, mechanisms, procedures, instruments, tactics, techniques, technologies and vocabularies is authority constituted and rule accomplished? (Dean, 2010:42). Such technologies are set and/or implemented against a backdrop of a particular problem – the rationality. As such, the technologies used are adopted as logical responses to the stated problems.

By examining Question 1, a preliminary understanding is gained, further developed throughout the remaining questions, of the rationalities associated with specific modes of governing. Rationalities focus on the development of 'truths' in a particular context in a given space and time, and on knowledge production which serves to shape the understanding of reality. Within these rationalities, problems may be identified and particular narrative devices (Gedalof, 2018) utilised to produce and (re)produce this knowledge amongst actors. Chronology is a narrative device used to identify what is in the past and what is the new version of the future. Another device used is the narrative arc, which constructs a crisis and the proposed resolution to this crisis. The narrative arc is focussed on the ways in which the development of a crisis, and the particular set of resolutions it demands, come together

forming a narrative arc of crisis-resolution. The narrative of a crisis becomes a 'major framing logic' for the assumed audience. Within the production of knowledge, we are invited to identify positively with certain ideas, subjectivities and perspectives, while disavowing others. Lastly, the narratives affect 'which qualities we are invited to judge, tolerate, abject and champion' (Gedalof, 2018:11). Thus, rationalities help gain consensus for the pathway required for the new future. In relation to my analysis, it is imperative to question what the narrative achieves and what is omitted from the narrative, that is, whether there are any inconsistencies or alternative narratives identified in the data collected. Furthermore, for what do the rationalities enable consent? These questions are further explored below.

Question 2: What presuppositions or assumptions underpin this representation of the 'problem'?

The aim of Question 2 is to gain a deeper understanding of what assumptions are made to make the proposal intelligible. The question seeks to analyse what knowledge is taken for granted, and to identify which types of thinking lie behind the problem representation and how it was possible for particular proposals to emerge? This question also requires the researcher to note any patterns which can be found in the problematisations, in order to understand the background motifs to the thinking. Do particular modes of thinking repeat themselves in the problem representations? To help answer Question 2, Bacchi posits that the conceptual logics underpinning a problem representation can be located in the use of binaries, concepts and categories, and further suggests (2018) that when applying the WPR to interviews (as opposed to policy texts), it is useful to approach this question with the aim of searching for the types of discourse-knowledge that underpin and validate certain proposals.

Question 3: How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?

This question encourages the researcher to analyse how the problem representation has been able to take shape and achieve dominance (Bacchi, 2009:11). Relying on Foucault's concept of genealogy, the researcher is probed to question the conditions in a particular period of time that have allowed for

'this or that enunciation to be formulated' (Foucault, 1972:15). This question seeks to identify relationships of power which may highlight uneven developments or subjugated discourses which have been drawn upon, or not, to give authority to the representation of a problem in a certain space and time. A point to consider in Question 3 is how the issue might have evolved differently.

Question 4: What is left unproblematic in this problem representation?

This question compels the researcher to think problematically about the problematisation, that is to consider other ways of thinking about this problem representation and what has been silenced or excluded from it? In responding to this question, I seek to identify what has not been problematised within the two organisations; what has been overlooked in constructing the problem representations. To summarise, Bacchi states the aim of Question 4 is to 'bring into discussion, issues and perspectives that are silenced in identified problem representation' (2009:13).

Question 5: What effects (discursive, subjectification, lived) are produced by this representation of the problem?

Bacchi (2009) argues that the construction of problems includes three overlapping effects: discursive, subjectification and lived effects. This question recognises that the representation of the problem shapes worlds and (re)creates effects and as such is of paramount importance in this thesis. Bacchi (2009) identifies the effects as a key element of governmentality analysis, in identifying how people are shaped and maintained by the network of power. Dean (2010) suggests asking, in relation to effects, 'what forms of person, self and identity are presupposed by different practices of government and what sorts of transformations do these practices seek … what forms of conduct are expected of them? … How are certain aspects of conduct problematised? How are they to be reformed?' (p. 43). Fundamental to the effects of government is to consider how government operates to 'elicit various identifications for various reasons' (Dean, 2010:43). As this thesis focusses on front-line employees within the VCS, this question is significant, as it engages with the experiences of

employees and how the wider context, and its implications on and within the organisation, can impact on employees in a multitude of ways. Discursive effects are concerned with what can or cannot be said about an issue, providing a frame about what is valued, what is relevant and what is devalued. Subjectification effects focus on how the employees are constituted and constitute themselves, how the representation of the problem creates certain subject positions which employees are prompted to take up or to reject. These effects serve as dividing practices, whereby individuals are governed through the ways in which they see themselves and through which others are stigmatised. As Foucault notes, 'the subject is either divided within himself or from others' (Foucault, 1982:777–778). Finally, the representation of what a problem is can also have lived effects -- material impacts on people's bodies and lives. It is important to note that the three effects noted by Bacchi are interrelated – for example the subjectification effects of being stigmatised can lead to material effects; whilst these are separated for practicality, they are deeply interconnected.

> Question 6: How and where has this representation of the problem been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?

Question 6 is the focus of Chapter 9 in this thesis, although aspects of it are discussed in Chapters 4–8. This question seeks to understand how some problem representations have become dominant, and how they can be displaced if they are deemed detrimental. In order to interrogate the latter part of the question, an understanding of where the problem representation is defended and disseminated is necessary. To identify how the proliferation of certain types of thinking can be contested, we must first locate how these ways of thinking are disseminated and defended. This question focusses on what alternatives are available; whether there is evidence of resistance to the problematisation of certain groups or practices; and whether it is possible to destabilise assumed truths upon which the problem representation relies.

2.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined some of Foucault's key works, which build an understanding of neoliberal governmentality and have reflected on how these tools will provide a frame to guide the analysis in this research. Governmentality, as a form of inquiry, provides a platform through which to explore how employees' experiences and subjectivities are shaped by the wider context and, more specifically, whether neoliberalism is a mode of government shaping their experiences. Governmentality research is driven by attention to rationalities, technologies and the shaping of subjects, whilst it also highlights the importance of identifying scope for resistance. Thus, this framework supports my desire to explore the everyday experiences of front-line employees whilst identifying the discourses and practices which shape these experiences, and simultaneously identifying spaces for resistance. Governmentality as a guiding framework exposes that which is taken for granted, and can subsequently enable a better understanding of how neoliberalism can be resisted by VCS organisations and their employees. To gain a more detailed and operationalised understanding of the data collected, I have highlighted how I will operationalise governmentality with Bacchi's analytical approach, WPR. This approach was used in the research and provides a systematic tool for understanding the nature of the rules (rationalities) that comprise governance, by working backwards from the proposed solutions (technologies) and then understanding how these come together to have effects on the subject.

To begin examining this phenomenon, in the next chapter I explore the existing literature, which suggests that neoliberal rule plays a role in the sector.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the literature related to my thesis, illustrating how my research connects with an existing body of literature exploring the changing nature of the VCS.

This chapter is presented in three key sections. In the first, I explore how the neoliberal context has changed the relationship between the state and the VCS through increased use of market mechanisms, specifically contracting arrangements. In the second, I explore in more detail how these contracting arrangements have had implications for the way VCS organisations are structured and managed. In the third section, I look more closely at how the broader changes and subsequent organisational changes have impacted on working conditions for employees. Throughout this chapter, I highlight how my thesis aims to explore these shifts from the viewpoint of governmentality, explaining my original contribution to this area of research.

3.2 Government Expectations of VCS: The shift from the Keynesian model to Neoliberalism

Throughout the Conservative governments of the 1980s and 1990s, there was a broad shift away from Keynesian-based state policy towards neoliberalism (Evan et al., 2005), and this shift has continued incrementally under the various political parties in power over the last three decades. This section begins by discussing the shift and its implication for the relationship between the state and the VCS.

Under the Keynesian model, the VCS grew significantly and was viewed as a partner of the state delivery of services, particularly in serving communities which the state struggled to reach. The VCS was viewed as being able to deliver services in flexible, bespoke and non-bureaucratic ways (Deakin, 2003). Its role was not to replace state services but to provide more personal services as its

organisations were closer to the communities they served and worked from a specific set of values. The VCS also had a significant role in advocacy for marginalised communities. Thus, the relationship between the state and VCS provided a platform for the voices of marginalised communities.

Funding during the Keynesian period was often long-term, core funding, which allowed scope for services to be delivered however the VCS saw as appropriate. Much funding was provided in the form of grants, with trust a central feature of such awards, rather than regulation, flexibility rather than bureaucracy, which allowed the VCSOs a degree of autonomy in providing an appropriate service. The VCS was viewed as complementing state provision (Evans, 2005:76), rather than replacing or displacing it.

Evans et al. (2005) observe that it is important to note that the relationship between the state and VCS was no by means perfect and was at times characterised by its ad hoc and uneven nature. However, the authors note that this relationship was far better for the VCS than the neoliberal type relationship that exists today.

The shift from a Keynesian state to one informed by neoliberal ideology saw significant changes for the VCS, with the relationship shifting from one based on cooperation and trust to one aligned with market regulations. New Labour instigated changes which shifted the relationship between the state and voluntary sector (Davies, 2011). There was an increased focus on competition, timed contracts and accountability. A significant feature of these changes was the use of contract funding over grant funding for the VCS. The government implemented changes which saw a greater integration of the voluntary sector as a provider of public services. Davies argues that New Labour continued with the neoliberal philosophy of the previous Conservative government and implemented public sector reform with the use of NPM tools and the introduction of ‘quasi markets’ of public service delivery. Within their adopted model, core services were to be delivered by the state (including through contracts with other providers) and peripheral activity could be delivered by private and third sector organisations. There was a commitment by New Labour to invest in public

sector services, but this commitment was heavily underpinned by a market ideology whereby inefficiencies could be driven out and standards raised by increased competition, performance management, consumer choice and purchaser/provider split (Davies, 2011:642). This led to a rise in the use of managerialism in the third sector under the New Labour government (Harris, 2010). Against this backdrop, public services were now to be viewed as expenses from the public purse rather than services provided by the public sector. The voluntary sector was considered a significant part of this plan and New Labour invested in horizontal support for the sector, supporting organisational development, training, and improvements in infrastructure e.g. information technology systems (Alcock, 2016; Kendall, 2003). Davies (2011) notes that the voluntary sector was seen as significant in the transformation, due to its perceived positive characteristics, such as 'closeness to the service user, capacity for innovation, flexibility, its contribution to civic cohesion and democratic engagement through its advocacy role' (p. 643). However, Milbourne (2013) observes that New Labour viewed the voluntary sector as an alternative to addressing market failures and pervading social problems, whilst Carmel and Harlock (2008) suggest that this renewed interest in the VCS by New Labour was to establish the sector as 'governable terrain'.

The investment by New Labour was not restricted to building organisational capacity; there was also a significant increase in funding to the sector for service delivery and community engagement. However, whilst there was growth in funding, this was in contract funding rather than grant funding. Clarke et al. (2009:14) state that, whilst income increased from £8.4 billion in 2000 to £12 billion in 2007, this increase was from contract funding. There was simultaneously a decline in grant funding from £4.6 billion in 2000–1 to £4.2 billion in 2006–7. Whilst this decline in grant funding occurred over a 5-year period, there was concurrently a 105% increase in contract funding from £3.8 billion to £7.8 billion. If we reconsider the point made in the previous paragraph, that the third sector's value was seen in attributes such as closeness to service users, flexibility and engagement with communities, questions arise about the nature of spending on the voluntary sector. In particular, why

was there significant growth in contract funding compared to grant funding, given the flexibility provided in grant funding compared to the inflexibility associated with contracts?

Under neoliberal governance, the VCS were considered 'partners'. However, Evans et al. (2005) argue that the rhetoric of partnership disguised the relationship of power between the state and the VCS. The power was still largely guided by the contractual arrangements between the state and the VCS but, under the guise of partnership, the VCS was seen as being a relevant party which could help to sustain public provision of services. However, this expectation had consequences. It is argued that the VCS needed to become more market-focussed in its approach, including becoming more professional and accountable. This had implications which are discussed later in this chapter. Evans et al. (2005) argue that the state over-emphasised the role of the VCS and, instead, the authors saw the relationship between the state and the VCS as a neoliberal strategy to dismantle the welfare state and place greater onus on individuals.

The neoliberal paradigm saw a range of market mechanisms introduced into welfare services, which impacted on organisations providing these services. As neoliberalism became accepted as common sense, it was seen that state-provided services could only be sustainable if the organisations delivering these services operated in a market fashion, including adopting business values such as being efficient and effective. NPM was considered a strategy for introducing such business practices into the VCS, and thus new mechanisms such as contractual funding and accountability frameworks were introduced.

The contract-based funding regime introduced under neoliberal governance included specific outputs being delivered within particular time-frames, with little room for flexibility. In this type of funding, the state defines what it wants, how much it will fund and what outputs it expects (Rochester, 2013). The rationale for such a rigid approach is often presented as a means to control waste of public funds by 'inefficient' VCS organisations (Deakin, 2001). This type of contract was accompanied by a performance measurement framework. VCS organisations would need to enter a competitive

bidding process to gain access to these funds; assessment of suitability for receiving funds was often based upon the best value for money, which in neoliberal terms is often interpreted as the lowest cost with the greatest output. This process served to weaken and devalue the VCS's traditional strengths.

The contract-funding regime continues to be characterised for the most part by short-term funding, which is insecure as the VCS participates in fluctuating business cycles (Suykens et al., 2019). The requirements in the contracts are based on government-imposed agendas (Cunningham and James, 2011), causing VCSOs to drift from their missions and diverse roles (Kendall and Knapp, 1995) in serving marginalised communities and advocacy. Furthermore, the new funding regime was not based on a full-cost recovery model, which saw VCSOs struggling to meet the administrative and other costs of being involved in the competitive bidding process. As the contracts were tied to specific outputs, insufficient consideration was given to overheads, which VCS organisations felt compelled to keep to a minimum due to the competitive environment (Cunningham et al., 2013). Thus, the contract-funding regime had implications for HR systems including employee benefits and supervision (Kendall, 2004).

Evans et al. (2005) and Jacklin-Jarvis (2015) argue that the relationship between the VCS and the state is now characterised by disempowerment because of the shift from the Keynesian welfare state to one dominated by neoliberalism. This is largely due to the changing policy context (Hogg and Baines, 2011), ongoing repositioning of the VCS and its role, and the state holding more power, due to its gatekeeping function over resources. Evans et al. (2005) argue that the relationship between the state and VCS has also been displaced under the neoliberal policy changes, due to diminished trust. The relationship between the two parties was historically regulated via trust rather than the use of performance-measurement tools, which allowed the VCSOs flexibility in the way they reached their goals. Jacklin-Jarvis (2015) notes that to overcome the issues above, the VCS is required to 'work around' (p.7) the relationship, undermining any scope for collaboration. Such working around includes strategies such as backroom negotiations rather than going through formal processes and/or

limiting the values-based 'voice' in public forums. The suggestion of a relationship characterised by disempowerment is further illustrated when VCSOs are having to use secretive tactics to assert influence with funders and have difficulty in voicing their distinct values, in public spaces.

Under the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government of 2010-2015, an ideological and material shift was evident in relation to the role of the third sector (Macmillan, 2013), in terms of who was an appropriate provider of welfare services, with a greater focus on market competition and a significant increase in private sector organisations being favoured and the VCS being sub-contractors of corporate organisations (Murray, 2013). The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) (2013) report that the third sector was reduced significantly under the coalition government, with a reduction in both grants and donations. This loss of income must be seen against a backdrop of rising inflation.

The shift under the coalition government implies a move towards the privatisation of welfare services, which further begs the question of how much the VCS strengths are valued under this new approach (Milbourne and Cushman, 2015) and how far the operating environment is shifting for VCSOs. The use of third sector organisations as sub-contractors of corporate bodies has led to harsher and more inflexible terms; smaller organisations are often unable to manage the sub-contractor financial arrangement due to a lack of reserves, and Murray (2013) suggests that VCSOs are merely being used as 'bid candy', later discarded by the corporate companies. Milbourne and Cushman (2015) suggest that, despite conditions seeming better under New Labour, it was this political period that exacerbated the vulnerability of the VCS, leading to the issues that the sector is experiencing now. Its heavy economic reliance on state grants as its main source of income has led to the sector having to further compromise on its purpose and activities.

Recent trends in the sector have established that the VCS is also facing the challenge of reduced funding availability, as income from local government contracts has reduced from 37% in 2009–10 to 31% in 2016–17. However, this reduction is skewed towards small and medium-sized charities;

the proportion of income for larger charities is 39% from local government, with an astounding 86% of government funding being received by large organisations (NCVO, 2019b). It has been argued that the shift from grants to contracts has benefitted larger charities as they are able to meet the increasing scale of contracts and the introduction of mechanisms for payment by results (NCVO, 2016). A more stringent availability of funds impacts on the financial stability of the VCS, as well as causing an increase in demand from communities as they face social problems no longer supported by public services (Doeringer, 2010). These changes are unsurprising given the features of neoliberalism in relation to the reconstruction of the state. Evans et al. (2005) argue that it is characterised by an emphasis on fiscal constraints, and an increased focus on management, performance management, business practices, the introduction of markets in the public sector and deregulation in favour of markets.

The financial context is argued to be one of the most significant factors influencing the experience of VCS employees, and plays a significant role in determining the conditions of their work. Cunningham et al (2013) identified that the financial context had greater influence over conditions for voluntary sector employees than the work of unions. Membership of unions in the voluntary sector is low (Hemmings, 2011) and Cunningham et al. (2013) suggest that even were this to increase, there is inadequate evidence to suggest that unions will be able to protect employees against deteriorating terms and conditions at work produced as a result of an unstable financial context. The reduction in the availability of funds is thus a pertinent concern when considering the welfare of employees in the VCS.

An overarching theme of many of the changes in the voluntary sector is the introduction of NPM, which is underpinned by both neoliberalism and managerialism. Despite the differences in their historical roots, they work together to underpin the practical manifestations of NPM; Shepherd (2018) argues they form ‘twin ideological pillars’ (p.1669). NPM marked a shift from the traditional form of public administration to governing which involved enacting management changes unpinned by

market-values (Lynch, 2014). Clarke et al. (2000:7) argue that NPM is not a neutral management approach but instead works to institutionalise market values into the workings of the organisation. Kelliher and Parry (2011) observe that the public sector has itself undergone significant shifts as a result of NPM and, in the contract climate, contracting has operated as a means of influencing the management practices of the VCS. Key tenets of NPM include the use of private sector tools and practices in the public and voluntary sectors (Hyndman, 2017), with a concern for 'efficiency, effectiveness and excellence' (Deem, 1998). The increase in NPM since the 1980s has supported the notion that a contractual arrangement between the state and the VCS is preferable to grant funding; that the use of precise performance measurements techniques are a means of accountability; and that market-style attitudes, such as competition, are beneficial for the growth of the VCS. Such premises are rooted in the idea that operating like a business is 'good', despite concerns that NPM practices and doctrines are not appropriate in the VCS (Newman, 2000; Hyndman, 2017).

In this contracting climate, managerialism can be considered the organisational arm of neoliberalism, operating through the introduction of NPM tools into the VCS. So far, I have highlighted how the relationship between state and VCS, and expectations, have shifted. I will now review the literature which highlights the implications of these shifts in the sector.

3.3 Impacts of the Contract Culture on the Sector

3.3.1. Operate like a business

It is argued that VCS organisations are increasingly operating like commercial businesses in their approach and becoming more professionalised in their management (Keevers et al., 2012) because they are operating across both the non-profit arena and the market domain (Maier and Meyer, 2016). One reason for this is the increasing need for these organisations to participate in competitive tendering for public sector contracts (Bode, 2006). Such contracts are associated with a focus on outcomes (Garland and Darcy, 2009), with increasing demands on evidencing value through

accounting measures (Manville and Greatbanks, 2010) and demanding more 'professional' management approaches (Tomlinson and Schwabenland, 2010). This shift towards being more professional is conceptualised as hybridisation. Suykens et al. (2019) carried out a literature review which illuminated four organisational features of the hybridisation of third sector organisations: commercialisation, corporatisation, managerialism and entrepreneurship.

Commercialisation refers to how and why income is generated, i.e. for social objectives or monetary gain. In some cases, income generation may be closely associated with social objectives, such as user fees for services whilst, on the other hand, income may be generated for non-social objectives, such as consultancy services to the private sector (Weisbrod, 1998). Concerns relating to commercialisation have been raised, particularly in regard to organisations changing their constitution from a charity to a for-profit organisation or, what may be classified as a mid-way point, a social enterprise. Commercialisation may be associated with the increase of the social enterprise discourse. Social enterprises are businesses which have social goals and were heavily promoted and supported by the New Labour government (Nicholls, 2010). The discourse surrounding policy documents during this period suggested that VCS organisations could generate profit if they adopted commercial practices; this profit could then be invested in the wider community (Dey and Teesdale, 2016). This agenda was continued under the coalition government, with rhetoric suggesting that social enterprises could help to mend a 'broken society' (Alcock, 2010:1) and great importance placed on third sector organisations providing public services. There has been an increase in the number of social enterprises, as VCS organisations seek commercial strategies to survive in difficult economic times. It is argued in management literature that there is not necessarily a conflict between economic success and social value (Arthur et al., 2006) and that social enterprises can resolve social issues which both the public and third sectors have failed to address (Sepulveda, 2009). However, Humphries and Grant (2005) argue that the introduction of social enterprises should not be considered value-free, but instead that social enterprises are the manifestation of the drive towards the market doctrine.

The second feature highlighted by Suykens et al. (2019), corporatisation, is adopted when third sector organisations are seen to be adopting governing practices from the corporate arena; this may come in the form of governance tools or recruiting board members from the corporate sector.

The third aspect identified by Suykens et al. (2019) is the introduction of managerialism in third sector organisations, including the following internal features or changes: close control of organisational processes, including the use of performance measures (Carnochan et al, 2014); standardising work processes (Baines, Cunningham and Fraser, 2011); the use of corporate tools (Hvenmark, 2013); or the recruitment of managerial professionals (Hwang and Powell, 2009). The same literature review also identified the external features of managerialism, which are based on the economic outlook of organisations, whereby clients may now become consumers, non-profit services become commodities and communication becomes marketing.

The final feature highlighted is entrepreneurship, whereby organisations may create a dual bottom line – based both on social and economic value.

Recommendations from the review (Suykens et al., 2019) suggest further research into how the competing demands that may arise from hybridisation are managed and resolved within organisations. This can, of course, be studied from a management perspective, but value can also be drawn from the perspective of front-line employees, who are arguably at the heart of the tension created by the competing demands of hybridisation.

The use of NPM tools also has scope to reduce workplace democracy. Of considerable importance to my research, the review by Suykens et al. (2019) found that the hybridisation of third sector organisations can significantly erode workplace democracy through the introduction of corporate tools and the standardisation of processes (Baines, 2010). The erosion of workplace democracy can lead to increased tensions in the workplace (Kreutzer and Jager, 2011) and higher levels of union

membership (Baines et al, 2014). The shift towards hybridisation can thus reduce the participatory nature of third sector organisations.

The reduction in employee participation is corroborated by the findings of Baines et al. (2012), who note that an increase in managerialism has led to employees being excluded from formal mechanisms of participation within organisations. These findings confirm those of Alatrista and Arrowsmith (2004), who also noted that employees felt excluded from decision-making and feared negative repercussions if they spoke out in opposition to the management's view or direction; this fear was exacerbated for lower-level employees. This exclusion may play out in the reduction of staff meetings and supervisions, and the decision to eradicate these formal types of participation may be considered a cost-cutting exercise by management or a means of silencing the staff voice.

The body of research illustrates that VCS organisations are experiencing a shift which requires them to operate more like a business in their practices and management. Through a Foucauldian lens, this would suggest that the discursive environment has shifted, but how does this discursive environment take shape, through which technologies, and underpinned by which rationalities? Furthermore, which discourses are valued and which marginalised, in order that this shift becomes a 'regime of truth'?

Suykens et al. (2019) also highlighted more positive effects of hybridisation, suggesting that increasing the organisations' income, separate to receiving public sector contracts and particularly when providing services unrelated to social objectives (Dart, 2004), can be beneficial. For example, increased income may provide more stability for the work-force, and the commercialisation of third sector organisations may result in greater organisational legitimacy. However, this legitimacy is closely linked to managerial ideas of efficiency and effectiveness (Andersson and Self, 2015), which in themselves can be problematic, as the benchmarks for these concepts are defined outside the third sector. Consequently, any potential benefits in legitimacy may be limited, particularly for the internal dynamics of the organisation.

Whilst these positive benefits have been noted, a body of work has shown that shifts towards commercialism have had implications for VCS organisations. The following section will focus in more detail on the nature of these implications. Much of the research in the field focusses on the influence of managerialism and its implications on the organisation of work and the increased use of performance management techniques in the sector. Another dominant theme in the literature is the shift in market-style attitudes adopted by VCS organisations as a result of the funding environment. This section will move on to discuss the loss of values and types of work, and the adoption of poor HR practices, as a result of the reduction in funding, as survival strategies are sought by organisations in unstable periods.

3.3.2. An increase in performance management

Tools such as performance measurement frameworks have been a significant area of focus and concern in third sector research for scholars (Carnochan et al., 2014) and campaigning organisations alike (National Coalition for Independent Action (NCIA), 2015a). Davies (2011) notes that significant changes which have arisen from the increase in contracts include an increase in public-sector prescriptions and performance measurement tools to improve services, as the VCS is now considered a provider of core public services. Baines (2004:274) argues that 'public-sector management [is] characterised by performance results, contracting out, and the attainment of accountability and efficiency through individual achievement of set targets, behavioural coaching and ongoing evaluation'. This approach to management is significantly different from the outcomes model traditionally used in the VCS under the Keynesian welfare state (Evans et al., 2005).

Most performance measures deployed in the third sector are taken from the private or public sectors. Although there is little research regarding their effectiveness, it is argued they 'can be used' (Moxham and Boaden, 2007) or adapted. Other authors argue that performance measures used in the third sector do not adequately capture the full extent or nature of the work in which the organisations engage, minimising and limiting their outputs and achievements (Ferlie and Steane, 2002).

Furthermore, there is debate over whether employees in the VCS have the necessary level of understanding of performance measurement frameworks, as well as a mismatch between the deliverables of the contracts and the requirements of the frameworks through which are implemented (Moxham and Boaden, 2007). For front-line workers engaging in work which involves social change, performance measurement frameworks can be rigid, focussed mainly on quantitative measures (Shaw and Allen, 2006). Mook et al. (2003) argue for performance measurement frameworks which report on social and economic impacts to be used, to mitigate some of these issues, while Shaw and Allen (2006) argue that trust should be the central feature of auditing and accounting between funders and the VCS.

Manville and Greatbanks (2010) add to this debate, highlighting two areas central to performance measurement in the third sector: 1) the choice of appropriate measures to accurately reflect the complex and social nature of the work of the third sector organisations; and 2) the choice of performance measurements used to satisfy funded accountability and transparency requirements. These areas are presented as dilemmas, as the objectives of VCSOs and funders may not align and fundamentally, the funding body holds greater power (particularly financial but also symbolic) and is thus able to prioritise its requirements over that of the third sector organisation. The authors discuss the frustrations that arise amongst third sector managers concerning the lack of suitability of these measurements to reflect the nature of the work of third sector organisations. Their recommendations include providing both numerical data as well as more qualitative insights, which may serve to relieve management frustrations. However, two significant concerns arise from this point: 1) how much value does this provide for funders, who operate within a quantitative paradigm of measuring and accounting, and 2) the additional workload associated with creating a qualitative portfolio of evidence which is not a contractual requirement. The additional work involved in collecting the qualitative data is minimised in this study:

> it…does require management and coordination to be useful, but these tasks are considered minimal within the context of managing an organisation (Manville and Greatbanks, 2010:581)

This may imply that the third sector organisations should carry out the additional work to satisfy themselves, but it does not account for the labour or other potential implications involved, not only for managers but also for front-line staff. Such recommendations seem to avoid the funders being held to account for changes in practice, but instead create additional work for the third sector organisations and in particular for front-line workers who are required to collect the majority of the data needed.

McCambridge (2005) asserts that accountability measures such as contracts do not hold third sector organisations accountable, but instead distract them from their organisational mission. Furthermore, organisations will be accountable to other stakeholders, including the board and participants of their services, which may conflict with the accountability measures imposed by the funder. However, due to the power dynamics between the funders and the VCS, it may be argued that the funder's form of accountability is likely to be prioritised. Consequently, the responsibilities of the organisations to their participants may be neglected, such as the degree of engagement a participant may require.

Performance tools were introduced into the VCS under the guise of accountability. However, Evans et al. (2005:86) make a clear distinction between types of accountability and assert that administrative accountability, evaluation and public accountability are not distinguished, leading to a lack of clarity around purpose and impacts of accountability in the third sector. They argue that the majority of accountability measures imposed on VCS organisations are administrative, and primarily include being able to demonstrate that funds are spent in accordance with contractual agreements. they argue that there has been growing pressure on VCS organisations to produce appropriate paperwork to justify their funds, which limits the time that employees can spend actually delivering the services. Levasseur and Philips (2005) add that paperwork can take up to 20% of employee hours,

yet this is not acknowledged or funded (Baines et al, 2014). Consequently, Evans et al. (2005) argue that administrative accountability has dominated at the expense of other aforementioned types of accountability.

A significant aspect of accounting technologies is the reduction of work to numbers, whereby success is judged by quantifiable measures. In order for this style of management to be successful, it required changes to the organisation of work processes in the third sector. The achievement of quantifiable targets requires greater management control, which saw a shift from flatter structures in third sector organisations to the more hierarchical structures common in the private and public sectors. NPM also encourages management to operate the organisations as business entities, focussing on professionalisation and efficiency and consequently adopting business orientated solutions. The nature of funding availability for third sector organisations has led to an increase in business tools and practices in the sector (Hvenmark, 2013; King 2017). However, it is argued that these solutions shift practices to ones which do not necessarily align with the mission of the organisation.

The reduction of outcomes to quantifiable measures also impacts on the characteristics of the role of the VCS employee. For example, autonomy is considered to be a characteristic of roles within the third sector (Cunningham, 2010); however, such features may come under threat as these organisations are increasingly engaging in performance-based contracts with strict outcome requirements. Furthermore, the reduction of work into quantifiable forms demands less creativity from employees, which has implications for labour costs. It is assumed that, as employees require less skill, people with fewer or different credentials can be hired, reducing the cost of labour (Evans et al., 2005). Given the instability of the funding context, this can be viewed as an appropriate strategy, particularly when considered through a neoliberal lens.

Largely, research regarding performance measures has discussed the usefulness (or not) of business practices, such as performance measurement, in the sector but there is still a lack of research

into how these measures may affect employees, particularly from the perspective of those same employees. However, King (2017) has made some contribution to this discussion.

King (2017) argues that accounting technologies shape individuals to see the world through a particular framework. Consequently, tools such as performance measurement are not an insignificant means of managing contracts and relationships; instead, they serve the purpose of managing the subjectivities of employees, in that 'practices produce professionalisation' (p.24). King argues that this process is exacerbated in smaller organisations, as managers and employees are instrumental in the 'development, implementation and judging of performance measures [albeit to meet an externally imposed requirement] and therefore act in ways that manage themselves'. Whilst funders often set the parameters for performance measurements, very often it is up to individuals within the organisation to oversee and shape this process. Therefore, as Miller and Rose (2008) suggest, such technologies serve to govern the conduct of individuals whilst 'according them a certain autonomy of decisional power and responsibility for their actions' (p.213).

3.3.3. Market-style attitudes

One of the implications of contract culture in the VCS is the shift towards competition. The commissioning process, determined by market relationships, demands transparent competition which, it is argued, leads VSC to professionalise, build capacity, and adapt organisational values where these are deemed problematic (McCabe and Phillimore, 2012). Such competition discourages relationships between organisations, hindering collaboration and the sharing of knowledge on best practice to provide effective services to the community, and instead viewing other organisations as competitors for potential contracts (Buckingham, 2009). Milbourne (2009) also argues that the competitive element of commissioning poses a threat to the survival of smaller organisations, diminishing the services provided by smaller organisations, which often have a rich knowledge of the local community.

There are also challenges for small to medium organisations in collaborative working. These organisations, often without the infrastructure or resources to compete for funding as a stand-alone organisation, have adopted collaboration as a survival strategy. Such partnerships, though, can present issues for the smaller organisation, as larger organisations with greater resources dominate the relationship, leading to a diminished representation of the smaller organisation's values and mission (Harris, 2015). NCIA (2015a) report that collaborative relationships of this nature are also characterised by short-term strategic decision-making, rather than longer term relationships.

3.3.4. A loss of values and changes to the nature of work

It is argued that the VCS has distinct qualities in its ability to work with disadvantaged groups, or groups with a specific geographical focus or interest (Kendall, 2003). Moreover, it is argued that VCSOs possess the knowledge and relationships to tackle social problems (Kramer, 1987). Such distinct features have allowed them to position themselves as key stakeholders, essential for the delivery of successful welfare services (Do Domenico et al., 2009).

Whilst it is argued that the third sector is unique in having a value-based approach to the delivery public services (Alcock, 2010), commentators such as the NCIA (2015a) debate the continuation of this uniqueness, and argue that an increasing reliance on the state has reduced their ability to remain independent and, therefore, values-based. Instead, it is argued that the sector has increasingly become more market-focussed, adopting a business approach to the services it delivers and in the management of its organisations (Billis, 2010; Suykens et al., 2019). Competing in a market-style economy, required to participate in the contract and commissioning process, threatens the VCSOs' ability to remain values-based, and presents challenges in remaining committed to their social mission, potentially eroding the values which give them their distinct nature (Carmel and Harlock, 2008; Paxton et al., 2005; Amin, 2009; Bruce and Chew, 2011). Further, it is argued that the commissioning cycle may also have the effect of devaluing some of the 'strengths' such organisations have; as Rees

(2014:55) argues, metrics such as 'trust and engagement with excluded groups' are difficult to measure and prove in the commissioning process.

It is argued that the funding pressures for small and medium organisations may result in them losing their localised knowledge and expertise. Aiken and Harris (2017) suggest that these organisations, where they still exist, run the risk of losing their core characteristics. Hemmings (2017) argues that such organisations are neglecting to work with the disadvantaged communities they serve, as they need to operate in a more commercial fashion (Morgan, 2015). It is also suggested that increased accounting demands have reduced their ability to engage in campaigning work; hence their accountability to the communities they work with has been weakened, shifting the nature of work they carry out (Aiken and Harris, 2017; Rochester, 2013).

In contrast, Blackmore's (2006) work on organisations' retaining agency under the contract culture argues that some organisations have maintained their ability to retain their social objectives and deliver services in ways which coalesce with their values.

3.3.5. Inadequate human resource practices

The environmental uncertainty and pressure to operate as commercial organisations can lead to significant tensions within organisations, as a commitment to human resource management (HRM) practices are neglected (Alatrista and Arrowsmith, 2004). Greer et al. (2011) note that the changes have shifted labour relations, as the contract arrangements become the guiding force in how people are managed. Ridder et al.'s (2012) model of HR architecture in third sector organisations presents a four-dimensional typology which includes motivational HRM, values-based HRM, administrative HRM and strategic HRM. (See Ridder et al., 2012 for detailed discussion.) They note that for any HRM architecture to be successful it must be perceived as equal, available and with a high quality of implementation to be considered effective. They suggest that administrative HRM architecture represents low strategic and employee orientations and stems from a reactive approach to cost-cutting. However, in the VCS, HR practices which are dominated by cost-cutting, that impose external

strategies or market logic inappropriately are becoming dominant at the expense of more motivational of values based practices. Examples of such HR practices may include training and development which does not suit the needs of the employees, as seen in Cunningham's (2010) research; cuts in pay and conditions; and intensified workloads. Employees are often considered replaceable under such HRM practices, hence basic HR practices are deployed, such as recruitment and redundancy. Such practices may be considered unfair by employees, as they focus on strategic needs rather than the employees, consequently reducing staff motivation and commitment (Cunningham, 2005). This corroborates with Alatrista and Arrowsmith's (2004) findings when they explored employee commitment in a large (500+ employee) organisation; findings identified negative perceptions of the organisation due to dissonance between the strategic decisions or priorities and the front-line activities. These types of HRM architecture support the findings of Mahon (2016) and pose significant challenges for small and medium organisations, which are those most frequently affected by funding cuts as they are more susceptible to attempting to appeal to funders' requirements. Alatrista and Arrowsmith (2004) argue that the onus for implementing HR practices that foster retention of and commitment from employees should be placed on the public sector contractors, with the view that such practice should form part of the contractual arrangements.

If HR practices are considered to be significant in the effectiveness and performance of an organisation, then, in conjunction with how much such practices are valued by employees, consideration of the value placed on HRM by management, and the types of HRM practice valued within my case organisations, is essential in understanding how employees may be affected by HRM. This corroborates with the findings from Bastida et al. (2018), who highlight the significance of HRM practices in the third sector. Their findings suggest that job satisfaction correlates with the following eight variables: 'the degree of job fit to knowledge, autonomy, training and development opportunities, work environment, forms of conflict resolution and leadership quality, help from colleagues, equality and respect for the environment' (p.334). The authors note the importance of HRM practices for the success of an organisation; however, as small to medium organisations face

economically challenging times, the implementation of such practices may be seen as a lower priority, which may be counter-productive to even the market-based discourses of professionalisation and efficiency.

3.3.6. How to survive

During periods of financial uncertainty, VCSOs may respond in different ways, adopting strategies to survive or thrive in the current context. Macmillan (2011) has called this the struggle for 'room', where organisations adopting different approaches, such as 'organisational restructuring and redundancy, merger and acquisition activity and repositioning and rebranding', (Macmillan et al., 2013:4) to maintain a footing in different fields.

In a study carried out by Macmillan and colleagues (2013) one response to the economic and political uncertainty was organisational restructure, which required a 'commercial ruthlessness' (p.11); this approach was adopted to ensure the organisation could survive in the face of the cuts associated with contracting. Such an approach allowed the organisation to stabilise and remain competitive. The study demonstrated that organisations would not renew short-term contracts and would reduce staff working hours as a means of increasing efficiency. However, this was not possible when commissioning organisations would roll contracts over on a monthly or three-monthly basis. Other strategies within this approach included the recruitment of volunteers to substitute for paid work and the reduction of management. This level of uncertainty meant that organisations spent considerable amounts of time on financial scenario-planning.

A significant point, which is not explored in great depth in this study, was that the restructuring strategy was sometimes used as a tactical strategy for survival against funding cuts, but was also adopted to remove staff who were not considered to be performing and thus was seen as a positive means to strengthen the organisation's position.

Mergers and acquisitions of organisations were also noted as a coping strategy against funding cuts, by which to reduce overheads, minimise duplication of services and create economies of scale (Macmillan et al., 2013:12). Such approaches have been promoted as a way of maximising resources (Bubb and Mitchell, 2009). However, Macmillan et al. (2013) found that, in practice, the possibility for mergers and acquisitions was far more difficult and presented issues around finding organisations that fitted appropriately; taking into account differences in interests groups, values and ethos as well as varying funding structures where some organisations are more insecure than others. The study also shows that organisations had concerns regarding being taken over ('swallowed-up' (p.13)) by larger organisations.

A final strategy employed in response to an uncertain context was that organisations repositioned and rebranded themselves, i.e. they shifted their services and provisions and/or changed how they were seen by others. The notion of repositioning was found in some case studies to align activities with wider political agendas, whilst in another case study, rebranding and repositioning included shifting to a more professional and commercial approach. This included the introduction of new systems, processes, on-line marketing and governance, which were considered by the authors to contrast with the origins of the organisation as a 'drop-in' organisation. This approach was seen both as a means of replicating larger, more successful organisations in the field and as a way of meeting funders' requirements. The authors of this study noted the significance of the degree to which an organisation is willing to 'position itself from itself' (2013:17), in order to meet the requirements of funders.

Aiken and Harris (2017) also examine survival strategies with a specific focus on small or medium organisations, and report that these organisations adopt strategies including 'scaling up' or 'scaling back' (p.5) as a means of survival against the backdrop of funding cuts. Scaling up may include strategies such as widening the scope or geographical location of work, whilst scaling back may

include contracts with no security for employees, or employing staff who are less expensive and possess a different skill set.

Whilst both studies provide a useful contribution to our understanding of how organisations are responding to the unsettling wider context, it is not within their scope to examine how these shifts impact on front-line workers who suffer the force of these changes.

3.4 Impacts of the Contract Culture on Employees

Having outlined some effects of the broader political and economic context on the VCS and comprising organisations, I will now move on to review the literature which discusses in more detail the impacts this context may have on employees.

3.4.1. Detrimental working conditions

There is evidence from a human resources perspective that changes in funding have affected the working conditions of employees in the VCS. There has been an increase in contracts offering no security; standardisation across work processes; increased workloads and an overall reduction in positive working terms and conditions (Cunningham and James, 2009; Cunningham et al., 2013; Baines et al., 2014). Lynn (2003) notes that many third sector organisations are short-staffed and employees work longer hours. The work environment is characterised by insecurity, both in employees' own employment status and also in relation to the planning of their work. Specific issues were identified in relation to delays regarding future funding and the time this takes to negotiate. Such delays are exacerbated by the transitory nature of public-sector employment, whereby workers are in post for a short period, leading to a lack of continuity. During these periods, employees may be laid off or await the outcome of their future within the organisation. Inevitably, this leads to increased stress and feelings of insecurity. According to Baines et al. (2014), this stress is also linked to poor health, increased pressure to maintain social relations and economic responsibilities, and burn-out.

3.4.2. What motivates employees in the VCS?

In order to grasp the nature of how changes to the sector affect employees, it is necessary to identify factors which motivate front-line employees in the VCS. A study by Mahon (2016) examines which motivating factors are important in the retention of employees in the VCS, in the context of the increasing pressures facing VCSOs from the wider social and political context.

Mahon's (2016) study noted that an attachment to the mission of the organisation remains a crucial factor for the retention of employees. However, the importance placed on the mission also serves to minimise the voices of employees, who find it difficult to raise concerns regarding poor working conditions, such as low pay, as they feel their commitment to the organisation's mission is more important for them. Motivation was also enhanced when employees could take on a variety of roles, other than client-facing work; however, this only acted as a motivating factor when these additional responsibilities were recognised. A further issue limiting achievement of the organisational goals, and therefore the motivation of employees, is the need to navigate different discourses. Findings showed that representatives from third sector organisations often had to 'straddle different realities' (Mahon, 2016:9) which led to tensions for individuals as they often had to negotiate differences, which resulted in compromises and discomfort. Employees understood that if they were seen to challenge authority in public spaces, they threatened access to resources and may have been viewed as disruptive to collaborative goals.

The role of senior management was another important factor for motivation noted by participants in the research, who suggested that managers should have experience of working in the front line to enable them to make good decisions, while also having access to senior managers. Similarly, Evers's (2005) research in social enterprises suggests that a gap can open up between management and front-line employees, as the former are more concerned with financial stability and the latter with the social mission. This difference in focus leads to separate groups within the organisations, causing difficulties in communication and employee motivation. Furthermore, the implementation of policies to

formalise decisions was important for front-line employees, in order that decisions were not made by one leader.

Bottom-up communication is also highlighted as a significant factor in retaining employee commitment in Alatrista and Arrowsmith's (2004) research. The study highlighted that the uncertain context in which front-line employees were operating caused a chaotic environment for them; however, this could be mitigated to some extent by strong teamwork and development of trust among colleagues through mechanisms such as meetings. The notion of teamwork is also identified as a positive factor in Alatrista and Arrowsmith's (2004) study, where they report that staff felt they had family-like relationships with team members, with whom they shared principles and values, in comparison to the organisation as a whole. These family-like relationships enabled them to express their frustrations when working on the front-line and were a source of motivation. However, as the authors suggest, such relationships can also serve as a platform for fostering negative perceptions towards senior managers.

Organisational procedures and policies were important in maintaining motivation; staff valued supervision, staff award systems and career development. The recommendations from the research focus on the importance of regular and direct communication with management and the careful design of work, so staff are not overburdened with administrative tasks. However, it must be noted that, whilst these factors suggest that the organisations have a commitment to employees, this commitment is not supported by funding arrangements, which do not place significant focus on HR dimensions, but instead on targets and outcomes.

Whilst Mahon's study uses a small sample of six front-line employees, it has significant value, as it begins to give an insight into the challenges of retaining a workforce which is motivated to be in the sector but under increasing pressures from the external environment. The study also illuminates how a management focus on employee well-being should be of central importance and given equal attention as questions of economic survival. Further, it aids in understanding how the motivating

factors are devalued and limited in a neoliberal context and how the factors which may serve as demotivators are exacerbated. For instance, Mahon noted that the following factors led to a sense of demotivation: workplace stress, poor communication with management and concerns regarding management decisions that appear to be aligned with a business agenda. Such factors have intensified since the changes in the funding regime.

The exacerbation of factors which may serve as demotivating is also illustrated in a study by Baines (2010) which explored the experiences of front-line employees in non-profit, social service, third sector organisations. The study highlights the positive and negative experiences that front-line employees face at work, and found that employees feel positive towards their work when they operate in a way which aligns with their values, feel empowered and develop relationships with both the participants they work with and with colleagues. When the possibilities of working in this way are diminished, negative experiences arise for front-line employees. The study found that some of the reasons for conflict for employees working in alignment with their own values are increased measuring and accounting; inadequate funding and pay; and a restructured work environment. NPM and standardisation has also led to employees working in 'silos', isolated from each other, as well as an increase in repetitive and tedious administrative tasks. The restructuring of work also led to frustrations for employees, as they no longer had time to participate in advocacy work. The research explored what employees would change if they could. Largely their responses revolved around the need to address the funding crisis and consequently improve HR practices and working conditions. The authors note that the suggestions in these responses were limited in terms of equality and social justice, but this is perhaps a result of the neoliberal ideology whereby the front-line employees are largely concerned with individual circumstances and collective action is 'pushed underground' (Smith, 2007).

3.5. Governmentality, Subjectivity and VCS Employees

So far, I have identified , firstly, how the consolidation of the neoliberal project has led to changes in the state's view, management, engagement and expectations of the VCS; secondly, the implications of this on the sector; and lastly, how these have come together to impact on the experiences of front-line employees. From a Foucauldian perspective, one would need to question what effects these changes have on the subject, in particular the subjectivity, of front-line employees. Whilst the research thus far indicates that there have been discursive, material and subjectification effects on employees, much of the research has not specifically examined this through a governmentality lens. However, there are two studies which do adopt a governmentality lens to specifically identify how rationalities and technologies in the VCS have shaped the subjectivity of employees.

Firstly, Dey and Steyaert (2012) argue that social entrepreneurship can be considered a tool of governmentality. Social entrepreneurship, whilst a contested concept, is defined by Choi and Majumdar (2014:372) as a cluster concept which includes as a minimum the presence of social value creation, and possibly includes one or more of the following: the social entrepreneur, the social enterprise organisation, market orientation and social innovation. Based on what has been outlined in previous sections, it can be argued that VCSOs such as those in this study may fall within the cluster of social entrepreneurship, as these organisations do focus on social value creation while having a market orientation as they participate in the public sector delivery of services. It may also be argued that managers and employees are social entrepreneurs, as they adopt entrepreneurial virtues (such as business tools and practices) to organise and execute their work-based activities, decisions and priorities. I make this distinction here, as the research on social entrepreneurship, and consequently social enterprises, can provide a useful source of insight for this research. Whilst third sector organisations and social enterprises are often delineated in empirical research, when taking Choi and Majumdar's definition, it can be seen that third sector organisations may be included under the cluster term of social entrepreneurship as they share many similar features and challenges, such as working

across two domains – social and business – as well as operating in similar and or shared contexts in relation to public sector service delivery, and consequently in similar or identical political and economic contexts.

Having defined the term of social entrepreneurship and how this relates to this research, I return to Dey's argument that the encouragement of social entrepreneurship can be considered a strategy of neoliberal governmentality, whereby the social space and the encompassing subjects are produced in alignment with entrepreneurial values such as responsibility, freedom and self-organisation. Social entrepreneurship has been heavily promoted by UK governments (Nicholls, 2010) and has been criticised for being a neoliberal strategy for the delivery of public sector services (Dey, 2014). Dey adopts a neoliberal governmentality lens in his analysis of other authors' studies. He notes that some authors argue that the social space, including the social missions of organisations, may be displaced by the use of mechanisms such as resources (funding), contractual managerialism and the embodiment of market discourses (Seanor and Meaton, 2008; Dart, 2004). Dey (2014) argues that this perspective is at times too deterministic; however, a governmentality framework offers value as it allows for sites of resistance to neoliberal subjectivity to be seen. It can be argued that social entrepreneurship serves to align organisations with political rationalities, such as organisations and individuals taking on responsibility for social and economic issues. More specifically, in relation to the development of the neoliberal subject, Dey (2014:62 observes that the 'function of social entrepreneurship is to offer individuals in the social sector a normative script which compels them to internalise entrepreneurial principles and values out of practical necessity'. For example, a charity manager may consider it necessary to adopt business solutions to problems, acting as would be expected of a 'responsible' subject, as this is considered 'the best way forward'. These subjects become the faces of individualism: individuals who are able to be responsible, to make the 'right' choices in a challenging economic climate. Dey (2014) argues that third sector employees are social entrepreneurs who operate in the neoliberal discourse of choice, responsibility and individualism, yet this does not necessarily function through homogenous practices; instead, the shaping of subjectivity

works through 'polymorphous' practices. Dey argues that to see how neoliberal governmentality operates to shape subjectivity, it must be studied at the micro-level. Further, he states that it is at this level that possibilities for resistance can be identified. For example, the studies Dey draws upon illuminate that employees do not always adopt the language or identity of the social entrepreneur and were not always aligned with the social entrepreneurship discourses (Baines, Bull and Woolrych, 2010; Howorth, Parkinson and McDonald, 2011). He argues that these studies evidence the need for investigations of employees to take place at the local level in order to identify how governmental rationalities are displaced at the level of the 'witches brew of actual practices' (Dey, 2014:13). He further elaborates that, while research often tends to focus separately on the macro, the context and the micro, they must be studied together to understand the 'messiness, complexity and unintended consequences involved in the struggles around subjectivity' (McKee, 2009:465).

Secondly, in a study by King (2017), an effort has been made to examine how governmentality may operate on the local level, and in particular how subjectivity is shaped in the neoliberal environment. In an auto-ethnographic study, King (2017) uses a governmentality (Foucault, 2000) framework to illuminate how professionals in the third sector are becoming professionalised in practice. In this study, King aims to explore on the micro-level which practices in the more commercial management strategies lead to professionalisation, and how these practices shape the subjectivities of employees in the sector. King's study arose from a research gap that suggests that, whilst it is widely accepted that neoliberal and managerial ideologies and practices are putting pressure on third sector organisations to become more professional, there is little research on how this change occurs in practice. By examining his own experiences as a co-founder and manager of a third sector organisation, King's analysis suggests that, in a bid to become more professional, a gap has opened up between the ethos of the organisations and the goals of the funders. Greater attention was given to providing evidence of meeting targets set by funders than to meeting the needs of the communities served. Further, the findings suggest that professionalisation led the author to be less engaged with social inequality and more inclined towards seeing clients as responsible subjects, a

product of their own conditions. King argues that practices associated with funding operate as 'technologies of the self' (Foucault, 1991; 2000), which change the possibility of action and also subjecthood.

This research has highlighted how practices can produce professionalisation, further enhancing an understanding of how hybridisation of organisations occurs in practice for employees. However, the study is limited to the experience of one person, and further development could provide deeper insights into the subject-shaping of employees. The recommendations from this research suggest that further studies should explore how employees buy into or resist such practices.

3.6. Front-line Resistance in the VCS

A number of recent studies may help in understanding how employees may be resisting neoliberal ideology. For example, Dey and Teasdale (2013) argue that the negative assumptions made about social enterprises are overstated, and that employees may adopt a more oppositional position. Their study illuminated that employees do not always identify with 'entrepreneurial' values and subjectivity. By engaging critically with the logic, they challenge the assumption that the social enterprise discourse shapes the way employees act and think and, importantly, they identify that even when employees do not identify with the social enterprise discourse in its totality, the discourse itself may lead to a sense of instability for the employees. Further, employees may not oppose social enterprise discourse publicly, and may act in ways which support it.

In another study which draws upon Lipsky's (1980) notion of street-level bureaucrats, Kim (2013) argues that discretion is applied by front-line workers in the author's ethnographic study of third sector organisations in South Korea. Kim asserts that, on the front line, employees do not act as 'servants of the state' (Cairns et al, 2006:6), but instead display acts of resistance in the way they operate. The study illustrated that front-line employees acted in ways which fostered a participatory culture by engaging with clients outside the bureaucratic regimes imposed by the 'partnerships' they

held with the state. Further, employees would engage with participants in their groups in ways which fostered democratic leadership as a means of sharing power and 'upward assimilation' (p. 580). However, a commentary on this study by Mukungu (2014) shows that the types of resistance illustrated in the study are at the expense of the employees, as they individually seek to achieve social objectives. Mukungu considers that such localised initiatives neglect the wider structural issues in which the beneficiaries participate and by which third sector organisations are constrained.

Sanders et al.'s (2015) study on employees navigating a more commercial approach also found more covert forms of resistance from employees concerning how they combine such an approach with achieving their social mission. Employees enacted 'professionalism' by interpreting the term and its associated characteristics in ways which facilitated their mission and values. For example, to be professional meant to demonstrate to others that they were capable, trustworthy and financially responsible. Language also played a role as employees used different language in different contexts: they recognised that when talking with businesses (funders) they were required to demonstrate sound management principles, and when talking with beneficiaries of their services they adopted language aligned with the values of their work. The authors conclude that language plays a fundamental role in ensuring the social mission is pursued.

Resistance by employees was also seen when they were excluded from contributing their practical knowledge to organisational knowledge, as a result of increased managerialism (Baines et al, 2012). Resistance came in the form of persisting with relationships with participants they worked with, even if this was carried out without the knowledge of managers. Resistance was also seen in a continued commitment and affinity to the social mission. However, the study showed that this resistance was highly gendered and calls into question how social relations may increase the ongoing exploitation of the female labour workforce.

3.7 Conclusion

A shift from the Keynesian, state-informed policy to neoliberalism has influenced the way in which the VCS has been funded and simultaneously, the expectations of VCSOs as delivery agents of public services. As the VCS entered a new phase of contract funding, a range of implications emerged for the sector which influenced the way organisations were organised and managed.

VCS organisations were called upon to become more commercial and to engage with tools of NPM, which led to standardisation of work, a reduction in workplace democracy and increased tensions within organisations. As VCS organisations operated across markets, research outlined in this literature review showed they had adopted market-style behaviours, which impacted on the degree to which they could maintain the values that had traditionally underpinned their work. The contracting culture also affected human resources practices, and financial insecurity led to organisations adopting ruthless survival strategies.

The review has shown that the wider neoliberal context has had significant impacts for the sector, which raises questions that can be explored through a governmentality framework. From a governmentality lens, the discursive environment for the VCS has shifted. In this research, I will investigate how this discursive environment is manifested, through which agents, technologies and practices, and what rationalities underpin them and make them intelligible. Further, how are the rationalities consolidated within organisations by management and employees alike? If the existing research illustrates clear issues between contracting and the organisation of work in the VCS, does this correspond to how the issues are problematised by management within the VCS? Bacchi (2009:31) highlights that identifying how issues are problematised is a key indicator for understanding the mentality of rule.

The literature review has also shown to some extent how the discursive shift has affected employees through deteriorating working conditions and devaluing factors which have been evidenced as motivating to the workforce. Few studies have explored this from a governmentality

lens (Dey and Teasdale, 2013; King, 2017) and they begin to illuminate that the shifts are underpinned by neoliberal rationalities and have a subjectification effect on employees. Technologies such as social entrepreneurship, performance management tools and the quantification of targets are all mechanisms which shape the course of action of employees. However, as King (2017) notes in his auto-ethnography, more investigation is required to understand how employees are buying into or resisting neoliberal subjectification. Therefore, this research aims to identify how the rationalities, technologies and subjectification effects combine to create a regime of truth; how subjects are constructed and what rationalities and technologies are put in place to make such subjects appealing; and finally, which counter-discourses are in operation, which discourses are marginalised, and to what extent is there evidence that rationalities, technologies and the pressure to become a neoliberal subject are being resisted.

This research provides insight into the integral link between micro and macro politics (Lemke, 2002) and elucidates the effects that neoliberal governmentality has on the constitution of subjects and through what means these are achieved. Identifying these effects on the local level provides an insight into the multiplicity and complexity (Brady, 2014:14) of neoliberal rationalities.

Cushman and Millbourne (2015) argue that an overly deterministic view of how neoliberal practices have dominated and coerced VCSOs into market-driven practices and discourses is limiting; instead, they suggest that researchers should also explore how current conditions in the voluntary sector have been resisted and hegemonic practices have been subverted, thus allowing the role of agency to be illuminated in research efforts. Moreover, they suggest that research should be carried out at the micro level to identify the everyday dilemmas in organisational life and also to identify the 'critical alternatives' that VSCOs maintain (pp. 472–43). As mentioned earlier, neoliberal governmentality is complex and can consist of minor techniques and practices, therefore value must be given to the mundane. Further, value must be given to the voices of those living the experiences, whilst also considering the context in which they operate. With several multi-layered facets to this

research, the application of a methodology that gives value to these facets is required. In the following chapter, I will explain the methods I have employed to engage in this research endeavour.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction and Research Question

My thesis sought to answer the following overarching research question:

> How does the neoliberal context shape the experiences of front-line employees in medium-sized voluntary sector organisations?

To answer this general question, I carried out a qualitative, instrumental, multi-site case study across two organisations. In each organisation, I gathered data from managers and front-line employees through semi-structured interviews, and carried out observations (including participant observation and informal conversations) for greater understanding of the nature of organisational life. I aimed to explore how the changes arising from policy change and the broader political and economic climate had affected the roles of managers and, consequently, how both these factors had an impact on the working lives of front-line employees.

To order to address my overall research question, I focussed my case study on three guiding areas:

- How the neoliberal landscape has changed the organisation of work in the VCS;
- Managers' perspectives of changes to the voluntary sector and how these have shaped their experiences of managing;
- Front-line employees' perspectives of changes to the voluntary sector and how these have shaped their experience of working on the front line of VCS organisations

These three areas were devised in acknowledgement that the experiences of front-line employees are shaped by the context within which they are situated. By attempting to understand the context in which front-line employees operate, the research aims to illuminate the notion that neither the experiences nor the issues are clear-cut; instead, they are deeply political, social, historical and personal (Stake, 1995:17). The importance of context is also related to my theoretical framework,

informed by Foucault's theory of neoliberal governmentality (Chapter 2). Thus, there is a specific focus on neoliberal discourse and practices and how both shape subjectivity. To be fully understood, the experience of front-line employees has to be interpreted in the wider discourse of which it is part. A qualitative case-study research approach lends itself well to an enquiry which values context in understanding the experiences of individuals.

This chapter describes and reflects on the methodology of this research, in three main sections. The first section discusses the philosophical stance underpinning my research. The second section provides details on the overall research design, including the rationale for my case selection, and presents the two cases: Community Life and Healthscape. I then describe the methods I adopted, reflect briefly on putting these into practice, and discuss the data analysis and procedural ethics. In the final section, I reflect on the practicalities of research, and specifically of gaining access. This section describes my own learning throughout the process, the challenges faced whilst carrying out research in constantly changing contexts.

4.2 Philosophical Stance

In order to unlock the experience of employees in the VCS, the research design is exploratory and informed by the paradigm of interpretivism. According to Creswell (2013:8), 'Interpretive research yields insights and understanding of behaviour, and interactions amongst others as well as considering the historical and cultural context in which people operate'. Interpretivist frameworks include both social constructionism and a transformative approach, utilising critical theories (Creswell, 2013). I will outline the relevance of both interpretivist frameworks below.

4.2.1. Social constructionism

Interpretivist research is underpinned by the belief that the social world cannot be objectively determined but instead is socially constructed. Research that sits within this paradigm values context as critical for gaining knowledge, and contextual factors should be considered in any quest to gain a

systematic understanding of phenomena. My interest in the experiences of the front-line employees has a particular backdrop - that is how the neoliberal context interacts with their experiences. For example, the neoliberal landscape has had a number of significant impacts on the voluntary sector as a whole (see literature review); in turn, this context may affect the way in which employees experience their working lives. The central question is both what (what are the impacts?) and how (how does this affect their working lives?). The reality of the employees interacts with the neoliberal context and perhaps other factors; therefore, I start from the viewpoint that meaning and interpretations are not imprinted upon the participants in my study, but instead, the participants are shaped by the contexts in which they operate, both social and historical. Given this standpoint, and a theoretical framework in which discourses and practices shape the subjectivity of individuals, my research is based upon the ontological understanding that realities are constructed through both experiences and interactions (Creswell, 2013). Having stated the ontological importance of context in my study, social constructionism is relevant to my enquiry.

To grasp how the context co-constructs the realities of my research participants, it is imperative that the voices of the participants are highlighted in my research design. Within the interpretivist paradigm, the goal is to understand the work from the perspective of those who live in it, and a strong emphasis is placed on capturing the views, interpretations and illustrations of how they perceive the phenomena under study. The subjective voices of the research participants are therefore critical in my research design.

4.2.2. Transformative/ critical

Transformative/critical research is interested in new ways of understanding situations, particularly those that are taken for granted; in it, the critical researcher endeavours to offer new courses of action. According to Canella and Lincoln (2009), critical research seeks to link individual experiences back to wider structural phenomena and systems, asking questions about who gains power, who is being excluded and who benefits from the current situation. As a researcher, I am interested in

understanding how structural forces such as neoliberalism impact on relationships, agendas, processes and people within the voluntary sector. The link between the macro-structures and the micro-experiences of employees in the voluntary sector has been largely neglected in the sector's narrative of the implications of state contracting and, consequently, I aim to elucidate some of the prevailing issues.

Having highlighted my research question and the philosophical stance of my research, I will now move on to describe my research design and data collection process.

4.3 Research Design

The research strategy adopted was an instrumental multiple-case study which examined the experiences of employees in medium-sized, voluntary sector, health organisations in London. The evidence collected was qualitative and was gathered using interviews and observation as the primary methods. An instrumental multiple-case study aims to focus on an issue and illustrate that issue within a bounded case. Two cases were studied for the purpose of literal replication. Literal replication enables an issue to be explored in another case (i.e. another organisation), to further illustrate how the same issue may manifest elsewhere (Stake, 1995; Creswell, 2013).

4.3.1 Case study approach

The value of the qualitative case study approach can best be understood through an ontological and epistemological position: what constitutes the social reality and how can we study it? The qualitative case study approach is advantageous in understanding the social world from the perspective of those who experience it: it is an approach which values subjective experience. Poupart illustrates the utility of the case study: 'a real knowledge of social realities requires an exploration of the personal experiences of individuals' (Poupart, Raines and Piresl 1983:67, cited in Hamel et al. 1993:16). In order to understand the social world, we need to understand how the figures within it make meaning of the processes and experiences they participate in; the case study allows for this

level of exploration. Becker (1970) adds to this, expounding 'we cannot understand the effects of a range of possibilities, delinquent subcultures, social norms and other explanations of behaviour which are commonly invoked, unless we consider them from the actor's point of view' (p.64 cited in Hammel, 1993:17). The case study is a valuable method if it is considered important to examine the complexity that exists between phenomena, actors and context. Given the overall epistemological and theoretical framework applied in this thesis, the case study approach remains highly valuable.

Further, Yin (2014) highlights three instances when case studies should be selected as a method: when the researcher is asking how or why questions; when researching contemporary phenomena; and when the researcher has no control over the behaviour of the research participants. Given the purpose of my research, the method selected appears to be appropriate. Firstly, my research aim is exploratory and explanatory: how has the neoliberal context impacted on front-line employees' experiences and can this be explained through the Foucauldian lens of governmentality? The wider perspective of ideological and economic change has not been explored in depth from the perspective of the front-line employee, and therefore remains a relatively new phenomenon in this specific field. Whilst one can draw parallels from other social professions (e.g. teaching, social work and nursing), there is a lack of insight into the experience of the front-line employee in the VCS, and therefore case study research appears a legitimate approach.

4.3.1.1. Qualitative approach: Ethnographic-informed methods

In order to collect the data, I adopted a qualitative approach informed by ethnographic methods, as part of which, I conducted interviews with managers and front-line employees, and observed organisational life. This three-pronged approach is key to ethnographic research as it allows insight into the contextual factors and into what people say they do and what they do in reality. Ahrens and Mollana (2007) argue that people do not always know what they do and consequently cannot articulate their actions; participant observation thus allows the researcher to examine data collected from interviews in the context of observations made.

A further justification for an ethnographic approach to data collection is embedded in my epistemological approach, that is to engage with a research inquiry aiming to reveal notions which are otherwise taken for granted. A critical approach is one of the aims of the research, in order to explore the voices of the unheard and convey the meanings of the lives of those observed. Where this is the purpose, ethnography is the best method to adopt, as it involves 'direct contact with agents, and of richly writing up the encounter; respecting, recording and representing at least partly, in its own terms, the irreducibility of human experience' (Willis and Trondman, 2000:5). In adopting an ethnographic approach, I aim to gain a subjective understanding of the research area.

Furthermore, Willis and Trondman (2000) assert that the highest quality ethnographic research relates the lived experience to the wider social, political and economic context, and as the research seeks to relate the wider contextual changes to the employees' experience, its strength will lie in examining not just what agents say they do, but also the environment in which they are operating; ethnographic methods are an effective method for doing this. Ybema et al (2009) notes that to gain a full understanding of how people construct their situations, one needs to 'do so in situ'. In so doing, researchers can 'immerse themselves' and can 'appreciate, translate the situated, creative and moral practices' experienced. Exposing the relationship between the social reality and the experience of the agent can enable work towards a more transformative agenda.

Another justification for adopting an ethnographic approach to my data collection is based on Brady's (2014) critique of previous neoliberal governmentality studies, which he finds have largely produced a 'cookie-cutter' analysis of governmentality enquiries (p.14), resulting in the neoliberalisation of the social world being presented in 'monolithic and linear terms' (2014:11), and consequently limiting the scope for potential resistance or alternative subjectivities to be brought to light. Brady also argues that the context, the complex reality and the 'blurry division between political rationalities and their associated technologies on the one hand and actual practices of governance on the other' are negated in other methodological approaches, particularly in reliance upon documentary

analysis. Brady argues that researchers need to adopt an approach which allows for 'multiplicity and complexity' (2014:14) and, more specifically, the differences in the way neoliberal rationalities play out in any given social context, whilst also identifying what other forces are involved. Brady's critique of neoliberal governmentality studies also guided my research to include managers within my study. Brady suggests that both 'actual people' and 'actual processes' should be observed to develop an understanding of subjective formation without neglecting the possibilities of 'heterogeneity, multiplicity, contingency, and locality etc.'. The idea of locality, space and time is also raised as a significant concern for Brady in the 'totalizing narratives' which are often presented in studies on neoliberal governmentality.

Finally, my methodological approach is also informed by challenges other researchers have faced in the same field of inquiry. Firstly, it is reported (Baines et al., 2014; Ehrenstein, 2012), that access to front-line employees can be very difficult and in many situations impossible. Through an ethnographically informed approach, I was able to develop rapport and relationships to gain trust with front-line employees. Whilst this did not always develop as I had initially idealised it, the approach did allow me to interview 15 front-line employees. Secondly, by adopting a case study approach, I aim to move away from some of the existing qualitative research which tends to remain at the individual level of consciousness, rather than explicating the relationship between individuals and the discursive environment through a strong emphasis on the context, as demanded by the case-study approach.

Given the nature of my enquiry, an ethnographically informed approach to data collection is fitting, as it provides the possibility of identifying the 'mundane and micro-governmental techniques and tools' (Brady, 2014:21).

4.3.1.2. The cases: Rationale and boundaries

The case studies on Community Life and Healthscape enabled exploration into how the neoliberal context had impacted on employees' experiences of working in medium-sized organisations.

The decision to select medium-sized organisations was based on two factors. I had initially wanted to focus on small organisations, but recognised in my scoping exercise that it would be extremely difficult to protect employees' anonymity in an organisation with perhaps 2–3 employees. Furthermore, employees may feel reluctant to discuss issues regarding internal dynamics if they feel they, or others, will easily be identified. Whilst this still posed issues in the final study of medium-sized organisations, it had a lesser effect. Therefore, by focussing on medium organisations, I was able to minimise the risk.

Secondly, a sector report by NCVO (2016) into how small and medium charities were adapting to the current climate suggested that medium-sized organisations faced specific and significant challenges in the current context.

Location is also a significant determinant of adversity for small and medium organisations. Evidence suggests that organisations in London and the North East are most affected by the cuts (Innes and Tetlow, 2015), and that this effect is exacerbated for organisations working in the most deprived areas which rely largely upon grant funding (Johnson and Schmuecker, 2009). Location is thus an important factor when selecting cases because of the challenges faced by organisations working with the most vulnerable communities. It must also be stated that London is also an ideal location for me to gather data, as I live and work in London, and this is a prime consideration when trying to complete doctoral studies on a part-time basis.

Lastly, I have a personal interest in organisations providing health-related services, having worked in the voluntary sector on health prevention programmes for over 10 years. Whilst personal interest is an important motivator for those carrying out doctoral studies, there were other justifications for the focus on health. Firstly, organisations delivering preventative health programmes represent a segment of the voluntary sector which has been disadvantaged by government cuts. As reduced spending has become a priority in local government, areas which fall under preventative health have been targeted for cuts (Bagwell et al., 2015). Changes resulting from reforms outlined in

section 75 of the Health and Social Care Act 2012 have encouraged greater competition in the provision of health and social care services (Frith, 2015), as the Act encouraged providers outside the NHS to tender for service delivery including commercial enterprises, leading to more competition in the field for VCSOs.

To summarise, the case is defined by the following criteria: the primary unit of the case is the front-line employees, based in medium-sized VCSOs, providing health-related services funded by the government in the form of contracted services, in deprived areas of London. In order to understand the experiences of the front-line employees, I examined three sub-units of analysis: the neoliberal landscape, the organisation and the managers' experiences. The case study is thus an embedded multiple case study, as depicted in Figure 1.

Within the criteria for my case study research, Community Life and Healthscape provided appropriate cases. The boundaries of the study are predetermined by the organisations' boundaries, i.e. I focussed on the employees within the organisations and the work they were involved in which, in both organisations, involved preventative health programmes. As identified above, managers would also be a unit of analysis in my case study, in order to gain a fuller understanding of the experiences of front-line employees. Whilst the goal was to focus on the employees, it is also necessary to consider the context in which they operate, that is, the neoliberal context, the organisational and managerial views and perspectives. Considering this backdrop enabled me to consider how and why some discourses had arisen in the organisation and how these shaped the experience and work of front-line employees

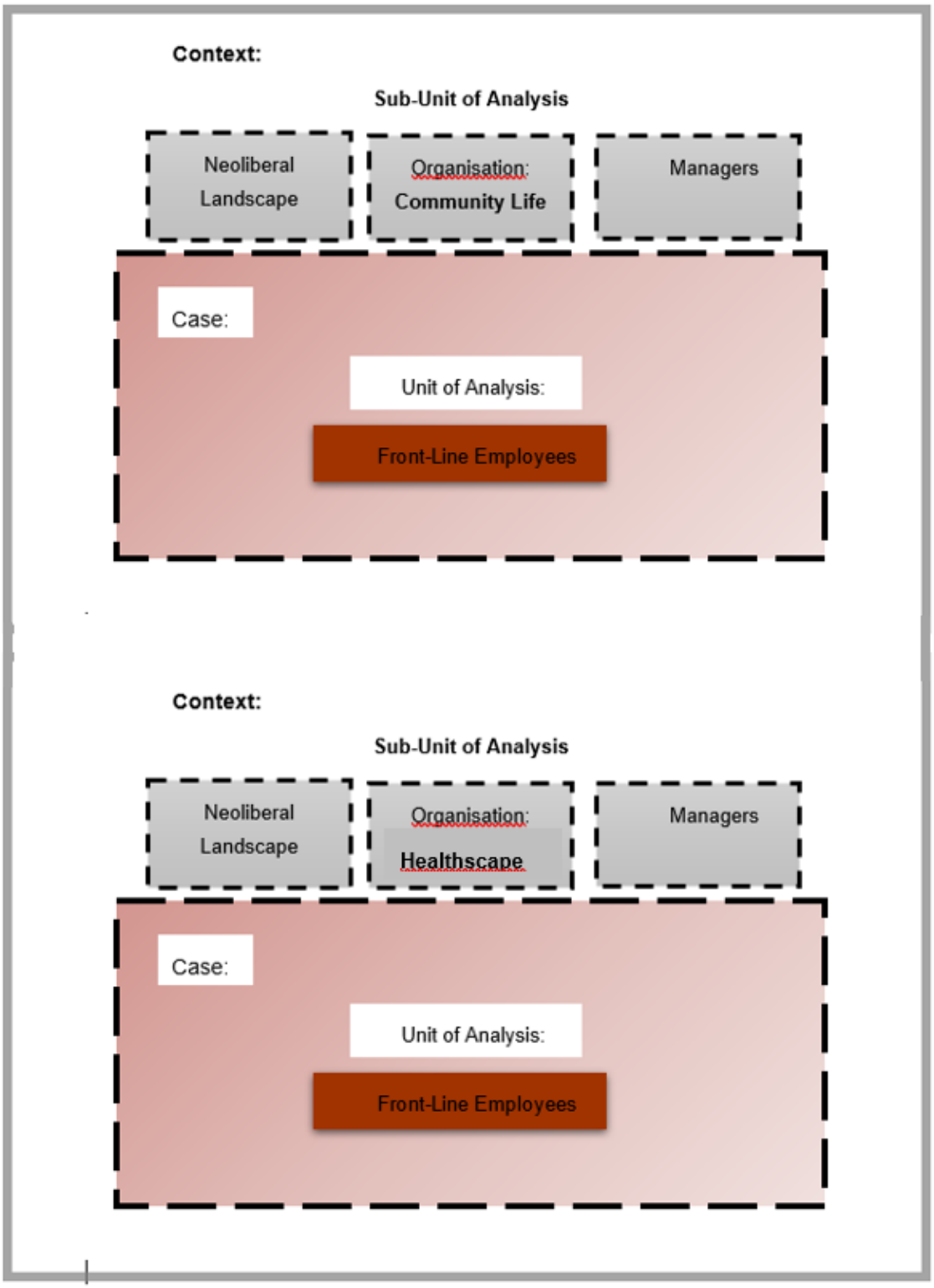

Figure 1: Unit of analysis

4.3.2. Case: Community Life

Community Life[2] aims to empower people through services which enable them to live healthy and prosperous lives. Based in London, it was founded in 1997, and primarily serves people who live in most deprived decile of neighbourhoods. In 2016–17, its total income was £543.4K, positioning it as a medium-sized organisation (NCVO, 2019a). A total of 54% of its income came from local government for commissioned projects. The average FTE number of employees during 2016–17 was 11.

Within Community Life, I carried out interviews (n=6) with managers (n=3) and front-line employees (n=3), and observations of organisational life, including attending meetings (n=3)[3]. In addition to observing the meetings, approximately 6 hours over the duration of the fieldwork was spent observing organisational life or, as Spradley (2016) call it, 'hanging around'. I have quantified elements of the research, where possible; however, it is not possible to quantify the number of informal conversations that took place. At times, these were brief encounters, where I may have arrived early at the organisation or when waiting between scheduled interviews. The data collection took place between April and June 2016. In total, 6 days were spent in the organisation.

4.3.3. Case: Healthscape

Healthscape works primarily in four London boroughs, again in some of the most deprived wards in England. Its aim is to empower people and communities, by increasing knowledge and skills and access to services, particularly those most likely to be affected by health inequalities. In 2017–18, its total income was £921,906, a 45% decrease since 2015/16, of which 91% came from contracts, with the remainder derived from donations and grants. More specifically, 68% of income was from local government or NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups. The average FTE number of employees during 2017–18 was 19, a 40% reduction on the previous financial year.

[2] All names of organisations and individuals are pseudonyms to protect anonymity.

[3] See appendix 1 for the table of research participants from Community Life.

My field work in Healthscape took place over two weeks in April 2017, when I was based within the organisation, arriving at 8.30am each day and leaving usually between 5pm and 6pm. During the field work, I interviewed 15 employees in total, including managers (n=2) and front-line staff (n=13)[4]. All but one of these interviews were carried out during the two-week period, with one held a month later off-site as this employee had resigned from the organisation on the day I started, but still wanted to be involved in the research. I was only given access to one internal document in Healthscape.

Table 1 overleaf presents an overview of data generation within each aspect of the research.

	Interviews	**Observations (structured)**	**Observations (unstructured)**
Scoping Exercise	6	7	10 days (approx)
Community Life	6	4	4 days
Healthscape	15	0	10 days
Total	27	11	24 days

Table 1: Data generation

4.3.4. Scoping exercise

Prior to and alongside the central case studies being carried out, a scoping exercise was conducted, firstly, to identify current trends and key issues facing the voluntary sector in my geographical area of interest, and secondly, to facilitate the process of gaining access to research participants.

[4] See appendix 2 for the table of research participants from Healthscape.

During the scoping exercise, I attended seven meetings, including both public and closed, which related to a broad range of issues and developments in the voluntary sector. I also carried out interviews with six leaders in various roles, including CEOs, of small to medium organisations.

4.4 Methods: Rationales and Reflections

Having outlined the overview of my case study research, I will now discuss the primary methods adopted: semi-structured interviews and observations, supplemented by the ongoing use of field notes.

4.4.1. Semi-structured interviews

I carried out semi-structured interviews to elicit the experiences, stories, emotions and perspectives of participants. The interviews served the exploratory nature of my research, providing an opportunity to gather rich descriptions from participants, whilst also giving myself the opportunity to probe and clarify issues with the participant. Fundamentally, the interviews enabled me to gain an insight into the social worlds of the managers and employees within the organisations.

Given my research topic, I had initially prepared an interview guide with specific interview questions to allow for a more focussed interview (See Appendix 4). However, I realised very quickly that this was not conducive to gaining the best results, with interviewees responding in a 'robotic', cold and specific way to the questions. After turning off the recorder, I was able to have a more relaxed conversation with participants and, based on this experience, I altered my interview approach in two ways. Firstly, I exchanged my interview guide for a topic guide, which focussed on how the organisation had changed; whether roles and priorities had changed; daily work experiences; challenges and barriers to carrying out work. I believe this helped me feel more relaxed and confident and, in turn, helped the participants. This approach to interviewing allowed a much more open and conversational style and improved the quality of the interviews.

Secondly, I recognised the importance of conversations outside an interview situation, as the aforementioned participants opened up more once the recorder was off.[5] There may have been a number of reasons for this, but I felt it was due to anxiety of being recorded at such an uncertain time for the organisation. I always therefore allowed the conversation to continue after the 'official interview' and began to note down these conversations in my fieldnotes, with a much greater focus on the importance of what these conversations could reveal.

In my revised approach, I adopted elements of Spradley's (2016) grand-tour questions. While grand-tour questions provide a useful opportunity to explore further points raised by participants, it was important that I learned more about the everyday experiences of working in a VCSO, so I would also use Spradley's (2016) mini-tour questions to narrow the perspective. Adopting this style of questioning helped to build up rapport with participants, by allowing them to some degree to lead the interview with their responses, whilst simultaneously focussing the interviews to serve the purpose of the research.

According to Seidman (2012), the context in which interviews take place is fundamental to their success; this does not necessarily refer only to the spatial arrangements of the interviews, but in my case studies also to the context for the participants. For example, in Community Life, the recent departure of the senior manager had left staff feeling insecure, and therefore I needed to be sensitive to their needs. I was very conscious of that context and hence felt very wary that what may be considered an 'interrogation style' interview might only add to the tension, and that consequently participants might withdraw their cooperation (Spradley, 2016: 464–5). As Spradley recommends, when I felt participants were becoming uncomfortable, I would shift back to a friendly style of conversation in order to develop and maintain a rapport with them.

[5] Consent was re-obtained verbally in these cases. All participants who are included in the study had also signed a consent form. Ethical research protocols are discussed in section 4.6 of this chapter.

Spradley identifies four stages in the rapport-building process with research participants. In Community Life, I felt I achieved three out of those four stages: apprehension, exploration and cooperation, whereas at Healthscape, there was more evidence of reaching the final stage of participation. Examples of this stage included one employee approaching me to talk about a conflict which had just occurred between herself and the CEO; or an employee bringing me a newsletter which had just been published, discussing what it meant to be a professional in the field. Spradley acknowledges that not all participants reach this stage, as rapport is also context-dependent, but I always attempted to build rapport with participants in both organisations.

4.4.2. Observations

Observation allows a researcher to study people and phenomena within a natural environment, enabling the discovery of patterns, behaviours, interactions and relationships (Baker, 2006; Bloomberg and Volpe, 2016). I set out to observe organisational life within Community Life with an open-ended approach, that is, without predetermined criteria but simply to capture the interaction that took place between employees, the nature of everyday activities carried out and the general workings of the organisation. I had asked to observe meetings and to sit in the office to observe typical days in the organisation. Gold (1958) elaborated on Buford Junker's typology of roles within field observation, suggesting that there are four categories which illuminate different types of participant observation: 1) complete observer; 2) observer-as-participant; 3) participant-as-observer; and 4) complete participant. My observations varied: at times I adopted a complete observer role and at other times was an observer-as-participant or a participant-as-observer. The nature of my observations depended on the particular circumstances of the day or event and could vary during a single interaction. For example, whilst observing a senior leadership meeting at Community Life, I started out as a participant-as-observer, whereby I was actively involved in the meeting, as members of the team asked me to contribute on key items on their agenda, such as social media and website development for VCSOs. However, later in the meeting, tensions grew between two members and their disagreement became rather heated. At this point I recognised my position as a researcher, and

decided to remain a complete observer throughout the rest of the meeting, as continued involvement in the discussion could jeopardise my position if I were to 'over-identify' or lose objectivity (Gold, 1958: 221). Further, continuing to engage in this meeting might have posed a threat to the relationships I had developed with the senior leadership team, destabilising the research process. I therefore viewed observations as a continuum, whereby I would negotiate the nature of my role, depending on the nature of the observation but determined also by the dynamics in the field at any given time. This required frequent in-action reflexivity, whereby I needed to make swift decisions about how I would proceed with my observations.

The observation in Healthscape also helped me identify who to interview, and when to do so. As I observed organisational life, I was able to identify which times were best to talk to people, how people used spaces in the office to converse, and how and where people felt most comfortable to talk. For the first two interviews, I used one of the smaller meeting rooms which was directly in the middle of the office and made of glass but, as I observed the dynamics within the organisation, I realised that more informal conversations took place in the training room. I then started to interview staff members in the training room and realised this created a far more relaxed environment. I also realised that social conversations took place in the kitchen, so at around 11am and 1pm I would sit in those areas to have conversations with staff, in a more natural setting than a scheduled interview. This approach can be likened to Adler and Adler's (1994) analogy of a funnel, whereby the observations may begin as broad activity which becomes more specific and informative to research objectives as the process develops.

4.4.3. Field notes

In addition to collecting data through interviews and observations, I also maintained three types of field notes: 1) field log, which detailed the events that day, including date, names of interviewees, what I had observed, how many people were present that day; 2) field notes, which were more analytical and identified themes, patterns, significant events or interactions, markers of neoliberal

governmentality and meanings I could attach to my observations; 3) my personal log, which included my feelings towards the research process, what decisions I made and why. At the end of each day, I would read my notes and summarise what sense I could make of my entire day, specifically focussing on my field notes, and how the everyday events linked into a wider theoretical framework. According to Chatman (1992), identifying how well the phenomena being studied matches the guiding theoretical framework is a means of ensuring construct validity, and I therefore attempted to begin this process in the earliest possible stages of fieldwork. Thus, the field notes served as the first step in my analytical process.

4.5 Data Analysis and Writing-up

Data analysis was carried out throughout the data collection process: as Spencer et al. (2014:275) express, 'analysis does not begin when the researchers have finished collecting their data, but is an ongoing and inherent part of the whole process of qualitative research'. This section begins by briefly defining thematic analysis and then summarises how I proceeded to analyse the data collected through various methods, once the data collection process was complete.

Thematic analysis is described by Braun and Clarke (2006) as a 'method of identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (or themes) within data' (p.97). I selected this approach to data analysis as, when adopted rigorously, it allows for an insightful analysis to answer specific research questions. Yin (1981) suggests that a case study is best written up around the substantive topics which have arisen during data collection, with evidence from multiple participants included under the various topics. Yin favours this narrative approach, which may be difficult and time-consuming to construct into a readable form, and highlights that a predetermined conceptual framework, propositions and questions can help identify the substantive topics of focus, with sufficient flexibility as the analysis progresses. The WPR questions thus served to guide my analysis (see section 2.7).

The steps taken for thematic analysis in this study were largely informed by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases for undertaking a thematic analysis: 1) familiarisation with the data; 2) generating initial codes; 3) searching for themes; 4) reviewing themes; 5) defining and naming themes; and 6) producing the report. These phases were supplemented with additional techniques for understanding and interpreting the data, some informed by qualitative data analysis literature, others drawn from my own experience and understanding of both the data and theoretical framework, to ensure I had interrogated the data thoroughly.

The first stage in my data analysis included tidying the data, for example copying all data files, scanning field notes and organising files with the relevant data pertaining to each organisation. All interviews were transcribed verbatim via Microsoft Word and anonymised. The next stage in the analysis process included reading each transcript thoroughly. There were three distinct read-throughs of each transcript. Whilst I have attempted to quantify the number of times transcripts were read, this does not necessarily reflect all iterations. For example, when new codes emerged, I went back to each transcript to see if further examples were evident in interviews I had already analysed (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

On the first read-through, the audio recordings were also played in order to check for any additional sounds (sighs, laughs, persons entering the room etc.) which could enhance the understanding of the text. On the second read-through, codes were added to the transcripts manually. The choice to approach analysis without the use of computer-aided programmes was taken to remain as close as possible to the data, and also reduce the risk of fragmentation of the data. To guide the process, I drew on prompts taken from both Lofland and Lofland (1995) and Bernard et al. (2016), including:

What is happening in the text?

What is this an instance of?

What is happening here?

What are the reasons this is happening?

What processes are in place? How does this happen?

What do people say they are doing?

It is worth noting that, at this stage, I was not using a theoretically driven approach to analysing the transcripts. Inevitably my prior theoretical knowledge guided and influenced the nature of my reading of the transcript, and I did not avoid this: we all come with pre-suppositions in research, and I embraced this and allowed it to guide my analysis loosely in the earlier stages and then more directly towards the end of the analysis.

A third read-through was also required to mitigate a challenge which may occur in initial reading of transcripts, where researchers may be inclined only to look at those parts of the text which fit their assumptions and/or research questions. Additional coding was also carried out at this stage. This stage was important given the ethnographically informed approach I had taken in my case study, the purpose of which is indeed to *discover* rather than *impose* concepts onto a phenomenon (Smith, 2005). Further, this stage was significant in ensuring that polyvocality was honoured (Stake, 2005), that is that the analysis does not just focus on the obvious, but instead interrogates the interview data to ensure that sub-meanings and minutia are given importance in the overall analytical process, even if eliminated at a later stage.

The third stage included reviewing and developing the codes into themes and involved two phases. Firstly, I utilised Microsoft Excel to begin organising and interpreting my codes. The use of Microsoft Excel to organise and synthesise data is informed by Ritchie et al.'s (2003) 'matrix-based method for ordering and synthesizing data' (p.219). This approach helped facilitate management of a large amount of qualitative data and initial analysis of the data.

Secondly, I adopted a traditional paper-based approach to start to group codes together. This stage involved writing each code onto a sticky-note and sticking it onto a large card. I used this strategy to

identify which codes were replicated, similar or miscellaneous, and it also allowed me to synthesise the data, reflect on the various codes and, subsequently, develop patterns, for example what had influenced a staff member's experience. This step served as an early conceptual map, which allowed me to begin to decipher the flow of the themes and how they might be presented in the chapters on my findings.

I had a total of 68 codes by the fourth stage, which were for my own use and did not necessarily develop into full concepts for discussion, but which did help me formulate themes to be included. At this stage, I specifically engaged with the theoretical framework and considered how the open-codes might be thematised accordingly. I used the underpinning questions from the WPR approach to bring out themes and to group the common themes that cut across all the interview data. These steps were carried out for the data collected in each organisation, and were repeated on field notes collected during the observations.

The fifth stage in the process I began to identify and describe the themes. Chapters 5-8 are structured around the themes which emerged. This was followed by the sixth stage, the write- up. Yin (1981) suggests that many case study researchers are misled by the view the case must be written up in a 'full' narrative form. Instead, Yin suggests that reporting the case study around the substantive topics is an effective way of presenting the data. I too had started to face challenges in how to present my data in a narrative form, recognising that providing elaborate amounts of detail regarding each case in turn could have made the organisations and particular individuals identifiable to those working in the field, posing significant ethical concerns for the anonymity of my research participants.

Where appropriate, I have contextualised the data for greater understanding of the phenomena under study; however, any unnecessary data which would serve to identify individuals or organisations has been removed. Specific extracts which may have served as useful data have been removed from the study altogether if they allowed a participant or organisation to be identified either externally or within the organisation.

4.6 Ethics

The study complied with ethical procedures at my affiliate institution. In this section I will highlight some of the ethical issues which arose in the planning stage of the research, as a result of which appropriate protocols were put in place before starting the data collection process.

Three broad ethical issues were considered significant in this research:

- Anonymity, privacy and confidentiality;
- Protecting the respondents from harm;
- Role as a researcher.

These issues are discussed in turn below. Finally, I will discuss how the risks were mitigated through the use of different research protocols.

4.6.1. Anonymity, privacy and confidentiality

According to the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) (2015) framework, one of the core principles of social research is to ensure that participants' rights and dignity are maintained throughout the research process. This ethical principle is fundamental in organisational research, as neglecting it can have multiple impacts for research participants, including placing their employment at risk, negatively impacting on existing power relations within the workplace, and increasing anxiety for employees (Alcadipani and Hodgson, 2009). In this research there was a high risk of such impacts due to the size of the organisations included, hierarchies within the organisations, and the prevailing lack of employment security in the sector. Consequently, it was crucial to ensure that research participants were anonymised and that data was kept confidentially throughout the research process.

These concerns were not isolated to the publication of the research; there was also a risk to participants if anonymity and confidentiality were not maintained within the organisation and amongst research participants. This can be of particular concern when access to the organisation is gained via a gatekeeper and may be further compounded when the gate-keeper holds a senior

management position, as in my research. For example, when attempting to negotiate access in Community Life, the senior manager at the time suggested I could be his 'eyes and ears' in the organisation. This not only raises concerns about respecting privacy but also intersects with ethical dilemmas arising in areas of informed consent (i.e. who will be able to access the data) and also my role as researcher.

This ethical issue was also key in maintaining the rights and interests of the organisation as a whole. As a critical researcher, I exposed negative practices in the organisation, for example the performance of power relations, strategies of resistance and what may be called 'hidden issues' (Alcaipani and Hodgson, 2009), which had potential to put the organisation at great risk.

4.6.2. Protecting the respondents from harm

Ethnographically-informed research uses a number of strategies and ensuring informed consent is gained can be a complex and fluid process. For example, when I was collecting data from an 'everyday' conversation, the participants needed to be aware that this formed part of the data collection strategy.

Furthermore, as a relationship with the gatekeeper was established, it was imperative to ensure that informed consent was gathered from all research participants. It is not possible to carry out ethical research without considering existing power relations, and it can be assumed that senior members of the organisation will be in positions of power, which may enable, coerce or prevent informed consent. Ensuring informed consent was gained was therefore a high priority throughout the process.

4.6.3. Role as a researcher

I offered consultancy services to both organisations when negotiating access. It was important to let participants know that the workshops I facilitated would not be in my role as a researcher but instead as a management consultant. This dual role presented potential risks. In my role as a management consultant, I did not have to adhere to the same confidentiality and anonymity protocols

as I did in my role as a researcher; rather, it was necessary for me to disclose feedback from the workshop to the senior management team. I therefore ensured that I was explicit about when this role began and ended, and held the workshops four weeks after I had completed the bulk of my data collection.

4.6.4 Research protocols

4.6.4.1. Semi-structured interviews

Participants were provided with an information sheet (See appendix 4) and a verbal explanation of what the research entails, in which voluntary participation, confidentiality and anonymity were emphasised, and an opportunity to ask questions about the research was given. A consent form was provided (See appendix 5); this was also explained verbally and an opportunity provided for the participant to read it.

The information sheet highlighted that participants could stop the interviews at any time, particularly if feeling distressed, although this concern did not arise during the data collection phase. At the end of the interview, participants were reminded of the research purpose and reassured that all data would be anonymised and remain confidential. Participants were also informed that they could contact me if they wanted to see a copy of the transcripts or key findings before publication, but this offer was not taken up by any of the participants.

4.6.4.2. Observations

Observations included a variety of settings, including meetings or observations of the office space; as such, ethical considerations need to be addressed individually.

As I entered the field, I sought consent from the primary contact in the organisation, who also held the most senior position, to observe organisational activities, and supplemented this with continuous verbal renegotiation of consent with individual research participants.

During the meetings, or similar, my purpose and research motivations were made explicit, information sheets were provided to all participants and verbal consent was gained. No participants declined to be involved in the research during the observations.

4.6.4.3. Data analysis and publishing

All data collected was anonymised using pseudonyms and other tools to remove identifiers. Careful attention was paid to ensure that individuals or organisations are not identifiable. Due to the size of the organisations, where individuals may be identifiable to other organisations' members, job titles were removed and any data revealing individual identities was anonymised. In the following chapters, the generic terms 'senior managers', 'managers', 'front-line employees' and 'employees' are used, rather than specific job titles, to maintain anonymity for the participants. Where data might make the organisation or individuals identifiable, it has been excluded from the analysis and published findings, with caution used to ensure that the findings are not distorted.

4.7 Some Reflections on Gaining Access in Unstable Contexts

The reality of gaining access was complex and non-linear: throughout the process there were multiple peaks, hurdles and disappointments. According to Karjalainen et al. (2015), researchers do not always discuss the extent of the challenges faced when gaining access; they assert that one reason for this is the need to simplify the complex processes and engagement involved. I have summarised the challenges faced in this section.

The process of gaining access started in February 2015 and, for want of a better word, was 'successfully' achieved by May 2017. The process was fraught with obstacles, disappointments and ethical dilemmas. Van Maanen and Kolb describe the process succinctly: it 'involves some combination of strategic planning, hard work, and dumb luck' (Van Maanen and Kolb 1985:11); however, in my case, there appeared to be minimal luck. In addition to strategic planning and hard work, it required analytical thinking; being reflective and asking questions throughout; constant

balancing of thoughts and priorities; completing the data collection; maintaining good working relationships within the VCSO; protecting the reputations of individuals and organisations; protecting my own identity as a researcher; questioning what is 'really' happening here. In summary, I needed to be open-minded, reflexive, flexible and resilient. Whilst, at the time, much of the process felt disappointing, it soon became apparent that the problems I encountered in gaining access were representative of the context in which I was carrying out my research and would later come to be a part of my analysis.

My history of working in the sector had granted me access to Natalie, a senior leader of a VCSO, who was also the chair of a VCS umbrella organisation. Whilst the conversations were initially intended to be a part of scoping exercise, they turned into Natalie granting me permission to carry out my research in an oragnisation she was leading, Organisation A.

However, my attempt at gaining access was thwarted by subsequent events: Natalie was made redundant, unexpectedly and suddenly, and told me I would no longer be able to carry out my research in Organisation A. This sudden change within the organisation served as an indicator of the unpredictability of the sector in its current context and highlighted the need to consider the nature of gaining access. According to Cunningham et al. (2013), gaining access to an organisation should be considered rather as gaining multiple accesses. It is important to consider the following aspects: ongoing processes of access, multiple level access and contradictory negotiations. In this instance, considering multiple level access was significant: whilst I had gained access to the organisation at one level (the CEO), I had not gained access with the board directly. Building trust at multiple levels would have helped to secure my access within the organisation once the CEO had left. To conclude, within Organisation A, I was able get in and to some extent get on, but in a very limited manner

Natalie was very concerned to find another organisation and introduced me via email to the CEO of Community Life. In my first meeting with Nathan, he was very open about the organisation, the challenges it faced with funding, and the conflicts within the organisation. He authorised participation

in my research, and suggested I start the following week, observing a senior management meeting. However, I then received an email from Nathan, stating that he was leaving Community Life with immediate effect – again, an indicator of instability in the sector. I was directed to the deputy manager, who agreed that I could continue with my research with Nathan, but I would not be able to contact him directly. Nevertheless, I was able to access the organisation and collected data over the next three months. Some employees were, however, excluded from the research: it appeared that the part-time and casual staff were not considered able to make useful contributions and I was unable to interview them. Beynon (1988) highlights that organisations resist research in a variety of ways.

I intended to carry out a series of interviews where appropriate, both to build trust with the respondents and also to deepen the understanding of emerging themes. I attempted to contact the organisation between September 2016 and February 2017, but subsequent interviews were not possible for a number of reasons. I had entered the organisation immediately after a change in management, and the organisation was experiencing considerable turmoil as it tried to move forwards. It also faced cuts in local authority funding and employees were being informed of possible redundancies. The research had been officially authorised and understood by someone who no longer worked within the organisation, and the current leadership were not necessarily committed to the research. Whilst I was granted access, I was not granted cooperation under the current management arrangement. Furthermore, during the data collection in Community Life my own supervisor was made redundant, which impacted on my own commitment to the research.

I did not abandon the negotiations, but instead began to focus on gaining access in other ways. In April 2017, I was able to make contact with and negotiate access to two employees from Community Life, but this took place offsite and was negotiated on an individual level. This experience demonstrates the importance of continually maintaining accesses throughout data collection and recognising that the process is emergent and relies heavily on the characteristics of the researcher, the respondents and the research context itself (Carey et al., 2001).

I will now turn to Healthscape. The first stage of 'getting into' Healthscape was relatively straightforward: I gained access via email, with a follow-up meeting with the CEO and deputy CEO of the organisation.

During negotiations for access, it was made clear that there would need to be some form of reciprocity for the organisation, as time spent by employees in interviews would be a cost to the organisation. I therefore agreed with the CEO that I would give two days of training for the organisation, an approach recommended by Ahrens (2004) to secure commitment to research. During challenging times, negotiating access may be more difficult as staff are pressured for time and, furthermore, management may feel threatened by staff talking to an outsider.

Once I had entered the field in Healthscape, I gained access primarily on an individual level. Wasserman and Jeffery (2007) assert that the need for social skills is crucial in building trust and acceptance from the participants. I adopted some of the existing practices within the organisation; for example, I noticed that in the staff kitchen people would contribute food for everyone to share, so one day I did the same. I spoke to people about their weekend, made general 'small talk', and on several occasions I went for coffee and lunch with staff. In addition to this, a significant element in developing trust was to share my experience of starting doctoral research: four staff members within the organisation wanted to engage with undergraduate or post-graduate studies and, from my knowledge, I was able to guide them in some of the processes. This was a strong factor in gaining trust, most probably due to a sense of reciprocity.

In considering the process as whole, two factors proved to be key: the importance of context and the importance of continual and multi-level access. I will conclude by summarising these below.

One of the key considerations in the process of gaining access was the importance of context. My key informants felt that the research would be difficult to execute because of the climate in the VCS, and this proved to be accurate. In two out of three organisations, senior leaders left the organisation

suddenly and, in both cases, there was great discontent about the way in which this had happened. All of the organisations had just had or were undergoing major internal changes, including restructuring and redundancies. These factors were significant in determining the nature of access I was able to gain.

The overall context of the sector also affected how much time I was able to spend with respondents. According to Johl and Renganathan (2010), access in the field can vary greatly: for example, in a profitable enterprise, staff time is seen as having high financial value and therefore an interview would be considered a financial loss. This was also evident in Healthscape, where it was made clear in the negotiations that staff time was scarce. I was able to mitigate this to some extent in offering training to the organisation; nevertheless, whilst interviewing staff, I certainly felt a sense of urgency in both Healthscape and Community Life.

The importance of context is not only significant for those being researched but also for the researcher: during my time at Community Life, not only did the participants' context change but so did mine within my affiliated institution, impacting on my own commitment and consistency in the process.

Continual and multiple access was a recurring theme throughout the process of gaining access. Laurila (1997) categorises gaining access into three forms: formal access, based upon research objectives and what the organisation may gain; secondly, personal access where the researcher may know people within the organisation; and thirdly, access gained where the researcher develops relationships with the organisation based on collaboration and clear, meaningful understanding of the research.

I heavily relied on personal access in Organisation A and Community Life, which brought limitations: when the key informant was removed, so was my access. Karjalainen et al. (2015) developed a useful model depicting the various levels of gaining access (see Figure 2). Drawing on

this model, it is evident that in Organisation A, I gained access at the general level: document access and access to selected members (as in my first observation event, all staff members were very positive about my presence and also towards my research); however, I faced challenges when the individuals moved in Stage 1. In Community Life, a similar pattern occurred, and I was only granted access to selected members; other staff members were not included. Further, it was evident that there were power relations at play: as many of the staff were subordinate to those I did manage to interview, I could only gain access to them via their managers. I primarily interviewed core team members, who may have presented a particular picture of the organisation; staff in peripheral positions may have given an alternative picture.

In Healthscape, I was granted access at all levels, although access at level 2 was limited. There was also some resistance at level 4, where some individuals declined to be involved in the study on the basis of time. It is evident that one should not assume that access has been agreed until the process is over: gaining access is clearly a continual process, one which is full of nuances, and demands reflexivity, as no singular model or approach can account for the nature of the wider context or the choices of individuals at one particular moment in time.

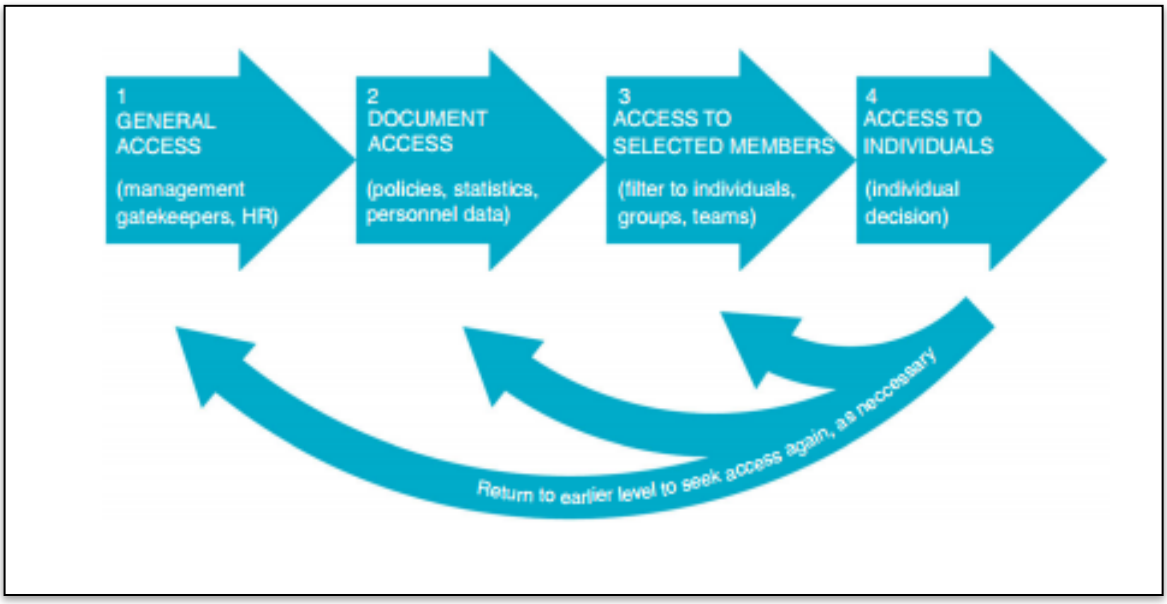

Figure 2: Levels in gaining access

To conclude, gaining access is sometimes considered a functional task for the collection of data; however, in my experience the process of gaining access served as data itself, providing me with insights into the context of the sector, the power between organisational figures, the nature of working in such an environment, and why some organisations were more open to research than others. Furthermore, the process required me consider throughout issues such as methods, ethical issues and reflexively revising my approach to the study. As explored in this summary, the process of gaining access was far more time-consuming than accounted for in my initial time-frame and, consequently, it developed my own understanding of carrying out research in an unstable context.

4.8 Conclusion to the Methodology Chapter

This chapter has introduced the research sites and described the methods employed to investigate my research questions. A governmentality-informed research methodology includes an overall design of a qualitative, instrumental, multi-site case study, which comprises ethnographic-informed methods, namely, semi-structured interviews and observations across two research sites. Governmentality as a framework has been operationalised in my research through Bacchi's (2009) WPR approach, and this guided my analysis in terms of 'what markers am I looking for?'. With this approach steering my analysis, I also used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases to thematic analysis to analyse and manage the data in practice.

I have also reflected in this chapter on the process of gaining access in unstable contexts. In the following chapter, I begin to present the findings from the first case organisation, Community Life, where instability was a central theme dominating the organisation, and which had an integral link to the construction of subjects.

Chapter 5: Community Life: An Organisation facing Uncertainty

5.1 Introduction

In the second chapter, I outlined the elements of the WPR approach which aid in operationalising a governmentality enquiry. I then noted in the fourth chapter that the WPR approach guided my analysis of the empirical data. The problem representation, proposed solutions, underpinning assumptions, examination of what is marginalised in the problem representation and effects on agents are all central to a WPR approach. These central concepts have also helped structure the following four chapters. Whilst I have attempted to 'separate' elements of the WPR approach for clarity in the presentation of my findings (chapters 5-8), it must be noted that at times there are discussions where such separation is not possible, due to the intertwined nature of rationalities, technologies and their effects.

In this chapter I will present the findings from Community Life, beginning by outlining the problem representation of an organisation facing uncertainty. I move on to explore how the way in which this influences the nature of the proposed solutions, which primarily target the employees as needing to realign with neoliberal principles. I discuss the material, discursive and subjectification effects this has for employees, alongside exploring how employees buy into and resist the reconstruction of their subjectivity and offer counter-discourses.

5.2 The Problem Representation

The neoliberalisation of the VCS has led to a number of significant changes, in particular shifts in funding regimes, which have created an environment of uncertainty (Macmillan et al, 2013). The uncertainty prevalent in Community Life was overwhelmingly evident throughout my interviews and observations, and many factors contributed to it. It was evident during the fieldwork that the organisation was at risk of funds being reduced or removed, and this was coupled with a sense of a

pressing need for the organisation to retain its position in an ever-changing and increasingly competitive marketplace.

The primary cause for this environment of uncertainty was a lack of clarity as to if and when Community Life would receive the next round of funding. This uncertainty was closely linked to the current nature of contracting regimes between local government and VCSOs, which are characterised by a reduction in the availability of funds, an increased shift towards a competitive market-based framework in deciding on funding allocation, and increased demands for accountability and performance measures in funded organisations (Doeringer, 2010; Davies, 2011). Mark, a manager, highlighted some of the key challenges present at Community Life at the time of my fieldwork, compared with his previous role working for the civil service:

> *Work wise there wasn't that much pressure. Also, you didn't have to think about funding or money. Your salary was coming. There was no uncertainty about what's going to happen next year or the next 3 years. So that was the relaxation part of it. You weren't constantly thinking about money, the pressure was off. It was a different atmosphere. You get a salary, your salary is based on… [now], you know, when you get a project for 3 years, you know for 3 years you're talking about that. Then after that you've got to find funding again.*

The environment of uncertainty was further reinforced by the lack of and delay in communication from the commissioners to Community Life, in particular regarding the cuts. Ahmad described a period of nine months of uncertainty (December to September), when the organisation was not clear on how the funding cuts would affect it. He referred to a period of 3–4 months of chasing the commissioners for information and received a series of responses which were highly ambiguous:

> *In December we got a letter from Public Health saying that because of central government cuts that we have no choice there will be cuts. But we don't know the*

extent of the cuts. Indicatively they said 6–8%. That was in December. So, there was no other communication for 3 or 4 months. We were chasing them, saying, 'Look, people are demotivated we don't know where we stand. We can't budget; we can't plan next year'. So, they said, 'Look, we're waiting for other announcements, the Mayor's announcement ... x, y and z. Until we know, we can't share anything. We can't tell you anything. So, after December, 5 months I think, in May, May 5th, we had the next announcement came.' (Ahmad, Manager, Community Life)

He goes on to describe that, in the May announcement, the proposed cuts increased from 6–8% to 20%. This significant increase demonstrates just how precarious the environment is. He goes on to describe that this could shift again and, in fact, the detail of what the contract will require, the contract variation, will not be available until the final announcement in September.

But we don't know what that percentage is going to be. So is it 20% overall? Or is it going to be 10% here? We don't know until that final announcement and then the variation in our contract. So all of that is the unknown or we don't know. It's just outside our hands. (Ahmad, Manager, Community Life)

5.3 Solutions, Technologies and Effects

Having outlined this context of uncertainty in Community Life, I will now look at this context through the WPR approach. To recap, the explicit problems identified by the management within Community Life are limited funds and the uncertain nature of the current funding regime. However, when applying the WPR approach, it is evident that the proposals for change suggest that there are other, implicit problems. Bacchi (2009) suggests that to unpack the problem representation it is necessary to work backwards, by looking at the proposed solutions to these problems. The context has outlined what the management of the organisation deems to be the explicit problems, but it is by looking at the solutions to these problems that the researcher can identify the implicit 'problems'.

The proposals focus on two areas: 1) the restructure of the organisation, suggesting that it is unable to challenge or influence wider funding regimes, and 2) staff conduct needing to be 'nurtured' and shifted to meet the demands of the challenging context, suggesting that the effects of the wider funding cuts can be overcome with the right staff attitude. I will now move on to discuss these implied problems and their associated proposals, underlying assumptions and effects.

One of the proposed solutions to the uncertainty in the organisation was a restructure. There was constant discussion of the insistent need to minimise organisational costs, and the imminent restructure was a response to the possible reduction in funding for the forthcoming financial year. It would include potential redundancies in the worst case and, at a minimum, a reduction in contracted hours for employees. This response corroborates with Macmillan's (2013) findings that VCSOs respond to unsettling periods by restructuring as a strategy for regaining stability and organisational survival. This approach was reported in the interviews as a regular practice, with most staff experiencing some changes to their working hours, and some facing the threat of redundancy, year on year. It may be deduced that the problem shifts from the macro-level, i.e. poor funding practices at local government level, to the meso-level of the organisation. The representation produces a 'problem' that can be managed *within* the organisation, as opposed to externally. By reducing working hours of employees and restructuring the workforce, the problem is expressed as being one of management concern to make the correct decisions and to work in a way which adheres to the market-based discourse of efficiency. It becomes a race to the bottom, as organisations attempt to reduce the costs associated with the workforce. Yet, Ridder et al.'s (2012) study on HRM architecture noted that this administrative approach to HR (restructures and redundancies) in the VCS, which is usually a reactive response to cost-cutting, is highly detrimental to the organisational strategic goals and employee retention and motivation. Alatrista and Arrowsmith (2004) also found that VCSOs may neglect HRM practices which foster positive working conditions when faced with environmental uncertainty. How, then, is such a proposal made intelligible by the management within Community Life?

The proposal to restructure the organisation is largely made intelligible by the presupposition that uncertain funding regimes are out of the organisation's control. This can be seen in Ahmad's quote earlier, where he notes that the variation in the final amount of funding to be received is *'...the unknown or we don't know. It's just outside our hands.'* (Ahmad, Manager, Community Life). This sense of a lack of agency regarding funding is also evident in Mark's interview excerpt when he identifies that they have no control, as government funding cuts will inevitably trickle down to the organisation:

> *[Researcher] And over the 6 years that you've been here have you noticed any significant changes to your role or to the organisation?*
>
> *[Interviewee] Financially we're tighter now. When I first joined, we had quite a lot of money. So our plan was different, I think it was different. Over the past few years we don't, with government cuts a few years that felt different for us as well. Obviously, when the central government cuts their money it goes to local government and comes to us. So there's been a change in the mood of us in terms of job security, money coming in and uncertainty. (Mark, Manager, Community Life)*

Bacchi (2009:8) suggests that identifying how a problem may be understood can be found in binaries. It is evident in the interview extracts that the management relies on the binary of what is within its control and what is outside of its control, what is known and what is not known. These binaries are underlying assumptions which shape the problem representation. The cuts in funding are presented as though they are monolithic and, to a certain extent, incontestable at a macro-level. Mark appears to view the issues facing the organisation as inevitable; as such, they can only be addressed through shifts in ways of working or restructuring within the organisation. The excerpt above also shows how the idea of uncertainty is considered certain. Despite the continual discussion about uncertainty, certain aspects were considered fixed by the management of the organisation, for example, the terms and conditions that came with contracts were non-negotiable; funding cuts

occurred annually and would increase year on year; there were no resources available; contracts were reviewed annually bringing funding cuts; the unknown was fixed and remains out of the control of the organisation; the organisation was operating in difficult times and this means they were *'forced to make difficult decisions to find savings'* (Ahmad, Manager, Community Life). Therefore, the management represents the problem to be something that it feels it is able to control or influence.

It may be argued that the managers' views are concordant with the neoliberal discourse and practice of TINA (there is no alternative). The stance of having no alternative to shifting funding regimes, and consequently making decisions which have material effects (discussed later) on employees' lives, is an indicator of neoliberal rule at play. Fine and Saad-Filho (2019) argue that the neoliberal discourse of TINA and its implications for political, social and economic life have 'systematically reduced the scope for the expression of collective interests … and even the aspiration to change society beyond neoliberalism' (p.33). Further, Queiroz (2017) argues that the neoliberal principle of TINA subliminally guides individuals to become self-interested, with 'neither any sense of commitment to each other, nor a political principle concerning the well-being of others' (p.5). The managers have accepted that this is the position of the organisation, and indeed the sector, and consequently look for inward-facing solutions to challenges which they identify as being external, as they view the latter as being out of their control.

Turning briefly to Bacchi's (2009:10–12) question, how has this representation of the problem come about? Historically, the VCS has increasingly engaged in a relationship with the state for financial resources. This has, over time, become the main source of income for some organisations, such as Community Life. Jacklin-Jarvis (2015) suggests that this relationship has been characterised by the disempowerment of VCS as it attempts to 'work around' its relationships with the state. NCIA (2015b) argue that the receipt of state funds has over time led to the demise of the VCS, as it has involved organisations competing for contracts which are not based on the full cost recovery model, and do not focus on the quality of provision. Instead, a quality/cost model predominates, in which

decisions may be based 80% on cost and 20% on quality. Further, the commissioning relationship has led to pressure from the commissioners for reduced costs (i.e. salaries or hours) to meet the cost requirements that commissioners will pay. This disempowering relationship, coupled with an overall reduction in the availability of state funding, has led VCSOs to find inward-facing strategies to survive, or alternative sources of funds to supplement any shortfall.

The question of what has been silenced in this problem representation and what is left unproblematic remains (Bacchi, 2009:12). In the problem representation, the state is not problematised, insofar as it is not held to account for the deterioration in working conditions for employees. There is wider evidence that the changes in funding have impacted on employees' working conditions such as contracts offering no job security; standardised work processes; increased workloads; and a reduction in positive working terms and conditions (Cunningham and James, 2009; Cunningham et al., 2013). Cunningham et al. (2013) highlights that funding practices remain sub-standard. The study also shows that funding regimes still neglect to consider a full-cost recovery model, or to consider the link between costs and the expected quality of the service, which may lead to potential issues for staff. Another study finds that delays in funding decisions mean that organisations are not given adequate time to manage changes in hours or restructures within a reasonable time-frame (Macmillan et al., 2013). Together, these studies indicate that funders may hold some responsibility for ensuring that the working conditions of employees within contracted organisations are fair. It was evident from my observations in the organisation that the management dedicated a considerable amount of time to financial scenario planning in the event of budget reductions over the next few months. Time was also spent in individual and team meetings to discuss potential reductions in hours and redundancies. These factors are not considered in the contract budgets, but require significant time from employees. The focus on an internal solution to the external funding context minimises the responsibility of the state to engage in fair commissioning practices. Furthermore, the overall reduction in budgets, and the impact on the communities that the

organisations serve, is not challenged, as organisations are primarily focussed on their own survival and their competitive position in the market.

The environment of uncertainty, and proposed solutions for this, has led to a range of lived effects (Bacchi 2009:17) in employment conditions, with evidence of deteriorating working conditions and increased uncertainty. These effects were felt in various ways by front-line employees, from reduced work satisfaction and low team morale to unregulated changes to working hours.

Lucy refers to frequent periods of uncertainty about future funding which led to low team morale. She is now *'fed up'* with frequent, even yearly, changes to her working conditions, and finds these particularly frustrating, to the extent of driving her to consider leaving the organisation, as she now requires more security due to her financial commitments.

> *However, now I think it might be a much bigger cut, so my hours will be cut, so I think I'm going to have to start looking and stuff, and actually you know obviously when I started off, I didn't have as many financial commitments and stuff, so it was fine, I didn't really care too much, but now I've got a mortgage to pay, you know like different things so I can't go through that every year. (Lucy, Community Life).*

Chantelle echoes Lucy's views in the excerpt below, where she also feels the uncertainty is a threat to her commitments and desire for security:

> *...there's never certainty and it's so true there's never ever certainty working within the community but I love doing this. Yeah, but it's got to a point now when you have children and you realise, okay I can't be sitting around thinking if I'm going to have a contract next year.*
>
> *[Researcher] Yeah*

So yeah, so I'm not going to be looking to stay in this job much longer and look for another job. (Chantelle, Community Life)

This lack of certainty inevitably leads to Lucy and Chantelle feeling they want to seek out new roles. When probed, both suggest in their interviews that they would not work in the same sector, unless they were able to find positions in large, nationally recognised charities. They perceive some of the uncertainty as an issue exclusive to small community organisations, which highlights how the issues facing the organisations are problematised differently by employees. Lucy further illustrates her belief that this uncertainty is unique to smaller organisations when she discusses how larger organisations can negotiate the impacts of funding cuts as they have multiple funding streams and a large pool of projects to draw on, and can therefore retain staff members when faced with funding cuts.

So obviously it will affect us, but other organisations, they're either fundraising or they've got more projects and they're bigger organisations so it doesn't necessarily affect the staff. (Lucy, Community Life)

Changes to working hours had severe consequences for Chantelle: she had a part-time role in another charity, but was asked by Community Life to increase her hours from 3 days to 4 days due to a restructure, which had emerged from previous years' funding cuts. She was aware that, if she did not agree, she might be at risk of losing her initial three days a week. She handed in her notice at the other charity and agreed to take the four days. However, the hours Chantal were promised were retracted as, once the contracts had been finalised, the additional hours were no longer required:

[Interviewee] So then I had to give in my notice. I gave in my notice, they recruited somebody and suddenly he said, 'Oh sorry, we've changed our minds, you have to work 3 days a week' and then I was like, 'you just took' ... and I said to him and I said to someone, 'You just took food out of my daughter's mouth.'

[Researcher] Yeah.

[Interviewee] Like, you know, you made me give up a job that pays a little bit more than this job because mental health pays more money, yeah, you made me give that job up and you literally took food out of my daughter's mouth. He goes, 'How did I do that Chantelle, I don't think I did that.' I said, 'Yes, you did that.' I said, 'You won't understand that until you have your own child.' (Chantelle, Front-Line Worker, Community Life).

As noted in section 5.2, there was a lack of information from funders and this uncertainty was then filtered down within the organisation from managers to front-line staff. One manager did express that he was very transparent about the funding cuts to staff, adopting a number of approaches such as team meetings, consultations and one-to-ones.

[Interviewee] So one thing we've considered is being open and transparent with our staff... So when we've had communication, we've said, 'Look this is the letter we've received and this is what it says'. We've shown them the letter and every time there's communication, further development, we're keeping them in the loop individually through supervision staff meetings and all that. Consultation, all of that, they're part of that process. So it's a journey we're going on together as opposed to individually. Whereas other organisations you see is very different approaches, very different. (Ahmad, Manager, Community Life)

However, interviews with front-line staff members suggested that such meetings only served to raise the sense of uncertainty, rather than provide any sense of security for staff. For example, all the staff were aware of imminent cuts to their project within the next three months, but did not know how they would be affected by this. Given that the managers did not have clarity themselves on the nature of the funding cuts, the 'transparent' approach may have been detrimental to front-line employees,

rather than conducive to creating a more stable atmosphere. Drawing on Pyysiäinen et al.'s (2017) recent conceptualisations of neoliberal governmentality, it is suggested that governance is not only achieved through the 'appeal of freedom' but also by the threat to personal control, and such ambiguity certainly raised a threat to staff and their current employment positions, a point I will discuss later in chapter 9. Further, it appeared that this lack of information made it difficult to identify the implications of cuts to the organisation and thus limited the available courses of action. In this regard, this discourse was reinforced by being seen as ambiguous, beyond control or action.

Interrogating how the problem is represented involves identifying what is proposed to need to change (Baachi, 2009:55). Amidst the climate of uncertainty, the focus was on how staff should conduct themselves during periods of uncertainty, rather than on the wider context of the cuts and detrimental nature of the funding regimes. Solutions were often based on how staff behave and how they should respond during periods of uncertainty. Below, Ahmad illustrates how employees' individual capacity to adapt and develop a sense of resilience are fundamental to managing during this period:

> *[Interviewee] Yeah. And I think for some staff members, depending on their age and experience, some understand it a little bit better than others…And that's typical. Others, they are very emotional, they get quite upset. It becomes personal and you keep saying the same thing, 'It's not personal, it is business and these are difficult times and we're forced to make changes.'*

In Ahmad's quote, an important aspect to consider is the response to staff who were not seen as able to cope with the demands of the neoliberal environment: they were considered immature or incapable of understanding how 'business' works. The extract above illustrates the association between the lack of the 'right' personal attitude and the inability to cope with uncertainty in the organisation. This representation of the problem individualises the social and creates a greater sense of responsibilisation.

Furthermore, framing individuals as at fault for not understanding the current context operates as a subtle silencing mechanism for challenging the funding cuts and pervasive uncertainty, as the issues are whittled down to an individual problem, to whether an individual is unable to cope. Inevitably, employees do not want to feel as though they are the issue, so they continue to operate in ways which are considered ideal by managers, whilst failing to challenge the macro level issues present in the organisation. Governmentality is at play here, whereby a neoliberal discourse is adopted to shape human conduct based on what is considered good and responsible conduct (Dean, 2010:18–19). The quote above also illustrates the presupposition that neoliberalism is amoral which underlies the problem representation – i.e. that the current context is based upon rational market principles and hence one must adopt a subjectivity based upon such principles in order to cope with such challenges. As Ahmad suggests, the cuts are not *'personal, it is business'.* It is also worth noting that this amoral perspective is paradoxical, because neoliberalism relies largely on the individual morality of entrepreneurship.

In one extract from the interview with Ahmad, he views the issues relating to the sector as being able to be solved by a shift in working practices or, in Ahmad's words, as finding *'creative ways of delivering more for less'.*

> *As you can see the funding cuts every year is getting bigger and bigger so we're squeezed for resources and staffing. So you're having to find creative ways of delivering more for less. (Ahmad, Manager, Community Life)*

This perception resonates with the neoliberal assumption that structural issues can be rectified by the individual. As Foucault (2008) asserts, neoliberalism encourages individuals to become self-entrepreneurs, self-enterprising individuals, whilst also requiring a greater need for self-determination so they can individually engage in solutions to problems. Managers unequivocally believed in the power of staff members to address the issues facing the organisation through their own personal reform, a reform which involves the 'mentality of entrepreneurship' (Turken, 2017), adherence to

neoliberal market principles and the ability to govern oneself. Further, the proposals are made intelligible through the notion that employees are skill-acquiring individuals and also have a desire to do more than they may be compensated for. This notion may rely upon a perception of VCS workers being committed to the cause of their work and therefore more willing to go 'above and beyond'. Ahmad translates how the wider issues of funding can be *'overcome'* on a practical level by staff if they *'prove themselves'* and engage with technologies, such as the database (discussed later in chapter 6). Ahmed implies a framework for employees, shaping how they should act or 'perform' within the organisation.

> *For example, now we lost a lot of funding, so the organisation is struggling, so there are no resources available. So the arrangement is, when funding is healthy when we bring in additional, we will review the job role and what you're doing. And that's the kind of arrangement we have. And third sector's always like that, isn't it? And then you do whatever you can and hopefully, one day, you think the board and the SMT will realise the contributions. And they will come to you and say, maybe we need to reward you. Maybe give you a service permit or a gym membership or 2K increase and all that. Based on your performance and what you've delivered. And I always say to my team, 'Look, let your work be an example. You don't need to speak anything, your work should speak for itself.' If you are a high performing of staff, if your attendance is good, your sickness is low. When you deliver your level 1, 2 and 3, that it's of a high standard. That's all we can ask for. And people take note of that. (Ahmed, Manager, Community Life)*

This quote illustrates how the management of Community Life encourages neoliberal subjectivity. Ahmed displays a clear neoliberal rationality in suggesting that, if staff are responsible, active and entrepreneurial, they are likely to gain recognition and reap the rewards. This narrative also promotes a focus on individual gain, another characteristic of the neoliberal subject. In Ahmad's

extract, the desired subjectivity is linked to the dominant neoliberal discourses in the organisation regarding potential funding cuts and, more broadly, the survival of the organisation. Linking the problems of the broader context to solutions which can be found in employees' conduct begins to foster an environment which requires actions from the employees, serving to individualise structural issues, while further responsibilising employees.

It may be argued that, in some cases, Ahmed does shift from the dominant discourse of personal reform to one of challenging the structural constraints. In one extract, he challenges politicians regarding funding cuts, but he still aligns this to a personal attitude, and sees actions based upon his ability to be proactive and dynamic as the ideal response to structural issues. Ahmed is further reinforcing the ideal subjectivity of staff as he considered himself a beacon of good practice, willing to find an individual solution to structural issues.

> *[Interviewee] And then internal, the SMT, we've developed an action plan of lobbying, writing to our local councillors, and meeting with the Mayor. The lead member for North and adult services. So we're pursuing those lines of lobbying and stuff.*
>
> *[Researcher] But that's also kind of extra …*
>
> *[Interviewee] Work. Work on top of having to do contracts.*
>
> *[Researcher] Yeah. So you're having to develop those additional strategies.*
>
> *[Interviewee] But you know, the way I see it, it's something that we need to do. We have to be proactive. We have to be dynamic. At the end of the day, if we go home and sleep comfortably thinking that we've done everything possible, then we've done a good job. (Ahmed, Manager, Community Life)*

So, while there is an attempt to challenge macro level stakeholders, Ahmed's approach is still consonant with neoliberal subjectivity, as he suggests the need to reform oneself in line with

neoliberal ideals in order to challenge the funding cuts. This further perpetuates the individualisation and responsibilisation agenda, and is problematic because, if such strategies do not work, there is a further embedding of the notion that staff (or Ahmed himself) are not doing enough. This creates an environment whereby structural problems are internalised as a personal failure, and demand greater entrepreneurship from staff.

Work intensification was another impact of the current funding regime that caused both uncertainties and increased pressure for managers and front-line employees alike. Mark identifies how the most significant challenge in his role is the growing intensification of work, particularly with limited time resources. He considers this as an issue which could be resolved with greater income, enabling employment of more staff, which would have the effect of improving service quality.

> *Yeah, in the sense of staff wise. In the sense it's quite a lot of work labour intensified for people to do staff wise and not having enough people to deal with it. The pressure of work, you always get more work than you have time. So that's one issue where it would be good if we had more money to employ people and give a better service. (Mark, Manager, Community Life)*

In addition to seeing work intensification as an issue that can be resolved with additional income, he also suggests that this situation is more manageable with a positive attitude from staff. When discussing maintaining staff motivation in the context of increased pressure and uncertainty, Mark believed this depended on staff ability to understand the context, and remain positive and open to opportunities.

> *We have a good team with a positive attitude ... I suppose they know, they've been here a long time. They know the set-up, they know how it works. They know that we depend on the funding and they keep their options open as well. They know that it's*

their expectations you know? So they understand how it affects our project. (Mark, Manager, Community Life)

This illustrates how the subjectivity of the ideal employee may be formed through the expectations of the management and the way the problem is represented. Here, it can be seen in the type of qualities and attitudes staff should have in response to issues facing the organisation. Firstly, he suggests they have a *'good attitude'*, which appears to be right if it is consonant with neoliberal subjectivity: one who can adapt, understand and always be open to opportunity during challenging periods. The attitude adopted by the manager is entrenched in a neoliberal ideology; according to Walkerdine et al. (2001), neoliberalism has positioned people as responsible for their own 'self-invention and transformation' to be 'capable of surviving within the new social, economic and political system' (p.3).

There were examples in my fieldwork of how employees had become subjugated to the self-reform discourse. Evidence of self-blame and clear expression of self-reform, self-governance and transformation of the self were identifiable in several of the interviews, suggesting that employees had to some degree demonstrated aspects of the neoliberal subject. It appeared that the response to funding cuts was for front-line employees to internalise the challenges facing the organisation and to reform themselves, rather than to question the legitimacy of funding cuts.

Cara explains her response to the funding cuts:

[Researcher] Are you concerned about the funding cuts for the amount of work that has to be done or …?

[Interviewee] I think because I have got more insight into the funding cuts, then there is work to be done. However, I think, because some of us have had our hours reduced, I think we needed that shake-up to wake, kind of really wake us up. Because if you're so … eight, nine years working in the workplace, you can get complacent and you can

get so comfortable that your work isn't up to that standard it should be. (Cara, Community Life)

It was clear that Cara linked the cut in her hours to the fact that she had not been working to a high enough standard. She internalised the wider government cuts to the sector as an issue that could be reformed by reshaping and transforming her own mentality and work ethic, demonstrating how the problem representation had subjectification effects. Bacchi (2009:1) observes 'the way in which the "problem" is represented carries all sorts of implications for how the issue is thought about, and for how the people involved are treated, and are evoked to think about themselves'. The discourse of neoliberalism supports the idea that individuals are free, responsible, autonomous individuals and, as such, have a choice in their ways of being. Consequently, there is a tendency to ignore the socio-structural issues and continuously reflect on one's own performance and what can be done to transform and rectify the problem, personally (Walkerdine, 2003; Rose, 1999).

Lucy explains her response to the increased work intensification:

[Interviewee] Last year, I felt I've been doing this for such a long time. Only last year … because we don't have kids. It was perfect for me. I started work at 10, I finished at 3, so everything was fine for me. Then last year, just physically and mentally, I felt drained. And I felt, I think I want to do other things. Because like I said earlier on, I used to come, I used to do my work and I used to leave. I did not get involved with certain things because of time constraints and working more days etc so I only did certain things …

[Researcher] Just that role.

[Interviewee] …yes. And then I went to this training and … you develop, you see certain things that comes out in you and you feel like, 'Oh, okay' …

[Researcher] 'I can do this.'

[Interviewee] Yes. So, I approached some man and I said, 'If there's any opportunities, let me know.' And he goes, 'It was funny that you said that because last week at the training,' ... because it was the next day, I don't train ... he said, 'There's few people in the team ... great assets to the team,' until he mentioned my name. He goes, 'I never noticed you.' And I was like, 'Okay.' He's like, 'I never noticed,' because I wasn't vocal.

One of the issues with the failure to question the limitations of the wider structure is that it leads employees to develop a sense of internalised responsibility for any failures, as the social becomes individualised. This leads to a view that any failure can be remedied by individuals, by engaging with an array of personal or career development activities. In Lucy's narrative above, she responded to feeling *'just physically and mentally ... drained'* by engaging in more activities. Lucy viewed the training as a means of transformation, where she was now able to see her own capabilities or, in her words, *'you develop, certain things come out in you'*, and in turn, these were recognised by management.

Chantelle's excerpt below also suggests that she has internalised some of the issues facing the organisations, as she relates them to her own poor decision-making. Chantelle reflects on her career choices, and how she wished had listened to key figures in her life who had warned her that the community sector is characterised by insecure employment and low pay:

Yeah, I wish I'd listened to my mum and my tutors back then because they're like, there's no money in community work. They were like there is always no money and you'll be, you know, there's always funding cuts and there's this and that and you're never ...

Chantelle's views illustrate how problem representation is significant for subjectification effects as well as discursive effects about what can and cannot be discussed. Chantelle does not question

why the VCS is characterised by low pay and insecure employment, or how these changes have come about, but instead draws the individualised conclusion that it is a sector to be avoided if you seek fair employment conditions.

There were examples of resistance to market subject positioning and its related discourse in the interviews. Chantelle rejects the neoliberal rationality of managers and their decisions. Firstly, she casts doubt on their capability as managers, expressing that they do not know the needs of the clients they work with. However, interestingly, in this organisation all the senior managers had been employed long-term in other VCS organisations. It may, therefore, be suggested that even managers who once aligned more closely with a moral position reflecting the traditional values of the VCS have now shifted their subjectivity to meet the demands of the neoliberal project. This is explored further after Chantelle's excerpt:

> *[Interviewee] Hmm, because initially when we started working here, when the team leader first started, the lead team leader, when he came in he was very adamant that we need to create a programme just for mental health clients that come specifically for them, and I'm like, I've tried these, we've tried these, it won't work, why would a client come to a service especially for mental health clients, they want to be integrated into the community and all services, and he didn't understand that because I guess he came in and he wanted to put his stamp on this.*
>
> *[Researcher] Yeah.*
>
> *[Interviewee] But I let him try and it didn't work. I didn't want to say I told you so, but you know, all that money, all that time spent.*
>
> *[Researcher] Wasted.*
>
> *[Interviewee] Yeah, that I've done previously and it didn't work.*

[Researcher] Yeah, so you kind of already had that knowledge that it wouldn't work.

[Interviewee] Yeah, it's not going to work because it never used to work. When you were at Mental Health Matters [previous employer] it wouldn't work if we had something specific for mental health clients. (Chantelle, Front-line Worker, Community Life)

In addition to not having the appropriate knowledge, Chantelle also suggests that the manager *'just wanted to put his stamp on it'*. It could be argued that this is an example of self-advancement, associated with the neoliberal subjectivity. Chantelle later provides another example where she saw the manager's decision-making to be influenced by their own self-advancement at the expense of her work intensification, referring to a scenario where her targets were increased by her line manager, with no clear justification. In a clear expression of resistance, she bypassed the manager and went directly to the funders to ask if the project's targets had increased, and was advised they had not changed. She later confronted her manager, who suggested that she had not behaved professionally by going directly to the funders. Chantelle observes below that she would have preferred there to be an open dialogue, rather than what she considered was a personal project of self-advancement which, had she not challenged it, might have left her in a position of failing to achieve her targets and consequently being open to a disciplinary process.

[Interviewee] And he then goes to me, I need to think about what I say before I say it, this is not the right way to behave professionally, and then he was basically being quite personal and I wasn't having it and I know my rights, I wasn't having it because I would have much preferred if somebody speaks to me on the level and tells me, 'because I started as a team leader here, I want to make the service good, I want to make myself look good so please try and hit beyond your targets'.

[Researcher] Yeah but it wasn't ...

[Interviewee] Yeah, so for you to turn round and say to hit 50 and if I don't hit 50 I'm going to get a disciplinary, I'm not going to have that. (Chantelle, Front-line Worker, Community Life)

`The more outright forms of resistance evidenced in the two quotes above, were often accompanied by a sense of isolation. Chantelle identified how she often shares the team's dissatisfaction on issues, but she is then left isolated and *'gets it in the neck'*.

No, because sometimes I think they don't say what they need to say, and I end up saying a lot of stuff that they should be saying. I end up verbalising it and nobody else says it, and I'm the one that gets it in the neck and nobody else gets it in the neck. Yeah, the whole team, give them a voice. (Chantelle, Front-line Worker, Community Life)

In another illustration of resistance, employees rejected the idea of the individualised neoliberal worker, by drawing on the discourse of supporting and family-like relationships amongst their team members. The employees proudly asserted that they had good relationships amongst themselves and with colleagues. They drew on the idea of seeing one another as a family, characterised by support and collaboration, particularly when individuals were faced with personal problems that affected their work. The family-like relationships at work seemed to be linked to their identity as community workers, where they strongly valued the idea of maintaining strong relationships based on a moral subjectivity. These strong relationships were one of the key reasons the employees stayed in the role.

We've been here for the last seven, eight years. And then everybody else has come, and it's a family. We always say we're a family here. We know everyone's weakness, we know everyone's strength. And you need to tap into the strength. And whoever has those weaknesses, we just have to work together to make that into a strength. [...] But I think we're really close-knit. We know like [unintelligible 00:17:10] just had a

bereavement. We know how to support each other and we know each other so well. Everyone knows everyone's ins and outs. (Cara, Frontline-worker, Community Life).

I actually didn't ever think that when I first came, I just felt really out of place. I really felt like I'm not going to get on with everyone and stuff like that, but obviously 6 years later I'm still here. It's like a mini family almost. But it's like a second home, like I could literally walk around in slippers. (Laura, Front-line worker, Community Life).

This resistance towards the individualised subject encouraged by neoliberal discourse is promising in this context, as peer support is an integral element to the possibilities of opening up a reflexive critical dialogue.

5.4 Conclusion

Community Life is undoubtedly facing a challenging time with funding uncertainty – both managers and employees provide data to suggest this. However, the problematisation is based on the assumption that the organisation has no control over funding. This problem representation is underpinned by the neoliberal belief that there is no alternative (TINA) but to face inward for the solution to this external issue. This way of thinking is unsurprising, given the cumulative imbalance in power between the VCS and the state in relation to contract funding (Evans et al, 2005), but leads to proposed solutions to the uncertainty being targeted at the employees' ability to withstand the 'difficult' periods and develop resilience, as this is 'the way things are' in the sector. In the discursive elaboration of the organisation having no control, cuts to public services and poor funding practices are left as unproblematic. Neoliberal discourse dominates as management institutionally sanction the notion that employees can overcome external challenges if they adopt the 'right' attitude – thus the management elicits a certain type of subject. The mode of thinking underpinning this problematisation has damaging effects for employees. There was evidence in Community Life that employees ignored socio-structural issues, as they too did not problematise the nature of the funding

cuts or poor funding practice, but instead saw these as personal projects. Employees to some extent buy into the discourse and there was evidence that they blamed and put pressure on themselves to reform and work 'harder' to be able to overcome the uncertainty facing the organisation. Material effects were also evident, with working conditions deteriorating as employees were frequently faced with insecurity over the sustainability of their roles, ongoing changes to their working hours, and consequently their income. As Foucault suggests, discourse is productive – it accomplishes things. Here we see that the problematisation, underpinned by neoliberal discourse and practices, had impacts on the lives of employees.

Despite employees buying into neoliberal subjectification, there was evidence that the dominant discourse is disrupted with counter-discourses, with employees rejecting the neoliberal rationalities evident in some management decisions and desiring to maintain family-like relationships, in opposition to the neoliberal ideal of individualism. In the following chapter, I explore how calculative practices are institutionalised in Community Life, encouraging employees to buy into neoliberal subjectification.

Chapter 6: Community Life: An Organisation Needing to 'Prove' Itself

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I identified how the explicit problems caused by funding regimes led to a sense of uncertainty in Community Life. However, when examining this through the WPR approach, the findings suggest that implicit problems were also represented, as displayed by the organisation's approach in adopting inward-facing strategies to overcome external funding issues, with proposals focussed on the staff, their working terms and their conduct. In this chapter, I identify a second explicit problem identified by the management: the increased need to engage with accountability strategies. I then discuss how calculative technologies are institutionalised as a proposed solution to the problem representation, and highlight how the neoliberal discourse of accountability within the organisation animates the calculative practices imposed upon employees in Community Life. Finally, I discuss how these specific calculative practices shape the possibilities and characteristics of a VCS employee.

6.2 The Problem Representation

Managers from Community Life recognised the growing demand for increased accountability, evidencing their work as a means of surviving in the current market. Despite the challenges it brought, this increased accountability was accepted as a necessity in the current climate, and it was expected that staff respond to meet these demands. Ahmed describes the importance of monitoring work on a quarterly basis, not only to demonstrate accountability for funding already provided, but also to ensure that the organisation is in a more competitive position when future funding opportunities arise.

[Researcher] How do you monitor all of your projects?

[Interviewee] Obviously we have … because some of the funding, most of the funding they will involve sending, you know, reports every quarter. So the funding monitors

what you've done. But when you make a funding application, when you bid for the money, you set the targets that you do, so this helps. So, every quarter you have to show that if you met the target or not. (Ahmed, Community Life)

As Community Life is primarily funded by local government, there is an obligation for the organisation to show how contractual agreements are being met and to demonstrate good value for money. Ahmed's extract above illuminates how contracting defines the expectations, roles and responsibilities of employees. Ahmed also notes that there has been an increase in scrutiny from funders, who require funded organisations to be far more rigorous than previously in evidencing the outputs of their work. Ahmed suggests that this shift to greater accountability has led to a reduction in the quality of work, as the monitoring systems focus on the quantification of work activities:

[Interviewee] And you have to show value for money. Previously the scrutiny wasn't that bad. Now they're going to say for every penny that we're giving you, show us accountability. Evidence the outcomes, evidence the outputs.

[Researcher] So you feel that's definitely got way more harsh?

[Interviewee] Yeah. I always believe that a piece of work should always be quality rather than quantity. But now it is on quantity. (Ahmed, Manager, Community Life)

When further questioned on whether the shift from traditional community work to increased monitoring and reporting has been detrimental to quality, he responded:

I think any commissioned service comes with internal pros and cons. They're giving you a pot of money and comes with terms and conditions. If you accept the terms, you know what you're buying into. So, you have to be creative, dynamic and innovative in how you deliver services and all that. (Ahmed, Manager, Community Life)

6.3 Solutions, Technologies and Effects

Governmentality mechanisms introduced into Community Life, such as contracts, reporting and targets allow for the conduct of employees to be visible to funders, managers and to employees themselves. In Ahmed's extract in the previous section, it seems that being made visible through calculative technologies was considered part and parcel of the contract culture. Ahmed suggests that Community Life *'accepts'* the terms of the contracts, so in effect must comply with the requirements. However, Ahmed does offer some resistance to the accounting techniques by suggesting that a more *'creative, dynamic and innovative'* approach should be taken, implying that there is some room for autonomy as to how the targets are met and recorded. This may also suggest that Ahmed relies upon employees refashioning themselves in alignment with newly introduced mechanisms of monitoring, to be able to achieve more, in a context of more demanding targets and increased accounting structures. Given the reduction in quality that he mentions, it may be argued that Ahmed begins to redefine what it means to be working in the organisation: meeting the terms and conditions of the contracts is now of primary importance, with the community work itself now secondary.

The WPR approach allows for a competing construction of issues (Bacchi, 2009:4) and, in Ahmed's quotes, a range of explicit problems are identified. There is an acknowledgment that the accountability frameworks used in the organisation are problematic, in so far as they reduce the quality of the work and place greater focus on numbers; this is, however, underpinned by an assumption that these frameworks are part and parcel of the contracts they receive. Here, it is again possible to see that the manager's view is made intelligible by the argument that there is no alternative if the organisation wants to survive. He links the survival of the organisation to the completion of accounting measures, as he sees these as fundamental for participating in tendering for future funding. Whilst the funding bodies' focus on quantification is to a degree problematised, it is not considered as something that needs to change. Instead, proposed solutions are based on assumptions of what will potentially happen if employees do not engage in such mechanisms. Consequently, it may be argued

that the problem is represented to be one of concern about those who do not engage with accounting technologies and what risk they pose to the survival of the organisation.

The notion that quantity is prioritised over quality under a regime of increased accountability is also illuminated in Lucas's extract, where he describes the process of how data is collected from front-line employees, then shared with senior managers, and then in turn shared with funders, both in a written format and in a face-to-face meeting between the funders and the senior managers:

> *[Interviewee] Another part of this project is me meeting one to one with the project coordinators staff, project, project update, end of the quarter monitoring report, liaise with the funders, all of these things ...*
>
> *[Researcher] Yeah.*
>
> *[Interviewee] Because delivery people, that normally what they do, they just deliver and give the report to us.*
>
> *[Researcher] Right, ok.*
>
> *[Interviewee] And if there is any problem, we have to answer to the funders ... And we have to prepare the report for that. That's exactly what I'm doing now.*
>
> *[Researcher] Ok, so you prepare the reports? They give you the ...*
>
> *[Interviewee] Yeah, they [front-line employees] give the information ... On that information ... whatever project I've got, I'm, I'm going to submit the report to the funders. (Lucas, Senior Manager, Community Life)*

In Lucas's extract, the technologies themselves are not problematised, but instead the focus is on the management of the process. The problem representation excludes the employees and presents the implicit problem that the 'quality' of the work is not valued. The exclusion of front-line employees

from the dialogue with funders shapes a framework about what is valuable and what is not. The reporting mechanisms (written and verbal) prioritise quantification over qualitative feedback and experience from front-line staff. The managers themselves thus become complicit in normalising the idea that quantity is valued over quality. This view is underpinned by the neoliberal idea that success can be measured by solely quantifiable measures, which demonstrate cost-efficiency. The inclusion of front-line staff in the meetings would provide an opportunity for qualitative feedback to be given, extending beyond the remits of the key performance indicators (KPIs). This extended discussion is essential in any consideration of accountability (the guise under which monitoring meetings take place), as it would provide a platform to communicate what work is taking place in practice. There are also issues here regarding trust: employees on the front line are 'hidden' from funders, which may reflect that they are no longer considered professionals within their organisations, as priority is given to managerial discourse for which the senior managers have assumed responsibility. Tsui and Cheung (2004) had similar findings amongst social workers in Britain, who were no longer seen as professionals with valuable knowledge, as managerial tools and practices dominated the operating of the organisations; instead, they were considered '*just employees'* under the control or supervision of managers or, as Lucas puts it, *'they just deliver and give the report to us'.* This issue may also be explained through Foucault's idea of self-surveillance, as the organisation initiates a strategy to position itself as having the systems and management in place to ensure the quality, or quantity, of services in the neoliberal environment, as they manage the front-line professionals out of the business dialogue. The representation of the problem is also underpinned by an acceptance of managerial practices as the best way to manage the organisation.

Another issue regarding trust arose from monitoring: Lucas outlines that monitoring officers would come into the organisation to check that the documentation corresponded to the reports sent in:

[Interviewee] Then once they have received the report, they, they make an appointment to come see the, see the evidences ... Like the services you delivered, like where is registration form, minutes of the meetings, the attendance register - we deliver

[Researcher] Right, so they come to look at that?

[Interviewee] There, they see, physically. (Lucas, Senior Manager, Community Life)

This quote illustrates how funders adopt multiple strategies to hold the organisation and its employees to account. Such exacting and demanding strategies imply that organisations cannot be trusted without this series of auditing techniques. This type of practice was again not problematised by the management; instead, tools and techniques were included in the roles of the front-line employees to ensure that they complied with all the multiple strategies.

The shift towards calculation within the organisation was also evident in internal meetings. I attended a team meeting as a part of my observations, which involved the manager, one administrator and four front-line staff, and was organised in a formal format with an agenda and minutes. The agenda included staff updates on project activity, guest speakers and any other business (AOB). I was asked to leave the meeting for the AOB discussion. The manager had mentioned to me prior to the meeting that imminent funding cuts would be discussed and that staff might feel uncomfortable in my presence. During the meeting, I was unable to take field notes as I felt this might add to an already tense atmosphere. The meeting felt cold and mechanical, with a very top-down 'motivational' narrative from the manager throughout; rather what I would have expected to see in a financial company's daily scrum meeting on reaching targets for major investors. The following extract from my field notes, made after the meeting, outline my impressions of the team meeting:

[date] XX June 2017

[time] 11am -11.15am

> Layout: Square layout, table chairs, middle of the room. Manager at the centre. Manager suited. Staff in casual and traditional clothes.
>
> Minutes distributed. Agenda on the table.
>
> I am not sure why it felt so tense, why was everyone so cold. I could have cut the atmosphere with a knife. I feel so awkward - do I just feel awkward or did they feel the same?
>
> The motivational rhetoric seemed fake and non-applicable in the setting. Are they selling cars, insurance, pensions? What is going on?
>
> Team members reported on their targets - and that was it. It was targets. Numbers. Going around, taking turns. One after the other. The meeting was bland. Forgetting to enter data into the database - manager warned them. The dialogue was non-existent.
>
> What was I expecting? Perhaps some two-way engagement, some discussion of issues, some discussion of challenges. Everything seemed so straightforward, but weirdly straightforward. Sterile.
>
> What was the purpose? To talk about numbers - to talk about quarterly targets.

The meeting focussed solely on staff performance concerning data entry onto the database, and achievement of the KPIs. The key points discussed in the meeting shaped the views of staff regarding what is expected of them and their work priorities.

The extracts above shed light on some of the practices associated with contracts, such as increased measurement of work, including targets and monitoring reports. Further, Ahmed's extracts illustrate how the management in the organisation justifies, encourages and institutionalises increased monitoring and accountability as a means to overcome the issues the organisation faces and implicit in any funding received. He also highlights the requirement that staff engage with monitoring strategies. As these strategies are tied to the broader discourse of the organisation's ability to survive,

employees may be more likely to comply, as the risks of not complying could be detrimental to their livelihood.

An insight into the nature of the language used to describe the problems the organisation considers it faces, both in this section and previous sections (5.2 and 6.2), demonstrates how a discourse is created that requires action from front-line employees, ensuring they are amenable to intervention; otherwise the organisations are at threat of reduced funding and the employees of losing their employment altogether. Rose and Miller (1992) discuss the importance of language and how this operates a form of 'intellectual machinery' which solidifies a reality. As a wider political discourse around austerity emerges, the management of the organisation adopts similar intellectual machinery within the organisation. The stance from managers within the organisation aligns with Miller and Rose's (1990) view that governing operates through subjects, particularly through managers within organisations. They suggest that, for programmes of government to be effective, they must enrol allies in their 'pursuit of political, economic and social objectives' (p.18). The managers' discourse, regarding what constitutes an ideal employee and the nature of the work carried out, is therefore a resource in a neoliberal government strategy, as managers discursively engage workers in calculative techniques by linking individuals' efforts to the wider survival agenda of the organisation. The calculative techniques are animated by the discourses within the organisation and the wider context. According to Miller (2014), without this 'collective assemblage' driving its usage, calculative techniques would remain marginal. The notion that staff are responsible for ensuring the organisation survives, in terms of their concomitant response towards market demands, is driven by the discourse; in turn, employees are aware of what is considered essential during this period. A complex interwoven picture of discourse and practices therefore limits the scope of possibilities and actively sets out what is expected of staff in terms of what they think, feel and do. To conclude, the explicit problem is represented as an increased requirement for accountability technology for the organisation, but the action needed to meet these demands relies upon the compliance of employees, despite an acknowledgment that such mechanisms are not appropriate for the nature of the organisation's work.

Bacchi (2009) suggests that, when looking for problem representations, researchers begin by identifying the financial aspects. In this case, a significant financial investment was made by the local authority to implement the database in the organisation. One of the key proposals to address the need for accountability in the organisation was the use of a database to monitor the activity of front-line employees in relation to the contractual KPIs. According to Foucault, for governmentality to have power, subjects must be enclosed so that they can be ranked and evaluated for performance. In this case, a virtual space was created via the introduction of calculative practices, namely a monitoring database (Townley, 1993). Governmentality techniques such as databases render individuals visible to funders, while at the same time providing knowledge by which the subject can evaluate their own conduct and performance.

In Community Life, the introduction of a new database was an external decision made by the commissioners of the project (a public health department), linking closely to the discourse identified earlier regarding increased accountability. The database was also introduced in four other organisations who had been commissioned to do the same project across different geographical areas, as a means to improve the monitoring and reporting of work, with a focus on how the organisations had performed against contractual KPIs, and to produce data for quarterly monitoring reports. The database was an upward managerial function which provided Community Life managers and funders with essential information on how far targets were being met. The data collected looked primarily at the numbers of participants engaged and the demographics of those participants, as well as the number of times front-line workers engaged with participants.

According to Ahmed, the database is used to inform quarterly reporting to the funders, primarily based on quantitative measures:

> *So at the end of each quarter we have to send a quarterly report with case studies. With the KPIs, community benefits and the number of staff that we use. Lots of businesses that we've used … Equality data in terms of the people that we've engaged*

in terms of gender, ethnicity, gender assignment, you know, those kind of things. (Ahmed, Manager, Community Life)

The need to engage with a culture of self-monitoring and increased accountability was evident from the participants' overwhelming emphasis on the database throughout my fieldwork. Staff expressed dissatisfaction with the database, how it took up a large proportion of their working practice, informed their ways of working and how they felt obliged to engage with it. Its role in monitoring work was a cause of contention and one of the primary reasons for workplace dissatisfaction. The database served as a means of shaping the neoliberal subjectivity, and was complemented by other normalising technologies, such as the quality assurance framework, which I discuss later.

The database acts at a distance, requiring Community Life to report and make visible all its contracted project activity, in the form of KPIs. This monitoring used to be recorded internally and a report provided quarterly to funders. However, the new database enables constant visibility and intervention, or threat of intervention, by the funders. The data that is captured is used in a sense to punish or reward and, in turn, has normalising consequences (Foucault, 1991). For example, managers suggests that if KPIs are achieved, the organisation is in a better position to receive future funding, suggesting if they do not hit all the KPIs, or do not enter their activities on the database, they may be excluded from future funding opportunities.

The introduction of the database represented a shift, from employees sending a summary report quarterly to the funders to the continuous monitoring of project activity via the database. This has had lived effects in relation to employees' autonomy in the workplace. Greater visibility has reduced the extent to which they were able to be creative with the targets. For example, previously, employees could be more flexible with the ways in which they achieved the targets; however, the database and its constant visibility mechanisms do not allow for such autonomy, as the specific nature of the data entered shapes the frequency of engagement with participants, as well as the ways in which they can

interact. The nature of the constant surveillance reduces employees' freedom to adopt the ways of working which they consider best, and forces them instead to adopt practices based on the requirements of the database.

All front-line employees described the database as requiring mundane, tedious tasks that duplicated their workload. More profoundly, they felt that the database limited the essence and vitality of their work, and described the process of trying to 'fit data' into a database as confusing and regimented:

> *[Interviewee] It is just duplicating work and then it's just really like … it doesn't give you room for … because it's not so …it's quite regimented so like I don't know how to put it but it doesn't cover all the things that we actually do.*
>
> *[Researcher] So what kind of things do you think it doesn't cover?*
>
> *[Interviewee] We use specific goals and stuff like that, so you have to sometimes pick to the closest one or …*
>
> *[Researcher] Yeah, but it might not reflect what you've been doing?*
>
> *[Interviewee] No.*
>
> *[Interviewee] And sometimes we do a lot more with a client and stuff, so it doesn't really reflect correctly, not on there anyway.*
>
> *[Researcher] No, is there another place where you can write more about them?*
>
> *[Interviewee] That is only for our own records though, so you can see from my record what I've done with them and stuff like that so I can go back to it, but none really. (Lucy, Community Life)*

This extract illustrates how the database has limited ability to hold the employees to account, as it does not reflect the work they are in fact doing, Lucy makes clear that she keeps a personal record of her work, but this is not necessarily formally recorded.

The database also reduces work to numbers, and Lucy identifies the challenges this presents, specifically that clients seek help from the organisation because they have multiple issues which are not quantifiable in the way the database demands:

> *[Interviewee] It's okay, it can be quite confusing at times because it's not so straightforward as like ... because some of the clients that we do work with, it's not just one thing, it's multiple things.*
>
> *[Researcher] Okay, yeah, so they come under both categories?*
>
> *[Interviewee] Yeah, when you're calculating it afterwards it can get confusing. (Lucy, Community Life)*

Cara echoes some of these feelings about the database and, in particular, that it has increased workload, adding pressure to her everyday working practices. The database has also made her role far more 'boring, tedious [...] and long-winded'.

> *[Interviewee] It has evolved. But because we've been doing this for such a long time, it's a bit boring and a bit tedious with the same old, same old. Over time, it's becoming more ... things have changed, they've added more elements to it, which is more added work, more added pressure. It has changed a lot.*
>
> *[Researcher] What kinds of things have they added?*
>
> *[Interviewee] The MCD (Methods Collection Database), which is a database that we have to input the data into the system. (Cara, Community Life).*

An analysis of the 2006 Skills Survey carried out by Donegani et al. (2012) found that staff in the VCS felt they had greater involvement and autonomy over their work programmes and the overall running of the organisation. However, the use of the database to steer work programmes left very little autonomy for staff. This lack of autonomy, coupled with the monotony of the database, left some employees feeling demotivated about coming into work. Cara found that the database specifically made her feel that she just wanted to *'get out'*, and this was compounded by the belief that the database added little value to the work they do. Cara also illustrates how the work ethic has changed in the organisation as a result of the database, with some staff just doing enough to meet their quota.

> *[Interviewee] Me personally, I have good taste, where I really enjoy coming into work because it's exciting and the opportunities I've had, I have looked forward to come in, which is really sad [laughs] but …*
>
> *[Researcher] But good, because work is a really big part of our lives.*
>
> *[Interviewee] But at the same time with now, with the MCD, it's just like … I just want to get out…Yes. It's just so much of the MCD. I feel the work ethic is different. Some people see a client, just get on the system, then they're done.*
>
> *[Researcher] Does it feel like a meaningful task or…?*
>
> *[Interviewee] The MCD? No.*
>
> *[Researcher] Yes, so that's what makes it more difficult. (Interview with Cara, Community Life)*

Cara went on to give an example of conversations she had supporting clients with health and lifestyle improvement which cannot be expressed in numbers, and do not fit into the database. For example, she relates a story about a client who had multiple family issues which affected her health. Cara explained that the database did not allow for the complexity or depth of issues reflected in the

conversations, and that this conflicts with her rationale for working in her role, which is based on providing a quality service to support people. Further, Cara identified how her experience in the role had helped her develop an in-depth understanding of the issues clients may face, but this is not accounted for in the database, illustrating how the database has discursive effects for employees. Lastly, Cara identifies the increased workload associated with the database:

> *[Interviewee] Yes. If you're speaking to the client … You can see the tension, then you try putting the dots together, try to see. When you've been doing this for such a long time you can see what the reason is … 'I've got so many issues in my family etc.' 'Okay, you know, come out, speak to people, access these services. I'm here if you want to have a chat, too,' etc. So, you realise that you've helped somebody. And that is what the health trainer project is about that's why some of us are still here … Because that's the meaning for our part …*
>
> *[Researcher] Does that seem like a higher percentage of the work than actually being able to …?*
>
> *[Interviewee] Yes. Because you want to provide a quality that now has become no quantity. It's quantity now. So, if it's quality, that's great, but then the MCD does take up a lot of time. (Cara, front-line worker, Community Life)*

Lucy goes on to illustrate how the database reduces the relational work, which is a motivating factor for her, in her work. She describes that she struggles with limited time now, as the monitoring requirements have increased:

> *[Researcher] What would you say are your biggest challenges in doing your job to how you might want to do it?*
>
> *[Interviewee] Okay, I think a lot of the time … I think I just prefer doing the work with the client because that's where I get the most from. So I think trying to balance doing*

that and making time for them as well as getting everything else done, which is the MCD stuff and the admin stuff and all of that, all of that other stuff, trying ... (Lucy, Community Life)

One manager also echoed some of the views that front-line employees had about the database, stating that the work had now become more focussed on quantity rather than quality, and that the introduction of the database and its associated targets had impacted on how they can or cannot interact with participants. When probed about the nature of increased scrutiny by commissioners, Ahmed explained below:

[Researcher] So you feel that's definitely got way more harsh?

[Interviewee] Yeah. I always believe that a piece of work should always be quality rather than quantity. You don't know the numbers like we're driven by numbers. It's about a numbers' game, rather than that individual needs x, y and z, and we need to take him for regardless of how long he needs. But then we're told after 12 weeks we need new numbers, we need new clients. And then you have to let go. You haven't finished your job; you haven't finished that journey with that individual. (Ahmed, Manager, Community Life).

These extracts highlight the effects that calculative practices may have for front-line employees through the example of the monitoring database. Firstly, it may be argued that the introduction of relentless accounting technologies, demanded by the neoliberal environment, has led to a sense of demotivation and disenchantment with the nature of work for front-line staff. Secondly, the database limits the nature of work that front-line employees can do. As Mennicken and Miller (2012) highlight, calculative practices have the scope to open certain possibilities while displacing the opportunity of others. This is firstly due to the nature of the KPIs measured on the database and, secondly, due to the time needed to engage with calculative technologies. Therefore, the database reduces the

employees' ability to engage in more meaningful practices, which would align more closely with the motivation they feel for working in the roles they do.

Further, the database and its associated targets have led to working with clients in ways which may not be deemed adequate for the needs of the client, but suit the demands of the database. Here, we see that the service is no longer based upon the effectiveness of the provision for clients; it is instead measured against its ability to be efficient in line with performance indicators set by funders. This can have both subjectification and lived effects for employees, with impacts for staff motivation and integrity, as they are compelled by the neoliberal environment to provide a service which they are aware is designed for quantity, not quality. The database also had discursive effects, as it limited the essence and vitality of the work they are engaging with. As illustrated in the two extracts above, staff do extend their work beyond the scope of what is measured, but there is no facility to record this. This is significant, as the database is introduced as a means of accountability, yet is not successful in holding the front-line employees to account, as they continue to carry out work beyond the calculative enclosure.

Despite their feelings, they felt the need to complete the task according to the requirements of the funders. They were aware that funders have access to the records so, although it was not used for service improvements, all staff still ensured the database was complete. One employee rationalised it as a task that was required for funders, *'they just need it for their records and stuff, which is fair enough I suppose, but it's just ... anyway, I still got to do it.'* Another respondent observed that the database allows the funders to see what they are doing and with how many people. The employees were not entirely sure what the funders did with the data, when asked about how and when the funders accessed it, but they were all aware that funders could access the database at any time.

> *[Researcher] Do think ... is it MCD? You think it's got any benefits to you guys, or just to the funders?*

[Interviewee] I don't even think that even they use it. Because every three months or six months, they always say, 'Okay, you need to input this data in,' they don't even know how to extract certain …

[Researcher] They don't do anything with that?

[Interviewee] I don't know even what they do. I know for the last six months, eight months, she gets out these … just some stats of how many people we saw who are disabled, who are men, women, who are pregnant etc. because there are nine key points that we need to capture. (Lucy, Community Life).

As mentioned earlier, the database was used by at least four other organisations, and this widespread use presented issues for Community Life. The use of the database across various organisations supports the Foucauldian notion of normalising judgement, as it links together levels of performance and leads to comparison both with those who are near and those further afield. Miller (2014) suggests that such territorialisation leads to evaluation based on financial rationales, and regulates individuals, both from within and outside.

Mark illuminates how the widespread use of the database works to shape the scope of possible action in the organisation. When interviewing the managers, very few of them acknowledged the work intensification of staff; however, Mark made a clear connection between the lack of resources provided by the funders and the intensive labour requirements attached to the contract. When questioned on whether there was any scope to challenge this, he replied:

The thing is, yes and no. You know like we have so many different organisations, and some of them are very big. And the council fund the same amount of money to all the organisations with the same number of targets. If we were a bigger organisation, you might have the staff employed for another project and in their spare time to be able to work for this project. When you are smaller, then you specifically employ a person

for a particular project. So that's where the disparity is. Where a big organisation can absorb that money and they could give the same level of service on a smaller budget, a smaller version because they've got their costs are more direct. So that's where. So, you can't really, if you go to the funder and say we can't manage, they will say, well other organisations are managing it, so that's one of the reasons. (Mark, Manager, Community Life)

This quote illustrates how accounting technologies legitimise decisions and shape the conduct of those involved; here, the widespread use of the database has discursive and lived effects. Mark is acutely aware that widespread use of the database and the associated targets prevent him from challenging the conditions of labour, as they uphold the notion that the work is achievable. However, the process of reducing work to numbers, and evaluating its achievability based on these numbers, discounts the contexts of the organisations. Such an approach assumes that the organisations, and the clients they work with, are homogeneous and illustrates how accounting practices fail to consider the context and compare the non-comparable. In this case, Mark makes clear that larger organisations are in an advantageous position, as they are able to *'absorb'* some of the increased labour by utilising staff from alternative projects, a resource which is not readily available to smaller organisations, such as Community Life. The database here also serves to uphold the logic of competition, and the technologies serve here as 'dividing practices' (Miller and Rose, 2008:98), distinguishing the capable from the non-capable, highlighting those who [the organisation in this case] have failed to reproduce themselves in line with the neoliberal ethos, as they are unable to cope with the workload. The widespread use of the database serves to illustrate how calculative technologies are strategies to 'implement and support neoliberal policies and programs', as they introduce values such as productivity, competition and meritocracy (Giannone, 2016).

The quality assurance framework is another technology of governmentality introduced into the organisation under the guise of accountability and quality improvement. It was a contractual

requirement, but there was no specific guidance or criteria in the contract to benchmark quality, nor was it specified how the quality framework should be implemented. The organisations decided that they would utilise a peer framework to measure quality. The framework would be used in other organisations providing the same service, rather than just internally. The quality assurance process involved four competitor organisations visiting each other's organisations to measure previously identified aspects of quality. When questioned on the aspects of quality they examined, the manager did not respond. This does, however, illustrate the introduction of tools by Community Life and other organisations, which aligns to the idea of 'normalising judgement', as the organisation makes itself increasingly visible, not to the funders in the case, but to 'competitor' organisations. The establishment of the quality assurance system amongst 'partners' demonstrates how staff had internalised responsibility and set out to develop a system of monitoring which follows the notion that quality is associated with standardisation.

Technologies which bring into being Foucault's notion of normalising judgement present issues for Community Life, highlighting the differences that small organisations face in comparison to larger organisations. In the previous section, Mark noted that increased workloads disproportionately affect smaller organisations; therefore, attempting to work towards a set of norms or quality benchmarks attained by larger organisations, may lead to additional stress for Community Life employees as they attempt to prove themselves, particularly as they are visibly comparing themselves to competitor organisations. Further, the introduction of a quality assurance system across four organisations also indicates that the workers cannot be trusted to deliver the projects in the ways most appropriate for the client base so, instead, all work must be standardised across the board and monitored from all perspectives to ensure delivery.

In summary, the quality assurance framework is presented as a means of achieving service improvement and quality, yet it undermines the nature and quality of the organisations that have been

commissioned, as standardisation assumes homogeneity rather than a bespoke approach developed to serve the needs of specific communities.

These experiences show how the database and other calculative technologies were not considered by employees to be beneficial processes of measuring or accountability but, instead, tokenistic methods which increased their workload, introduced a monotonous and boring element to their work and, further, did not represent an accurate reflection of their work. In particular, Lucy's quote illustrates how the database reduces the work to numbers. Rose (1999) highlights the importance of numbers in technologies, due to their objective nature which facilitates trust in them and also the development of 'truths'. According to Miller (2014), calculation limits the possibilities of actions; accounting technologies 'make up' people, insofar as they provide the framework for what is possible and what is not. Miller suggests that calculation provides a moral constraint on what actions can be carried out. This is evident in what staff state they can record, despite it not genuinely reflecting the work they do. However, calculation did not always limit their actions as employees found alternative ways of achieving what they felt was required.

According to Miller (2014), accounting makes possible the comparison of the incomparable. He suggests that the simplification of concepts that are not simple to a number removes the 'messy realities', while also removing quality. This reduction to numbers leads to the financialising of concepts in a single number, while also enabling individuals to govern themselves and the actions of others. This was a sentiment widely shared by the employees. They did not feel the database was a useful mechanism to record the work they did; instead they viewed it as the cause of a reduction in quality and the loss of the essence of their work.

The specific capability of calculative practices is, according to Miller (2014), that they encourage workers to act upon themselves and others as they distil complex realities to a single figure. The distilling of the complex into single figures has the capacity to create an environment of transparency,

standardisation evaluation and comparison of performance against oneself and others, promoting a governable terrain.

As Foucault notes, where there is power, there is also resistance. In this section, I will highlight forms of resistance which were discussed in interviews, firstly, in relation to how staff interacted with the database and, secondly, in relation to the broader neoliberal discourse and subjectivity.

Cara discussed ways in which she worked to overcome the problem of the database collecting only quantitative data, which she considered was to the detriment of the service quality. She felt that the system as it was currently organised did not enhance the quality of the service, but instead created barriers between themselves and participants. Cara found ways to overcome these formal arrangements, and would usually enter the data onto the system at a later time, allowing for a more personal, authentic engagement to take place between herself and the participant.

> *[Researcher] Data on the database. They are not questions that you choose?*
>
> *[Interviewee] No, the system chooses them - they are set. But we don't necessarily follow it when you know what we should ask the client ... It's just so long-winded. Because if I see one person and then there's a sign posted, we'll just send them off. But if he is a person where ... we've created a personal health plan, we have to go through loads of questions, pages and pages of it.*
>
> *[Researcher] Yes. You think some clients get put off by all of the questions?*
>
> *[Interviewee] No, because we know it back to front, kind of thing. So, I do not necessarily use them, I don't really take it with me, so we just speak to them ... It is scripted but I don't use it. I talk to the client face to face and then come back to the office and fit in what I can to the system. But I focus on having a genuine conversation with clients whilst I am with the client. So that's the thing I do.*

[Researcher] How do you think the other health trainers like that system?

[Interviewee] Similar. You know, they try not to make it like it is a doctor-patient relationship, where you sit behind a desk etc. The funders want it to be impersonal and we want to cater towards those people's needs, as every person is different.

[Researcher] Why do you think they put that in then?

[Interviewee] I have no idea. I think it's just for managers to extract data when he is doing another project. He can see how many people we always have, how many we haven't met, if he wants to, if he don't like what he sees it he can go and filter the details and see what each staff member is doing. I don't know how much of it is actually being used themselves.

In this extract, several important points are raised. Firstly, Cara recognises that she has specialised knowledge which helps her to shape the engagement with the client, and she draws on this knowledge rather than following the scripted questions and probes. She also demonstrates that she prioritises the needs of her client when discussing whether the number of questions would put a client off and elaborates on this further when discussing how she works around the impersonal nature of the calculative technologies. This suggests that Cara, on the one hand, resists the idea that she does not possess professional knowledge to inform her practice and instead draws on this very knowledge when working with clients, while on the other hand accommodating the calculative technologies as she adds the data in later.

The final point to draw from this extract is the way in which Cara discusses the management's use of the database. Cara sees the database as a mechanism for surveillance within the organisation. Interestingly, she points out that she does not think the funders use the data. In line with Foucault's view, this demonstrates how the database has used a technology of government, whereby the funders

successfully manage from a distance, as the organisation governs itself in alignment with their objectives.

This example, coupled with the ideas expressed regarding the logic of the database, illustrates how employees question and unpack the effectiveness of technologies which are underpinned by neoliberal rationality rather than by what they consider to be central aspects of their work. Ball (2003:220) suggests that the cold, mechanical techniques used to measure performance are a threat to workplace identity, as employees (teachers in his case) are no longer required to have a rationale for their practice in a way they consider meaningful; instead, they are required to justify their work based on the monitoring of quantifiable impacts. Ball elaborates on this by suggesting that employees develop an 'ontological insecurity' and 'uncertainty about the reasons for action'.

However, while employees expressed the need to engage with completing the database, there was evidence that they resisted this technology and its rationality. The database was introduced against a backdrop of accountability and market competitiveness and presented as a more effective means of monitoring the project; however, employees rejected this on a discursive level. Earlier quotes demonstrate how employees questioned the 'logic' of the database, and particularly its effectiveness to demonstrate the degree and depths of work in which employees engage. This begins to show the dissonance between what employees considered valuable in terms of demonstrating accountability and what the funders and some of the management consider imperative to demonstrate the impact and value of the organisation's work. The so-called 'soft' aspects of the work are not captured in the database, as they do not translate into quantifiable targets which demonstrate measurable impact. The narratives suggest a move away from the meaningful practice and quality work historically associated with the VCS, based upon social justice, towards the instrumental rationality associated with market subjectivity.

6.3 Conclusion

Managers expressed the need to be more accountable to funders in an increasingly competitive and stringent environment. The management within Community Life note that the means of achieving this, accounting technologies, are detrimental to the working practices of the organisation, but believe there is no alternative if the organisation is to survive. Consequently, managers problematise the management of the technologies, rather than the rationalities behind the introduction of such tools. The underlying belief that employees cannot be trusted by funders and therefore need to account for all activity is absent from managers' representation of the problem. Solutions focus on employees engaging with the technologies to improve the chances of the organisation's survival. Managers institutionalise the use of the technologies within the organisation through the nature of meetings and the importance placed upon the quantification of work. An examination of the problematisation shows a neoliberal mode of thinking, as managers accept that, for the organisation to remain competitive, they must participate in NPM initiatives which quantify the community work they do. The problem representation also led to critical areas being silenced. For example, the widespread use of the database served to limit the scope for challenging poor working conditions and discounted the context of the organisations (and localised challenges). The quality framework promoted the idea that standardisation is a marker of quality, and thus minimised the local context for the organisations and the communities they serve.

The accounting technologies had effects for employees on a discursive level. The database restricted what could be recorded for monitoring purposes, and limited what could be discussed with communities. The level of social complexity faced by the communities served by Community Life was minimised, for the most part, to a tick box exercise. This had lived impacts for employees, who felt that the quality of the work was reduced, and that this impacted on their motivation and job satisfaction. They reported a reduction in what they considered meaningful practices. Lastly, the engagement with accounting technologies had material effects on working conditions as employees noted a significant increase in workload.

Chapter 7: Healthscape: An Organisation in Crisis

7.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I discussed the findings from Community Life, identifying two central problems facing the organisation: uncertainty and a need to 'prove' itself through engagement with calculative technologies. The proposed solutions, however, shed light on how these challenges were problematised by managers: they primarily focussed on staff refashioning themselves into neoliberal subjects who could withstand uncertainty and transform themselves to survive, and also on institutionalising the use of calculative technologies. The problem representations had harmful effects on the employees in discursive, subjectification and material ways. In the following two chapters, I present the findings from my data collection in the second research site, Healthscape, beginning here with how the challenges facing Healthscape are problematised by the management. I then discuss the proposed solutions and their effects in Chapter 8.

When I started my fieldwork in June 2017, Healthscape had recently undergone a restructure, following the retirement of the former CEO and subsequent engagement of a new management team in 2015. The newly appointed managers had previously worked together in a large social enterprise, and one recruited the other.

The interviews revealed four perceived problems which the managers felt justified the restructure, all attributed to previous management decisions: 1) reliance on service contracts; 2) lack of professionalism; 3) waste of government funds; and 4) an ineffective workforce. The restructure involved a new neoliberal vision for the organisation, aligned with the tenets of new managerialism. According to Lynch (2014), new managerialism is the organisational arm of neoliberalism, and serves to institutionalise market principles within the governance of an organisation, weakening social and moral goals. New managerialism is increasingly seen in public sector services, with key features such as outputs over inputs, employee performance monitoring and self-monitoring through the use of

KPIs, decentralisation of budgetary control and authority to line managers, alongside power remaining at a central level, and changes in nomenclature from the use of words such as 'participants' to 'clients' and 'customers'. Whilst these broad principles have been widely noted across the VCS (see Chapter 3), new managerialism as an arm of neoliberal governmentality can be implemented in a different way, in a piecemeal fashion across different contexts, hence the need to explore how this occurs in different organisations and how it is experienced by different people.

The following chapter sets out, firstly, to identify how problems are constructed and the solutions proposed within Healthscape. In Chapter 8, I focus on the specific technologies adopted within Healthscape to put these rationalities into practice. Both rationalities and technologies shape the discursive and subjectification effects, as well as the lived realities (Bacchi, 2009:48) of employees and, consequently, this chapter will also examine the effects of these rationalities and technologies.

In this chapter I will present the findings from interviews with the managers of the organisations. I focus on the narrative: firstly, the chronology – how the organisation was described in the past; secondly, I identify the narrative device of building a crisis; and thirdly, I examine proposed solutions. According to Gedalof (2018), narratives may be considered effective if they cast anything which came before as problematic, and endeavour to replace the past with a new and better version for the future. I focus on the problems the managers perceive in the organisation here, as it is argued that narratives are a powerful tool to give meaning to situations and events which may otherwise remain 'disconnected' (Reismann, 2008:5, cited in Gedalof, 2018), particularly as the narrative presenting the 'old' version of the organisation was used to justify the restructure. Drawing on the WPR approach, I aim to identify how the problem is represented and the presuppositions and assumptions that make the solutions intelligible. I also illuminate some of the practices and processes which have caused issues within the organisation to become problematised, primarily by discussing what forms of knowledge have become subjugated to enable neoliberal rationalities and technologies to become governing forces within Healthscape.

Further, the focus on the managers' narrative of the perceived problems is crucial in this analysis, as the representation of problems is not disconnected from power; instead, managers hold both symbolic and legitimate power and consequently are in a position to produce knowledge, technologies and effects. For governmental programmes to be effective, they must enrol allies in their 'pursuit of political, economic and social objectives' (Miller and Rose, 1990:18) and, within organisations, managers may knowingly or unknowingly proliferate neoliberal governance.

7.2 The Problem Representation

In the interviews with managers, an overarching theme emerged of how the 'old' Healthscape was failing, largely due to its unprofessionalism, and thus needed radical change to survive as an organisation; thus, the 'old regime' was the problem representation. The current management attributed the lack of professionalism within Healthscape to some degree to previous poor management, including poor financial management, poor recruitment practices, an unskilled workforce and failure to measure impact. It held that the previous management had fallen into the trap, a sector-wide problem, of chasing income from service delivery contracts without any consideration of the impacts on employees' welfare or the true mission of the organisation. The problem was thus represented to be an issue of poor management by the previous regime; however, as Bacchi (2009:4) notes, problem representation can include a set of nested problems within the representation, and I will now discuss these nested problem representations.

One of the central problems perceived by the current management to justify the restructure was that Healthscape had been relying upon service delivery contracts which had led to a series of issues. Firstly, the nature of such contracts was considered a detrimental way of 'generating' income, as it led to the organisation operating in deficit and depleting reserves. Secondly, service delivery contracts were considered problematic as they did not cover core costs and the new managers therefore believed that staff and organisational infrastructure had been neglected. The issue of building the business on service delivery contracts was framed as an *'internal challenge',* whereby the organisation had

'chased income' (Louise, Manager, Healthscape). Whilst there was some acknowledgment in the interviews that the voluntary sector market had changed, insofar as the competition had increased and grant funding was now more scarce, this prevailing context was seen as threatening the survival of the organisation, as it had not invested in its internal infrastructure and employees, as a consequence of poor management insight into full cost recovery, rather than due to wider market changes:

> *Full cost recovery is more than even people were thinking and, at Healthscape, the impact was increasing turnover, chasing contracts and doing things that took us away from our vision and mission. (Louise, Healthscape, Manager)*

Nathan, another manager, echoes this view:

> *It's built that on the fact that there had been contracts out there and there has been money going around in the sector, so it didn't necessarily handle it very well. Just because you've got a high turnover doesn't mean you're going to run out of deficit if you haven't priced it properly. (Nathan, Manager, Healthscape)*

Further, the narrative presented suggested that the organisation had been 'clambering for cash', with little consideration for the development of the staff or the organisation's infrastructure. As well as identifying that the service delivery contracts did not contribute towards core costs, the managers also suggested that the contracts had been poorly managed within the organisation, leading to employees working in silos, a lack in consistency in approaches to the work and, consequently, employees working as individuals rather than as a collective organisation:

> *...if you've grown, and you're relying on service delivery contracts, and you've done any of that growth in the last 10 years, basically you've had to fudge contracts in order to weed out core costs and you know the core costs that every organisation needs ... So, I think that in itself has been part of the problem is they haven't been costed the way that they could have been or should have been, and then also I think, when I first*

arrived, it was definitely a case of, sort of 18–20 different projects but all working very much in their own little project ways, their silo ways, and so people come with their own projects first off, they come up with their own ways of doing this, and really that thinking should have happened as a collective organisation. (Nathan, Manager, Healthscape)

Nathan illuminates that the previous management had been so desperate to generate income that it had not always considered the needs of the workforce. For example, he reports that the organisation would take contracts which were both geographically far away from the its usual area of operations and which did not necessarily fit the organisation's mission.

But because people at that time were just like, aah we've got no money, we just need to bring in some money to keep someone in a post, it doesn't matter that it takes an hour and a half for these guys to travel there and back. Well, of course it does. (Nathan, Manager, Healthscape)

Louise notes in her interview that, because of these historical issues, they had to restructure the size of the organisation so they were able to leverage more core costs from existing budgets to develop the infrastructure of the organisation:

Most of our funding is service delivery, very finely tuned to the point at which we have not leveraged enough for the support costs the organisation needs. Even with an increase in turnover, we've not leveraged enough support costs, and we don't have enough support costs, so we have had to reduce people and that way in 2015/16 we operated at a surplus. (Louise, Manager, Healthscape)

Here we see how, for the current management, the structural issues regarding changes to funding regimes across the entire sector are internalised as the organisation's fault, as it has not appropriately invested in infrastructure or employees. Further, the issues facing the organisation are presented as

the result of poor decision-making on the part of the previous management, i.e. of poor management. This problem representation is made possible by the subjugation of knowledge relating to significant issues affecting both the organisation and the wider VCS, such as reduced grant funding from local authorities. Minimal attention was given to the fact that, during the period in which the organisation had been generating income from service delivery contracts, there was little alternative for small or medium health organisations, as local authorities had shifted from grant-funding to service delivery contracts. Furthermore, the managers appeared to ignore the fact that the organisation had not historically been built from service delivery contracts; rather, this move reflected external policy changes.

On one hand, it may be argued that the current managers appear to be addressing important issues within their representation of the problems, such as a need to achieve financial stability, investment in staff, collective working and staying true to the mission of Healthscape. On the other hand, this does not follow through in the solutions proposed by the management which fail to take into account the wider context which may have led to some of these problems. Instead, the problems are represented as a crisis of internal management, and the solutions are those of neo-liberal management. I will return to the proposed solutions in more detail later.

A further area of concern presented by the managers regarding the 'old regime' was its failure to 'hold themselves to account'. Louise suggests that the organisation had rebuffed accounting technologies, which she considered central to the notion of professionalism. She reports that the organisation had not engaged with the required monitoring technologies in previous years on the grounds that it was a 'community' organisation:

> *...us failing to hold ourselves to account, and thinking that it's okay to be nice because we're a community organisation over and above professional, almost rejecting professional as the antithesis of who we are. (Louise, Manager, Healthscape)*

This extract illustrates the distinction between an organisation considered professional and one which is not. It may be suggested that being *'nice'* was no longer considered professional in this context and that professionalism is demonstrated through engagement with accounting technologies. Defining professionalism in this way makes clear which qualities are to be championed and which are to be rejected: the introduction and ongoing use of accounting technologies are made intelligible and high value placed on such activities.

Closely linked to the narrative of unprofessionalism was the presentation of the organisational culture as *'odd'*. Whilst I have not analysed my interviews by counting terms, I could not help but note that Louise uses the word *'odd'* to describe the organisation's culture ten times. For example:

> *There were some behaviours and some patterns that, on the surface, looked quite good, like sitting and sharing lunch together in the office and that sort of thing. In a way it took me quite a while to unpick the extent to which there's some really bizarre behaviours and oddities, and stuff was hidden. (Louise, Manager, Healthscape)*

Louise also expressed that another *'odd'* aspect of the organisation was that staff relationships were *'not normal working practices'*, for example Louise notes that:

> *It is really odd for employees to say that we can't work together unless we trust each other and know each other. (Louise, Manager, Healthscape)*

Casting the 'past' of the organisation as 'odd', a seemingly negative characteristic, legitimises some of the changes introduced under the organisational restructure, which predominantly align with a neoliberal approach to professionalism. Staff spending time together over lunch, or spending time talking, or even sharing working practices were deemed in the management narrative as being 'odd' and not 'normal' working practices. Trust, collegiate relationships, opportunities to talk were all framed as negative, illustrating how managerialism suppresses social and ethical values, and gives priority to the notion that the organisation is best managed through the mechanism of market values.

Again, linking 'odd' and unprofessional behaviour to social interactions and being 'nice' prioritises some ways of being over others. Managers thus build a narrative which frames trust and collegiate relations as 'odd' behaviour, encouraging this narrative to be reproduced within the organisation, and making way for solutions which reject such interactions.

Another aspect of the past which facilitates the process of building a new future, and delineates what should and should not be included, is the idea that the organisation has been wasting government funding by not delivering to the stated terms and conditions of their contracts and instead *'fudging'* contracts. Louise suggests that, when she arrived at the organisation, it was on the verge of losing a major contract and she was able to regain trust by implementing a database within the organisation to measure more effectively the work carried out:

> *We're on the sort of last chance saloon of being much more able to articulate our impact and operate more professionally, but I suppose, accepting contacts, it doesn't allow you to develop in a way and hanging onto bizarre emotions almost led to, 'Yeah we'll take your money but we'll do what we want to do', or, 'We'll pretend we're doing what we want to do and sort of fudge it.' I don't know, it's weird. (Louise, Manager, Healthscape)*

New managerialism has a strong focus on market-type accountability for public spending. This approach is illustrated in Louise's extract, where she endorses the use of measuring performance and impact as a means to operate professionally, demonstrating how professionalism has become associated, from a management perspective, with the widespread use of measurement techniques. Further, Louise legitimises a stronger accountability approach by drawing on the discourse of both organisational survival and doing the 'right' thing, by not wasting the government's money. Consequently, the proposed solutions are deemed to make sense against this backdrop.

However, Louise's account of wasting government money fails to consider the limitations that government funding places on the organisation, particularly when core costs are not covered in the contracts. Therefore, the idea that the organisation was 'fudging' contracts, could be interpreted as a survival strategy for the organisation during uncertain times, rather than an indicator of the incompetence of the 'old regime'. This account fails to problematise the wider funding context as central to the organisation's current position.

A key element in the construction of the problem was the current workforce, particularly those staff who were recruited and employed under the 'old' regime. Nathan suggests in his interview that there were concerns about recruitment practices in the organisation previously, particularly as a large number of employees had been recruited from service-users or volunteers within Healthscape. It must also be noted, from my observations and interviews with employees, that the majority of the workers who were recruited through these routes were from Black, Asian and ethnic minority (BAME) groups, English was for most a second language and very few had been in further or higher education. In interviews with managers, it became clear that they felt that staff lacked skills and ability, which they partly attributed to the nature of service funded contracts (which do not cover core costs) and partly to recruitment of staff from volunteers or service-users.

> *but I think that there's been a history… it was really telling and very, it was very nice in some ways but also quite worrying in others, how many people are in management positions or were in management positions that had started out as volunteers in the organisation or service users. (Nathan, Manager, Healthscape)*

The notion that volunteers had been recruited into paid work is considered a weakness by the management, who believe that they are not skilled enough to be in paid work within the organisation. This is demonstrated in the approach taken in recruitment of volunteers under the current management regime, as even the volunteer positions now require a new form of professionalism. When discussing

the recruitment of volunteers since the restructure, one front-line worker suggests the practices have improved, as volunteers are now highly, formally educated:

> *The lady I recruited, she's a psychologist and she has a PhD, and the other lady I recruited, she has a PhD as well in Biomedical Science, so they're volunteering and I think it's a tremendous for Healthscape and that sort of quality wasn't there.' (Arnold, front-line employee, Healthscape)*

He later reports that a quality assurance process has been introduced into the organisation, such as ensuring the volunteers are *'able to read and write and be able to read and write in English and capable to write a report, science background preferable, but they have to have the passion about the community development, not just for your experience to come here'.* Later, the respondent also tells me about a specific volunteer who is a lawyer and has a keen interest in social media:

> *And only one of them actually has a background of property broker, but she's got a law degree, most importantly, but she's got interest in social media and stuff like that, so it's good that we have her for social media and marketing.' (Arnold, front-line employee, Healthscape)*

These points are important in demonstrating what experience is now considered important in volunteers and in illuminating what experience may be lacking in the employees who were once volunteers in the organisation. Historically, volunteers had been recruited on the basis of their knowledge of communities, representing the experiences of local people, speaking local languages and lastly, because of the social capital they possessed within communities, enabling access to some of the traditionally marginalised communities. It was not necessary for these volunteers to be highly educated, although some of them may have been, but it is clear that there is a shift in what skills are valued by the management within Healthscape. The adoption of a professional discourse of volunteers may be divisive for those employees who do not have the same qualifications, and may encourage

employees to prioritise skills associated with a professional subjectivity, which may have the potential to hamper the subjectivity more aligned with a traditional community development approach.

From the managers' perspective, reliance on service delivery contracts for income has led to inadequate investment in staff and, consequently, employees are not equipped to meet the demands of the sector. The following extracts highlight ways in which another, interrelated, problem is represented. Some of the workforce are deemed to be unfit for their roles:

> *This is extensively a service delivery organisation and it's got staff who are very passionate about their work, but not necessarily having the time or the money invested in them to skill them up to what the requirements are of the job, really, and the requirements of the sector at the moment. (Nathan, Manager, Healthscape)*

Nathan highlights that, not only do staff lack the basic project management skills required, but also fail to take on responsibility:

> *I think this is what's really tough is getting people to take responsibility, and not to continue to say, 'Well, I wasn't told what to do' and it's like, 'You have been told.' The first thing I've been trying to push through is just basic project planning, and the project managers create the project plans and that they understand it's not rocket science. (Nathan, Manager, Healthscape)*

Responsibility in this context primarily refers to employees taking initiative, being 'career motivated', being able to work without instruction and plan in line with the achievement of contractual targets. Responsibility is discussed synonymously with empowerment in the interviews with managers. The approach that employees should take towards being more responsible implies taking on the full onus of the work, including the service delivery contracts which have been deemed problematic by managers in earlier discussions. It can be assumed that taking full responsibility relieves the financial burden on the organisation to develop and invest fully in their staff and also

deflects from the need to challenge policy makers regarding shortages in the funding needed to deliver the work and train staff. This push towards being an 'empowered' employee makes employees more responsible (taking on more) for the crisis the organisation is reported to be in. The managers' conceptualisation of responsibility ignores working collaboratively with colleagues, working in alignment with community development principles, starting with the needs of the communities, and challenging unequal societal power structures. Responsibility largely focusses on the elements that align with wider neoliberal ideologies, such as competition, cost-effectiveness and auditing. The problem representation assumes a certain subject; one who wants to take on responsibility and further, one who wants to acquire more skills.

Nathan observes that the workforce who have been recruited *'through the back door'* also lack the necessary English, Maths and I.T skills, yet acknowledges that the organisation does not necessarily have the means to up-skill them adequately.

> *If you've got a workforce that's all come through the back door, you know, and where the levels are so different, like just the levels of English, the levels of maths, the levels of IT skills, being able to … and how do you skill up that workforce in a way that is both effective, doesn't demotivate them, and also is cheap as chips because we have no money for it. (Nathan, Manager, Healthscape)*

Nathan also identifies that staff had no idea what their contracts [service-delivery contracts] were: they were not familiar with the nature of the targets or contract requirements, and questions why this was never communicated by the previous management:

> *And you think, why did no one ever sit you down before you even took the job, why did no one ever sit you down and say, this is what we're doing it for, these are the targets, this is where you fit into the plan, this is how this all works, but no. (Nathan, Manager, Healthscape)*

Louise highlights the lack of capacity of the employees in the organisation:

> *I think again, over time, the lack of investment in people and previous management means that there's some serious capacity and capability deficit in the staff team … so, probably less than 80% of staff could pass English or Maths 'O' Level … and very reluctant to learn or adapt to new technology. (Louise, Manager, Healthscape)*

In the interviews, Louise mentions several times that the new management approach is focussed on investing in employees, yet in the extract above and in earlier suggestions that staff have been *'recruited through the back door'* and are unable to grasp what are now considered 'basic concepts' (e.g. project management skills), it becomes clear that some employees are considered sub-standard and a demeaning tone is taken regarding their capabilities. There is dissonance between the language about investment and the negative view of employees within the organisation, which raises concerns about the extent to which the investment is purely rhetorical, and whether this is instead a process of sifting the perceived ideal employees from those rejected within the organisation. This quote illustrates that having a formal education, speaking English, being competent in mathematics and adaptable to new technologies are valued within the new vision of the organisation.

Another aspect that Louise described as odd was the inability of staff to take responsibility for their own work within this 'empowerment organisation'. She explains that the organisation claims to be empowering staff from diverse backgrounds, but they are unable to take responsibility and, further, they would be unable to find employment in another organisation:

> *You know, I find it really odd, the extent to which in general people here are paralysed and not able to take responsibility for their work because I assumed, as an empowerment organisation, that would be true, and on the surface it doesn't look true. You can tell a story of, yeah, lovely diverse work team, so we've got no worries on equal opportunities, yeah, lovely diverse team from the community, you're empowered*

because they're in jobs, but actually how many other people who've come through that route could actually move on and get another job. (Louise, Manager, Healthscape)

This extract raises several issues as Louise links the problem representation (an unskilled workforce) to their *'diversity'*. Firstly, introducing diversity into the discussion brings a subtext that may imply that the employees have not been recruited because of their capabilities but because they look good for the organisation's empowerment and equal opportunities agenda. Secondly, by making a link between the perceived weaknesses of the employees and diversity, Louise is racialising these weaknesses.

Staff reviews, appraisals, and training and development records were also seen as weaknesses of the previous management. Nathan suggests there was inadequate evidence of staff development to warrant the number of 'promotions' that took place:

When you look into it and say, well, where are the reviews, where are the appraisals, where are the training development records, where are all of those things that help and support people, you know. You were given this promotion, so where the support to give you this, it wasn't very much evident. (Nathan, Manager, Healthscape)

Nathan indicates that these choices by the previous management have led to a crisis within the organisation, whereby they do not have a workforce which is fit for purpose:

And that's where the skills gap is. It's that you've got people in positions with titles but not with the skills to be able to fulfil what that role needs. (Nathan, Manager, Healthscape)

The notion that the underlying issues facing the organisation are a result of poor management decisions and a lack of investment in the organisation is also reflected in the interview with Louise,

where she notes that poor managerial decisions have led to a workforce who are largely not able to carry out their roles:

> *I think again, over time, the lack of investment in people and previous management means that there's some serious capacity and capability deficit in the organisation. (Louise, Manager, Healthscape)*

In addition to seeing these issues as a result of poor management decisions, there was also a sense that little could be done to challenge the broader changes to the voluntary sector. There was an acceptance that the government cuts had led to an underfunded sector, and that public sector cuts also meant that commissioners were not knowledgeable in their fields, which had a negative impact on the commissioning process. However, whilst this was noted as a structural problem, the solution rested within the unskilled workforce who were unable to meet the demands of the neoliberal climate:

> *But it's underfunded, so the contracts that are being put out there, and the things that are being asked from unskilled and un-professionalised work force are too great for them to ever actually meet. (Nathan, Manager, Healthscape)*

When asked about the future of the workforce, in particular about any forthcoming redundancies amidst the heightened funding crisis, the solution was seen to lie in staff doing more and operating in more efficient ways, particularly using technology, as indicated in the quote below:

> *We are struggling, you know, there are holes in our budget for this coming year so the extent to which we can sustain this level of staff … Literally, you know, and there are lots of wins like that if people adapt to shared working practice, but there's a resistance to really getting on with what our priorities are. (Louise, Manager, Healthscape)*

Within the narrative, the employees are constructed as inadequate and as a burden to the organisation within the current market. They are seen as having been inappropriately recruited, and

therefore not deserving, and they must therefore show their willingness to be open to reform. Within the narrative, managers shift between sector-wide challenges, previous management failures and problems of employee conduct. However, as the discourses are dispersed and reproduced, what emerges is that the primary solution is to be found within the employees' conduct. The solutions and proposed technologies give power to the notion that employees are the centre of the issue, and this truth becomes stabilised and accepted.

As this discourse is reproduced and stabilised, employees may alter their working practices to the neoliberal version as responsibility for wider structural issues is placed in their hands and they are framed as part of the problem. However, what are the barriers which prevent employees from taking the type of responsibility demanded by the neoliberal version of the organisation?

The representation of staff as the problem raises certain subjects while devaluing others. The staff who were from local communities, spoke local languages and represented the demographic of the communities they served were historically considered an asset in community development work. However, the neoliberalisation of the voluntary sector demands a different subjectivity. The employee is re-created as needing to be professional, highly educated and English-speaking. The term professionalism is not explicitly defined by the managers but can be inferred based on what is and is not welcome in the new version of the future. Staff are expected to be dynamic, flexible, strategic, resilient, agile, accountable, responsible, managerial and empowered - all qualities closely aligned with a neoliberal subjectivity. Those who do not adopt or demonstrate these qualities are cast as needing help, and therefore ripe for intervention or having the 'option' to leave the organisation.

Therefore, the restructure which may have been presented as a response to wider structural changes, was instead presented as a response to the employees' capability and conduct, as well as to poor management decisions. The issues facing the organisation, which originate from the nature of the public-sector service delivery contracts, were intertwined with different discourses, such as professionalisation, responsibilisation, accountability, entrepreneurship (go-getters, self-starters) and

increasing computerisation as a means of measuring work, thus connecting the sector-wide issues to employees' performance. Locating the solutions to the crisis within these discourses opens up a platform for technologies to be introduced which aim to govern employees as the focus of resolution. The narratives are presented in such a way that these solutions appear logical and rational. The solutions proposed, namely empowerment and accountability, are aligned to neoliberal ways of governing employees.

The managers draw upon the past to portray a crisis. As identified in the previous paragraphs, the organisation is in financial difficulties; its focus has drifted away from its mission; and the staff are seen as having been inappropriately recruited and not capable of fulfilling their roles or the potential of the organisation. This problematic position, coupled with entering a new era of reduced funding availability, creates a narrative which suggests that the organisation, whilst making 'positive' steps in the right direction, is facing a crisis. Louise notes that the twin challenges of lack of investment in the organisation and the limitations of the current funding climate are a struggle:

> *So, we've chased income to do things, and alongside that it's not been possible to also invest in people or technology, so we're kind of fighting against not having invested in ourselves plus a market place that illustrates that 4 out of the last 5 years we've operated a loss, if not longer, and so it's a challenge to turn that around at a time when both the type of work we did get is more scarce and there are more competitors in the market place, but also other types of funding overall are reduced, so the amount of grant funding available to charities is reduced and the competition for grant funding has increased. So that is the nature of the challenge, it's not easy… (Louise, Manager, Healthscape)*

It is also acknowledged that cuts within the public sector have meant that the availability of service delivery contracts for the voluntary sector are *'drying up quite a bit'* (Nathan, Manager, Healthscape), which meant they are facing increased pressures which bring different demands. Managers stated

that, in order to survive in the current climate, it was likely a number of further changes would be required, for example, downsizing the organisation further would be necessary in order to develop the infrastructure within current financial constraints.

Further, due the current climate, the organisation needs to respond quickly to the demands of the funding regimes. Nathan observes that contracts can become available at short notice and consequently the workforce needs to be ready to deliver at short notice:

> *… especially in health but across the public sector, means that there's a lot of pressure to suddenly respond and, if you're not able to suddenly respond, or if you've been working pretty much to capacity, and then somebody suddenly says, 'Oh look, there's a chance to get another 6 or 12 weeks work,' you know you've got to employ somebody to do that and, unless you've got a dynamic workforce where you've got a lot of people on the books that you can expand and contract, it's not going to work out very well for you. (Nathan, Manager, Healthscape)*

This crisis requires particular action and a particular type of workforce. Some of the workforce are therefore identified as a barrier to resolving the crisis, particularly those who are not agile or open to change. Nathan notes that some staff are not open to the change and feels they should leave the organisation if they do not like it:

> *And I think there's been lot of talk over the years, I think, of change and now that it's actually being driven through, I don't know that everybody… and I don't believe in keeping people who don't want to be here, but I don't think people here, some people, make that conscious decision, they just think they have to be here. It's like, of course you don't have to be here, go off and do something else. (Nathan, Manager, Healthscape)*

7.3 Conclusion

Analysis of the interviews with managers highlights that the challenges facing Healthscape are problematised in ways which cast the previous management and the current workforce as not capable and responsible for the current state of affairs. The data reveals that a narrative of crisis is constructed which draws on the idea that the state's money is being wasted and that the capability of the staff needs to be addressed urgently if the organisation is to survive. A new managerialist version of the organisation was constructed as a solution to the problem. A heightened demand for workers who represent the neoliberal subject is elicited in the discursive space. The assumptions underpinning the problem representation draw on neoliberal rationalities, as blame for structural issues (funding shortages and the increase of service delivery contracts) is conceptualised as the choice of individuals. Further evidence of neoliberal thinking is seen in the conceptualisation of what it is to be a professional, which is largely tied to managerialism. The dominance of such thinking enables the rejection of behaviours which are tied to more social and ethical values. In the construction of the problems, certain behaviours and attributes are given higher status, such as employees taking on responsibility, being proficient in English, or having project management skills and a professional background. Managers constructed the employees as needing remedial help and, in some cases, as undeserving. Thus, action was required from employees, despite managers drawing on discourses of empowerment and support, to adopt the proposed solutions in order that they were not perceived as a barrier to the new managerialist version of the organisation. This chapter has highlighted the problem representation which is core to legitimising the proposed solutions, discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 8: Healthscape: An Organisation in Crisis: Solutions, Technologies and Effects

8.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I presented the data from interviews with the managers of Healthscape, which revealed that they represented the problems within the organisation in terms of neoliberal assumptions. Structural or external factors were minimised in the problematisations, limiting the range of solutions proposed to overcome the organisational challenges. In this chapter, I will highlight the solutions, technologies and effects which had already been carried out under the restructure. I first provide an overview of the proposed solutions and unpack some of the assumptions which have made them intelligible, before discussing three specific technologies: practical methods put in place as a means to accomplish rule, as a 'legitimate' response to the problem representation. These specific technologies include the introduction of the project manager role, personal development review and new office culture.

8.2 An Organisation in Crisis: Solutions, Technologies and Effects

8.2.1 Solutions and technologies

Firstly, the restructure involved downsizing: some employees were made redundant and the remainder were all required to reapply for their roles. Moreover, the roles were changed to include two core levels: programme managers and project managers, and a number of practitioner roles were created. (In this study, both the project manager and practitioner roles are considered front-line, as they were not involved in senior-level decision-making, did not report to the board and spent a proportion of their time delivering services). The role of the project manager was framed as more managerial and strategic than the roles which had existed previously. Employees described their previous roles as being more focussed on engaging with communities, whereas there was in the role

of project manager a strong focus on being responsible and accountable, aiming to take an overview of the work in a sustainable and strategic manner, to look at the whole 'rather than be project focused'. The nature of the skills required within the project management role were closely aligned to the neoliberal managerial model, with a focus on tracking time, costs, outputs and standardising staff management practices.

Changes to the staff structure also included a 'clearer and acted-upon line-management' function which was focussed on 'personal development', and monthly PDRs, as opposed to annual appraisals. This new management approach was designed to empower rather than to instruct and appeared to have some positive elements. However, the question arises as to what extent the approach is supporting employees rather than driving responsibility to the front-line, whilst simultaneously suggesting that a 'personal development' approach can overcome the challenging context facing the organisation. Furthermore, to what extent is control given to front-line employees to operate autonomously and responsibly in line with the needs of the communities they serve?

Recruitment and development processes also changed to include a better written trail of decision-making relating to internal recruitment and equality of opportunity. However, it must be noted that the concern around a potential lack of equal opportunities was related to the high number of BAME employees within the organisation, particularly former volunteers. Interviewees expressed the view that the previous management had recruited staff because they were from local communities rather than because they had the right skills. I noted in my observations and interviews with employees that, during the restructure, the ethnic background of the workforce had changed from being predominantly BAME with a significant increase in white employees. Whilst I was not given access to figures on ethnic diversity within the organisation currently or historically, I observed myself a significant shift in who was employed, and this observation was also noted by several front-line employees during the interviews. This shift is important for many reasons, but in the context of this thesis, raises the

specific question of why employees from BAME communities no longer fit the new vision of the organisation.

In addition to the changes to the staffing structure, changes in the geography of the work had taken place: one office downsized significantly, and the other moved location to include a larger front-facing office and also to gain the opportunity to hire out space for additional income. The layout of the office was described as a *'fish-tank'* by one of the interviewees, raising questions regarding the rationale for the move. Was the open plan/glass design intended to be more community-facing, or was it a means of surveillance, particularly for employees seen to be performing below the expected standard?

Changes in ways of working were also implemented, including standardised documentation, increased focus on impact measurement, changes to health and safety policies which shifted flexible working patterns and lastly, greater engagement with technology to support these new methods of working.

The restructure aimed to create an environment where the organisation was more marketable to both traditional funders and the corporate sector. Online channels and social media were to be utilised further to promote community development work as a package, and thus the new vision required employees familiar with using social media, as illustrated in the following extract which is dismissive of employees who are not proactive in their approach to promotion and do not have a 'natural ability' to use social media:

> *we ought to be tweeting a couple of times and developing at least the equivalent of a scrapbook picture board of where we are and what we're doing. So you know there's some obvious quick wins but that's what I mean about very slow adoption on technology .... What I think ... I hear people say, 'Oh, we need training in that', but actually most people are never trained in social media. They just work out how to do*

it, the same way as you wouldn't need training on how to buy things online (Louise, Manager, Healthscape).

The new vision of the organisation was expressed in the interviews as one which values *'developing technological capacity ... to underpin more effective operating ... impact measurement and relationship management' (Louise, Manager, Healthscape).*

Further, the organisation wanted to provide employees with a more 'marketable work experience instead of a side-line' through the development of more professional ways of working which promote *'people leading their area of work and [being] responsible for their work' (Louise, Manager, Healthscape)..*

Louise makes clear that, if staff do not support the changes implemented and forthcoming proposals, the organisation will find it difficult to survive as it is not making the most of the opportunities available:

I don't know, it's a bit like pulling teeth, it is about where you come from but quite honestly, going forward, we don't manage to bridge traditional community development with new technology, we won't be competitive and we won't be making best use of the direction of travel, and bridges will divide. (Louise, Manager, Healthscape)

One means of diversifying funding was to provide consultancy services to the corporate sector on how to engage with marginalised communities, as this has been a strength of the organisation for over a decade. Such a shift is described by Suykens et al. (2019) as commercialisation of the VCS and is a feature of hybridisation. Nathan identifies that this strategy has been financially successful for other VCSOs and allowed them to continue to provide services to disadvantaged communities:

I think there are definitely options around that given the fact that we work with struggling communities, given the fact that we're very good at targeting people who

don't traditionally engage … We don't want to sell all our secrets but I think the way that we can … so I think that's probably the move the organisation needs to take moving forwards. (Nathan, Manager, Healthscape)

He notes that at this time the employees are not adequately skilled in the right areas to manage projects, but that the skills that the employees do possess are transferable into the corporate sector:

which is where our ability to sell what we do back into the corporate sector will be key because there are certainly things that happen on the ground here that are transferrable. (Nathan, Manager, Healthscape)

Nathan identifies that relying on the state for contracts is not the way forward but that instead the organisation needs to be more efficient in order to remain marketable and sustainable:

You're thinking, 'Right, I need to do a certain level of turnover,' but the reality is, you don't, you just need to be more efficient in what you do and be better at what you do and you'll kind of rise to the top because there'll always be a need. (Nathan, Manager, Healthscape)

Nathan reported that the organisation is trying to improve staff skills so they are able to take ownership and responsibility for their work, which will consequently allow them to be more employable in the future:

We're asking people to be responsible for their work and we're asking people to take ownership of their work, which I'm trying to give them the skills to be able to do that … I also want the people to know that, if they want to leave Healthscape and move onto another job, that they've got the full range of skills that would be expected for their job title. (Nathan, Manager, Healthscape)

Louise echoes this view by suggesting that the proposed changes will provide employees with a *'more marketable work experience instead of a side-line' (Louise, Manager, Healthscape)*. There is a clear assumption made within this narrative of a subject who is concerned with skill acquisition and career 'promotion', one who possesses an 'entrepreneurial spirit'.

As the solutions are presented as a logical and rational response to the heightened crisis, those who reject the changes [proposed technologies] are considered to remain outside of the 'norms of civility' (Rose, 1999:233). Therefore, if they remain in the organisation, they have the choice of engaging with the technologies and making the right choices which will bring them the status of an empowered employee, who is not only productive and efficient but also marketable to other employers. Through understanding the managers' narratives as 'regimes of truth' (Rose and Miller, 1992), we see how programmatic solutions become accepted as the only 'choice' for employees.

For example, the discourse of empowerment is drawn upon to make the proposed solutions intelligible. However, the word 'empowerment', adopted by the managers within Healthscape, activates discourses of accountability and responsibility; furthermore, the employees are positioned as having a choice about being employed within the organisation. The term 'empowerment' is used in a way which builds upon its original meaning but is appropriated to have a different meaning or tied to specific associated practices. Managers noted in the interviews that the staff are not empowered in an organisation which claims to be one of empowerment. However, the narrative presented by managers only highlights the neoliberal version of empowerment and suppresses other versions of the empowerment discourse. In the traditional sense of the word, employing people via the volunteer route is considered to be both empowering and associated with a community development ethos, particularly when the groups of people employed are traditionally marginalised from employment opportunities. Further, shifting people from volunteering to paid work for contracts designed to deliver public services has traces of a redistribution for resources, for why should people volunteer for delivering services which were previously funded by the government? However, in this narrative,

empowerment is appropriated to mean something different entirely: that staff should take on more responsibility and adapt to changes in the sector by continuously developing themselves.

Reflecting back on the previous chapter and the start of this one on further rationalities and solutions, there are a number of problem representations: poor managerial decisions, an unskilled workforce and, to a lesser extent, the funding context. However, as Bacchi (2009) notes, the problem and ways of thinking about the problem can be located in the proposed solutions. In the following sub-section of this chapter, I will outline in more detail the practical ways in which the perceived problems have been addressed.

8.2.2 Technologies of government

Having outlined the rationalities (Chapter 7), and the proposed solutions in the first section of this chapter, I will now move on to technologies which were put in place in Healthscape: the practical arrangements through which rationalities are put into practice. I outline three key technologies: 1) the introduction of the project manager role; 2) the PDRs; and 3) the new office culture. I also go on to discuss how the introduction of these technologies affected the experiences of front-line employees in Healthscape.

8.2.2.1 'Empowering' employees: The introduction of project managers

Every mode of governmentality presupposes 'a type of person, community, organisation, society or even world which is to be achieved' (Dean, 2010:33), which functions to configure subjects, their beliefs and practices in line with particular [policy] aims. This is made possible through technologies of government. In Healthscape, a particular technology was introduced to identify the nature of the desired subject and, simultaneously, identify who should be tolerated, what behaviours and qualities should be welcomed, and who should be rejected (Gedalof, 2018). The technology to operationalise the stated programmatic problems was a part of the restructuring of the workforce, namely the focus on the new role 'project manager'. Under the restructure, all employees were required to re-apply for the available jobs in what was, perhaps, the initial phase of sifting out undesired subjects. This was a

strategy identified by MacMillan et al. (2013), where restructuring is used not just as a tactical strategy for survival against funding cuts, but also to remove staff who were not considered to be performing, and thus was seen as a positive means to strengthen the organisation's position. As Ashley, a front-line worker, notes in her interview:

> *And again, commercially, what I've seen happen when you've been with an organisation a long time, obviously not always - it depends on the organisation, but there's much more almost recognition of the skills these people have brought, especially older people. It wasn't really the case here, well not that I saw.*

Here, I acknowledge that this sifting of employees may not happen directly, but instead operates through subjectification effects, including dividing practices. I focus on how the title and role of the project manager has served to create a desired subject and in turn, to shape the conduct of employees in accordance with specific aims and, further, to value certain skills and characteristics over others, which in turn can result in the sifting out or stigmatising of the undesired subject.

The skills required to be a competent worker were identified in the previous section, namely by identifying who was not considered competent for the roles. However, the title project manager also placed additional responsibility on staff and, whilst this may have been expected with a more senior role, the interviews reveal that this was the main role that was available to applicants; there was, therefore, limited choice for those applying for a more junior role. Consequently, the new project managers are now faced with additional responsibility and required to take greater accountability for their workload. As identified in an interview with Susie below:

> *There's very much shifts in project managers … So they've really stepped up in their roles and they're thinking they're still doing the role as before, and having, and for the project manager it is the responsibility to know what's going on here … and actually you need to be proactive.*

And, I guess, just making sure the teams and staff, project managers really thoroughly can go ahead and do things without having to ask permission, because I think maybe historically it was being told what to do. whereas now it's, 'No, you go up' ... being a bit spoon fed with the work we're doing so it's managers shifting towards and 'Go, you are a manager now, you are a project manager so you need to be managing the project'. (Susie, front-line employee, Healthscape)

The project manager role had thus two purposes: firstly to increase managerialism in line with the wider neoliberal trends across the social professions (Ball and Olmedo, 2013; Berg, Barry and Chandler, 2008; Davies and Bansel, 2010) and secondly to operate a technology of agency which aims to 'transform their [target population] status, to make them active capable citizens [employees, in this case]' (Dean and Hindess, 1998:148). I will address these in turn.

The new role of the project manager shifted the focus away from front-line client-facing work towards greater engagement with monitoring technologies, and with standardised systems and approaches to working with communities, managing casual front-line staff and recruiting professional volunteers, alongside a greater emphasis on making projects more marketable through the use of social media and engaging with discourses around impact, measurement and evaluation. This approach aligns with the management view that the organisation is more professional, as professionalism is associated with neoliberal discourses of standardisation, efficiency, measurement, marketisation and casualisation, with an overarching theme of 'doing more for less', as a means to save resources.

Below, I provide examples from extracts with new project managers about the nature of their work. Ashley discusses how she now manages the new database, which has been implemented to improve the data provided to funders. She later expresses the importance of her role as the funding landscape is more challenging:

No, we just sort of, we manage the process if you like … also obviously we've recently gone to the new kind of IT and monitoring system … It's called Salesforce, it's an American kind of customer relationship management system … And we mainly did that because we need to try and capture the impact of our work better … And we believe that Salesforce can help us with that, in terms of making our data look a little bit more shiny… so it's important that we show that we know verbally that the service is good, that lots of funders want kind of actual, kind of proper data, if you like, and we feel that kind of the flexibility that the system gives us can help us with that.

So, it's like, I suppose, just capturing the kind of impact of the work that we do and the advice contracts generally are kind of decreasing in terms of funding, so that's even more important that we kind of show the services are vital. (Ashley, front-line worker, Healthscape)

Arnold describes the way he works now which he considers to be far more professional than previously:

It wasn't measurable, so now, like, now everything is measurable, because we're doing this correctly and there is accountability, so we know that the task we do is measurable and is going into the right database and, if they know it is there also, even the templates, all the templates we create, it's very professional. (Arnold, front-line worker, Healthscape)

This is not to say that the project managers do not find it hard to adopt the neoliberalised version of management. For example, Ashley notes in her interview that quantity takes precedence over quality, which is difficult for those passionate about their work, as it does not necessarily achieve the best outcomes for the communities they serve. She also adds that the nature of the accounting technologies has discursive effects, that they only allow for certain topics to be raised, again making

it difficult to truly represent the needs of the communities, and this was also evident in how employees felt about accounting technologies in Community Life. She acknowledges, however, that it makes the organisation far more marketable if it focusses on quantity, as this impresses funders.

> *It is very target orientated, like you've spoken to, I've spoken to this number of participants, it is very target-driven. You get varied targets, like you've got 25 stories, this, that, the next thing, so I feel we need more qualitative stuff, shouldn't it be better to speak to two or three people and get loads of insight … But the contract is that we speak to 25 participants, and so that's quite hard for me because I've got the passion.*
>
> *And go into the funders, the way they have to report, they want it to be, 'We spoke to 100 women…' because it does sound much more impressive than, 'We spoke to four women.'*
>
> *The feedback from participants is that they want X, but this is too difficult to discuss so we [funders] won't look at that now. …? It makes you feel a bit resigned, but typical (laughs) typical.' (Ashley, front-line worker, Healthscape)*

Whilst some employees adapted to the role of project managers in accordance with the expectations, others felt unsupported and forced to apply for roles they did not want or feel they had the capacity to take on. Tracey highlights this in her interview extract below:

> *We had the restructure and I think we were put in positions where we weren't happy with what we didn't think we were capable of doing. You know, when you're just thrown in at the deep end, there is no project worker's role but there's a manager's role, take it, and you've taken it but then you know that's not like one person's job, it's like 2 or 3 people's job that you're doing … So you're kind of like stressed out, you're always on the go. (Tracey, front-line worker, Healthscape)*

As a result of taking on the project manager's role, without the required support or skills, Tracey was left feeling demoralised and incapable:

> *And sometimes it's like you're doing things that the top people are not happy with it, so they're changing everything, so that demoralises you and you feel you're not capable of doing it. (Tracey, front-line worker, Healthscape)*

Therefore, the project manager's role was introduced as a technology of agency - my second point. According to Dean and Hindess(1998), a technology of agency is introduced particularly for 'at risk' populations (here, the unskilled workforce), for individuals to transform their status and be capable of managing their own or the organisation's risk (reduced funding), as seen in the interview extracts with Samia and Arnold earlier. Further, agency technologies are deployed when individuals are to be governed through their own empowerment and participatory capacities. The introduction of the project manager role enabled the organisation to give greater responsibility to employees, which was often described as empowering the workforce as they were then in a better position to 'enter into the negotiation over needs' (Dean, 2010:168). However, in practice, the support to do this was minimal and the strategy therefore relied on individuals to be entrepreneurial and willing to continually develop themselves, in line with the demands of the neoliberal context.

> *[Interviewee] Yeah, and that's frustrating, it's really, really frustrating because they always say that you need to develop yourself, you need to have the skills, you need to empower and you try and do that but find yourself holding back.*
>
> *[Researcher] Hmm, so you think you're holding back from your work?*
>
> *[Interviewee] Yeah. We haven't got that support where we were put into these manager's roles and then we didn't have that support.' (Tracey, front-line worker, Healthscape)*

The technology of placing staff in project management positions has forced those who are not considered fit for purpose to identify their own shortcomings and take the necessary action, whether that be to improve their skills and engage with other technologies of agency or performance to enhance their self-esteem and reconfigure themselves, or to leave their position - as a failed subject. Finally, the role of the project managers has not reduced the need for the same workers to take on the same responsibilities they had before, such as engaging with communities, but instead has increased the importance of managerial elements of the role to reconfigure the employees into more professional, neoliberal subjects.

The title 'project manager' serves to reassemble the subjectivity of the worker, in a move away from what may be considered a focus on social justice towards increased value of management and accounting practices. The restructure and shift in job titles marked the transition from a community-focussed employee to one who is interested in the business, efficiency and effectiveness of the organisation. The term 'manager' itself activates discourses of planning, strategy and responsibility and the ability to be pro-active without taking instruction. Consequently, the subjectivity of employees is reconstructed with technologies that seek to 'empower' them to take responsibility for their workload without relying on others. Having the title of 'project manager' serves as a technology to ensure employees make the right 'choices', such as increased focus on monitoring and impact measurement, and consequently positions them as empowered employees who are fully responsible and take initiative.

8.2.2.2 'Supporting' employees: The introduction of the personal development review

Technologies of agency often go hand in hand with technologies of performance, which 'monitor, compare and evaluate the performance of those whose agency is thereby activated' (Dean, 1998:148). As identified in the previous section, management argued that management systems had historically been poor and they therefore now wanted to introduce standardised ways of supporting staff, primarily through a new performance development review (PDR) system which provided staff with

monthly meetings, rather than annual appraisal and monthly supervisions. The PDRs can be considered a technology of performance. Such technologies are often introduced where there is a climate of mistrust (Dean and Hindess, 1998:149). Given that the staff were seen as incompetent, such a technology would be required to restore trust, based upon the establishment of organisational benchmarks or performance. According to Louise, monthly meetings were *'a rolling approach to reviewing priorities, not your work plan, not everything you do, but the priorities you've got and how your manager can support you [to] achieve them'.*

The rationale for this had a moral appeal as it was to be 'fair to staff'; however, to some extent, it also implies that increased accountability will improve staff performance in relation to being more empowered and responsible, as they are able to identify their own priorities. Nathan observes that some staff are thriving under the new system:

> *so some people are finding it quite interesting and challenging with the new way of doing things, and having regular one-to-ones, and the sort of chain of how things are supposed to happen, but other people are really thriving under that, because they've suddenly realised it's about what they do, it's much more than dictatorship. (Nathan, Manager, Healthscape)*

These staff members are demonstrating increased responsibilitisation as they accept that the system is not there to tell them what to do, but instead to provide them with a platform to help them help themselves.

Susie, a front-line worker, who was employed after the restructure explained the PDR process in depth in her interview as she had recently carried out three PDRs for her subordinates. She described the PDR as a very positive step for the organisation, as it allowed staff to set goals, identify areas of weakness and measure where people were not meeting the expectations of the organisation:

What is it they need to be doing in their role, what they've achieved and what they haven't and then it means us sitting down and talking to them and saying, 'Actually you haven't performed very well, this is what is going here, you collect the evidence,' and I thought some of them would be really difficult conversations and they weren't going to agree because you were telling them, 'Well, this is what was set out, this is what you haven't achieved so far, this is why,' but it's an opportunity for you to work with them to get them up to the top. (Susie, front-line employee, Healthscape)

Susie later goes on to discuss how the next step in the process is to develop disciplinary procedures for staff who do not perform well in the PDR, and states that this is particularly important as the organisation is a charity and staff should not be paid from public funds for work they do not do:

Because I think it's not the kind of organisation to give time and resource to people if they're not going to give back what you need …They are a charity after all. So, yeah, so actually paying people for work they do, and not for not meeting their targets, and that's not getting paid by funders. (Susie, front-line employee, Healthscape)

It may thus be argued that the PDR opens employees up to more scrutiny, but less power. Those employees who are unable to perform within the expectations of the neoliberal identity outlined earlier are not only subject to disciplinary procedures but also seen as wasting the government's money in a time of austerity. Subsequently, the guise of the PDR as a means of empowerment is contingent on employees taking greater responsibility for any areas of development or weakness. This is illustrated in Tracey's interview, where she notes that the PDR was useful in helping her to recognise her own strengths and weaknesses and consequently develop herself:

I think it is, yeah, because you're getting the opportunity to develop yourself, which is good. You've got like, like I said earlier about your strengths and your weaknesses,

and I've got dyslexia so it's good for me to kind of, it's like a progress for me. (Tracey, front-line worker, Healthscape)

In this extract, Tracey identifies with the neoliberal subject, as she sees the PDR as a means for improving herself. However, she also identifies that she has dyslexia and, later in the interview, discusses how this prevents her from doing some of her work and how the organisation has not been able to support her with this, despite her raising it in the PDR:

...where we were put into these manager's roles and then we didn't have that support. I find that kind of, because I have dyslexia ... And I have it really bad and I find that there's a lot of things that stop me and I'm not getting support ...

This extract illustrates that the PDR relies on the individual not only to identify their weaknesses but also to resolve them themselves. Some of the reasons adequate support has not been put in place were attributed to financial constraints; however, the PDR does not account for these shortcomings and instead focusses on the individual to provide solutions.

In another interview, an employee stated that the PDR was not able to be completed as it was not a priority for her. She notes that part-time work means you are often working *'flat-out'* to achieve the targets and complete monitoring reports, hence the PDR does not take precedence:

Oh yeah, that system, it goes back to everyone working part-time and not having enough hours to actually do that personal development work, there's not enough time, you know. I think I've had one or two meetings with my line manager but the time just doesn't allow you to put what you need to put into filling out those forms and doing everything that you need to, it's just not the priority. The priority is meeting your targets and getting your quarterly reports done so all of that, to me, gets pushed to the wayside. (Sharlene, front-line worker, Healthscape)

Staff are therefore invited to engage with these tools of empowerment but they are expected to make the time to do so, as a neoliberal subject would see the benefit of engaging with tools that are there to develop them, in addition to carrying out their daily work. Such tools can disrupt, as they attempt to re- configure and add pressure to an already strained workforce. As Bacchi (2009) notes, attention must be given to what neoliberal governance silences as well as promotes: within the organisational discourse, very little attention is given to the time pressures on staff to fulfil the requirements of the additional techniques imposed upon them. By focussing on the individual as a means of empowerment, other areas which would enable staff to be more empowered are minimised or neglected. As identified earlier, the focus on employees shifts focus away from one of the primary causes of the crisis, which was the nature of state-funded contracts.

Here, I will draw on Lukes's (1974) conceptualisation of power, which highlights that power operates on three levels: the individual, the inter-personal and the collective levels. For empowerment to take place, consideration must be given to all three levels. However, the PDR focusses power on the individual level only, which is concerned with how individuals perceive their interests, self-worth and their ability to draw on resources. Little attention is given to the inter-personal or collective levels which focus on an individual's power to draw on the economic resources, skills or information to be able to achieve what they see as necessary and, further, what practices on an institutional level prevent choices being made. As such, staff who require resources, whether of time or finance, to fulfil their roles or meet organisational requirements, are unable to access them, and the inter-personal and collective sources of power remain intact.

The PDR works in two ways to operationalise the rationalities: firstly, it further embeds the notion of who is deserving and undeserving, acting as a dividing practice; and secondly, it appears to mobilise and maximise powerlessness as employees recognise their own potential. As such, it helps the employees to help themselves but only within a particular framework which does not necessarily include additional resources. This aligns with the welcoming of a neoliberal subject, one who is

willing to develop themselves. This was also seen in the findings in Community Life, where employees were encouraged to take up the subject positions of being responsible for their own 'self-invention and transformation', or being 'capable of surviving within the new social, economic and political system' (Walkerdine et al. 2001:3). As a technology of performance, it invites employees to identify their strengths and weakness as a means of identifying the progress of individuals within the organisation, and whether they are performing in accordance with the organisation's newly defined subject. At the same time, it enables identification of those who are not able to perform in line with the neoliberal demands of the organisation and who, consequently, waste public money.

8.2.2.3 'Professionalising' employees: The introduction of a new organisational culture

The final technology I discuss in this section is the change in organisational culture as a part of the new vision for Healthscape. This shift was in response to the perceived lack of professionalism in the workforce and drew on the discourse of wasting government money.

There were three key elements to the technology used: first, changing the physical office space; secondly, changing flexible working hours; and lastly, changing the nature of interactions between employees by creating an office environment where colleagues were not allowed to speak to one another, minimising whole staff meetings and removing staff representatives.

The first change towards a new office culture was the introduction of an open-plan office: an interesting move, as the larger office cost more while a number of staff members were made redundant. The physical space was now more open-plan and, as staff note, contained *'a lot of glass'*. The layout of the office included the senior manager's office and a meeting room in the middle of the open-plan space. Furthermore, the second office – in another borough – had been significantly downsized, with a view to removing it altogether. Staff said that the layout of the new office made them feel they were under constant surveillance. It was described as 'all glass, with no privacy' (Asha, front-line worker, Healthscape), and staff members did not feel at ease working in the office:

It never used to be like this. It used to be very busy so now people, they're not free working, they feel like someone is spying on them, that there's a camera somewhere (Asha, front-line worker, Healthscape).

The office was also extremely quiet, and I noted that some staff did not come to this office, preferring to stay in the second office which provided a sense of freedom:

'So when they are there, they are out of sight of management so are free to talk freely and they know that' (Arnold, front-line worker, Healthscape).

When I asked Samia about how she felt the organisation culture had changed, she said that staff often did not come in, or went to the second office. I asked her why, and she responded:

Yeah, no, I think it's about people's own kind of anxieties around, there's quite a lot of glass boxes here, lots of glass and lots of see-through things … I think it's more about the insecurities of individuals I think, more than anything else … And how they want to work and how the management want them to work and how they as individuals want to work.

From this response, it is clear that staff who are resistant to the changes are cast as insecure and not wanting to follow the logical solutions offered by the management. This physical change thus has the potential to operate as a dividing practice, whereby employees who see themselves as more 'capable' stigmatise those who are not as willing to be open to surveillance because of their perceived lack of competence.

The second change towards a new office culture was in a shift in working conditions, mainly around the allowance of flexitime. The representation of the problem, the incompetent workforce, has lived effects for the employees in terms of their working patterns and their motivation for working at Healthscape. Charlotte discusses how the flexibility has been withdrawn from employees:

Before, I can come at 10 o'clock, half-past ten, because we all had different hours, conditions, and I don't mind finishing later, or work[ing] on the day which is not my working day. We were more flexible at that time, and now we have to come especially at 10, no later than ten, and we have to stay in our working day from the time to time, and it makes tension. For me it's the most important results of my work, people say it, I will do it. I was, I think I did over my hours, I didn't pay attention. But I know if, for example, I need to do outreach work, I need to come out one hour earlier, but nobody wants to understand. They [say] you have to explain 'I was doing outreach and I exceeded my hours'. (Charlotte, front-line worker, Healthscape)

Charlotte talks about the notion of reciprocity that showed a give and take relationship. Later in our conversation in a coffee shop, Charlotte speaks more about how she still often has to stay late, but that this is not reciprocated by getting any of the time back. Overtime within the VCS is common practice (Baines, 2010). It had not been identified historically as problematic in Healthscape, as staff felt they were previously able to recoup this time through flexibility with working hours, but this ability had now been retracted.

Charlotte emphasises that the need to have to report and explain is frustrating and makes her feel that she is not trusted or considered to be working hard enough. Sharlene echoes this view of the new working patterns:

[Interviewee] So I think, in those ways, they feel that I'm quite difficult and also another thing is that, when I work for an organisation, I expect a certain level of trust … And they trust that, if I say I'm going to A, B and C, that that's what I'm going to do and I've felt at times that I wasn't trusted by my line manager because she'd message me and say to me stuff like, 'Oh, I'm not in the office and can you clock out by ringing'… Because there were times when I'd be doing outreach and I'm not standing around, waiting for a bus or a tube, I'm actually on my bike pounding all

over the place to go do my outreach, so with the outreach that we do, like I might go to two places or three places within that day, and it's quite draining to sit and talk with women and gather their information and their stories, so by the time I'm finished I may not get a lunch break, because of the times the clinics run that you try and speak to as many women as possible. Then, after I've done all of that and everything, if I'm nearby home and I haven't had a lunch break, I'm like, I'm off home now, you know.

[Researcher] Of course.

[Interviewee] But in their eyes, I've felt like they didn't like that, they probably prefer me to kill myself and get there and then clock out and say, 'Yes, I'm off home because it's 5 o'clock,' you know, but yeah.' (Sharlene, front-line worker, Healthscape).

The changes to working hours and reporting to the office limited staff in terms of achieving what they considered important in their roles: the quality of the service. Some staff felt that they had less time now to carry out key roles such as engaging with the community, as being out of the office was not valued or understood by the management:

For example, when I need to [do] outreach work, I need to converse with as many people as I can. And actually, I am willing to, because it makes me really upset that we're providing the service and people don't know about it. It's unfair, because if something happens they don't know where to go, where to get help, and when I inform them about the service which we provide, the legal advice service, they become so happy, so excited, 'Oh wow, we didn't know!' and it's unfair because it's a project for the community. So, everyone should have access to that. (Charlotte, front-line worker, Healthscape)

Both the move to an open-plan office and the changes to flexi-time may illustrate how employees who historically were able to operate autonomously, despite still having contractual obligations, were

trusted to fulfil these in ways they thought would achieve organisational goals, and in line with their own professional identities. Employees were provided with autonomy. Yet, under the new organisational culture, they are monitored heavily and their actions and time are scrutinised. Managerialism has cast autonomy as irresponsibility (Schimank, 2005:372), and trust in employees' capabilities and knowledge was no longer seen as facilitating the achievement of organisational goals. Instead, autonomy was considered the 'harbinger of the "unmanaged" and hence the unproductive, undisciplined and unknown' (Ward, 2011:2010–11), and a risk to the organisation.

Consequently, this solution has discursive, subjectification and lived effects (Bacchi, 2009:48). The changes to working hours had implications for what was considered to be relevant: being out in the community was devalued and being present in the office was considered a more important activity. This had implications for the working conditions for staff, as they found it more difficult to achieve what they considered important in their roles – engaging with communities – as well as not being able to recoup hours owed to them, and it affected their motivation as they felt they were not trusted. The solution assumes that staff are unable to be trusted to be autonomous, and also has subjectification effects. Fearing that they may not be trusted, an employee may decide to adopt a neoliberal subject position, always willing to prove themselves, do more than contractually required as a means to improve their chances within the workplace, as well as being able to prove themselves agile in responding to the demands of the neoliberal context. Further, this solution invites subjects to present themselves as disciplined and open to scrutiny from managerial technologies.

The third and final change discussed here is a shift in the office culture to limit staff interactions. A dominant theme emerging from my interviews with employees highlights a substantial shift from a more family-like culture to one which discourages engagement between employees altogether. For example, Charlotte spoke about Healthscape in the past, *'before, it was more like a family, a closer relationship than now. Now it is more professional, a more professional way, more official'.* Whilst the term professionalism may have some positive elements to it, the shift, to a 'more professional

way' was presented as a detrimental change which discouraged employees from engaging with one another and impacted on their ability to collaborate and share best working practices as well as their motivation in working for Healthscape.

Sharlene echoed a very similar view:

> *When I first came here, the reason why I wanted to work here at Healthscape was because of the atmosphere here, it was relaxed, it was more like a family-orientated type environment, but it's changed, it's not like that.*

Ben talked about the nature of the organisation when he first started, one month before the restructure, and expressed his surprise at the organisational culture:

> *[Interviewee] Oh, okay, let me say, when I joined, I was surprised about the work style.*
>
> *[Researcher] Okay.*
>
> *[Interviewee] Like I told you, it was very accommodating, people were very open, very supportive. It was difficult for me to believe, it was, to be honest.*
>
> *[Researcher] Hmm mm.*
>
> *[Interviewee] It took me time to readjust into the system, I was like, is it real, can people really be this way, yeah.*
>
> *[Researcher] And do you think it was real?*
>
> *[Interviewee] Yeah, it was because, if they were faking it, they could only fake it to a point where it's obvious, and it's not like one person that's doing it, everyone was doing it in the organisation. I've never been in that situation before, so I was surprised.*

Arnold also described a clear distinction in the culture, which was referred to by many of the employees as the *'old Healthscape vs. the new Healthscape'*:

> *There are definitely things that you can pick from the old when you want to bring out the good model, things that you can bring from here and things that you should kick out and things that we can bring up from here … something which is really missing, which is very key and a strong motivation for most people in the restructure, was the interaction, the communication, the human feelings that you get. It is almost completely gone now, yeah.*

Arnold went on to describe that staff were afraid to interact and felt as though they were being constantly watched:

> *[Interviewee] Of course then I used to have interaction with my team and all that, but now it's different, where it was almost compulsory to interact with a range of people and there's that belief of fear of people coming out to interact because the platforms for being able to interact have been dismantled.*
>
> *[Researcher] Hmm mm.*
>
> *[Interviewee] Yeah, so people have that feeling you're not allowed to talk, but I think in one way it's meant to check people, but I think the effect is that it's gone to their strength, the effect.*
>
> *[Researcher] So how do you think the staff are feeling about that?*
>
> *[Interviewee] People are more secretive now, they're afraid to talk, to be honest.*

This fear was echoed by Charlotte who stated that, if staff wanted to talk, they would usually use 'private' spaces, such as the kitchen. She went on to describe having to have hidden relationships with staff.

[Researcher] But do you think they exist then, or are they gone?

[Interviewee] They exist, but they are existing now like they are hiding. They are hiding this.

[Researcher] And you think that's because of the culture, of what Louise is saying, 'don't talk'?

[Interviewee] Yes.

[Researcher] So, if you were talking, what would happen?

[Interviewee] If you don't like it here, you can leave.

Resistance was not specifically observed in overt ways but instead through subtle counter discourses amongst colleagues in newly created spaces by the employees. For example, as Charlotte identifies, conversations took place in the kitchen or by whispering with colleagues. Such platforms provided a space for employees to resist some of the managerial techniques imposed upon them, even if only through critiquing them. I observed, on several occasions, employees discussing the management's bullying behaviour both in the kitchen and also in the reception area, which was somewhat out of sight. This subtle resistance was also shown by staff choosing to stay in the second office, where they were out of sight from the management. This space provided them with more autonomy to carry out their work in a way which they considered more ethical and aligned with the purpose of their roles.

Overall, the shifts to discourage communication amongst staff alienated staff and had lived effects on their motivation and the views of their team members. Charlotte felt that the changes meant that staff were not able to be honest with one another and limited sharing of information, particularly if staff needed support. She spoke of how the organisation used to be:

Because people become more honest. More honest, if they have any troubles, they always share it. If they are not really professional or something, they always get support.

Staff felt that relationships with colleagues were important for their own motivation but also for the nature of the work. As Charlotte explained:

Yeah, but I think relationships with our colleagues are necessary, especially in the area in which we are working, because we need to be more human than robots.

In addition to feeling that colleagues were not encouraged to engage with one another, staff also felt that the systems in place to discuss issues and complaints had been removed, again limiting interaction between employees. Prior to the restructure, the organisation had a staff representative system, which had been removed by a staff vote. However, staff reported that the vote was not a democratic process, with only a short consultation period, and including casual staff who were not affected by some of the organisational decisions being made. In an interview with a front-line employee, I asked how staff could raise concerns or complaints:

[Researcher] And if you have a complaint for example, who do you go to?

[Interviewee] Nowhere, nowhere, because before we had a staff representative, and after we voted that we need staff representatives. Half us wanted to and half of us didn't, Louise said, 'No, we don't need it. You are open and you're always free to say.'

[Researcher] And do you feel you are free?

[Interviewee] No... no.

[Researcher] If you have a complaint, what do you do then?

[Interviewee] If I have a complaint, I can talk about this with my manager. I can chat, and gossip with my colleagues. That's it. (Charlotte, Healthscape)

Here, it possible to see how the restructure 'decollectivised' the workforce: strategies which had provided employees with some degree of stronger labour relations were removed under the restructure. In the VCS, there is overall very limited union representation and, in this case, even internal structures created to ensure some form of collective power amongst front-line employees were withdrawn under the new managerial vision for the organisation. There is also evidence, mentioned by Charlotte, of *'gossiping'* with colleagues if there are any areas of concern.

Jameson (2017) conceptualises this 'gossiping' as more than just that, but instead a means of 'letting off steam' and managing upwards in resistance to managerial technologies, by what are called 'critical corridor conversations'.

In addition to removing the staff representative system, whole staff meetings had become less frequent and had changed in style from interaction to a one-way space for communication. Arnold described the shift:

[Interviewee] Yeah, for example, we used to have staff meetings which used to be monthly, now maybe it's once every quarter and that's when you physically get people together to talk, and in the meetings there used to be activities with people, you know the way you teach your kids, you make them catch a phone and thereby passing messages to them, and some of the things like that we used to have before, where people would come in and would be asked to do some activities. The thing with catching the phone, there's a goal …

[Researcher] At the end

[Interviewee] At the end of it, they would tell you, oh, what this means and they feel relaxed and that, but the structure of the meeting is different now. It's usually a presentation, people sit down and listening. (Arnold, Healthscape)

The changes to the culture of the organisation had two impacts: firstly, they served to 'decollectivise' the workforce and reinforce vertical line management; and secondly, they served to divide the employees into the valued and the devalued. I will address these in turn.

The changes to the culture remove or weaken various forms of collectivity: reducing meetings, removing staff representatives, reducing opportunities for informal discussion, eliminating the 'family' atmosphere and limiting flexitime would all seem to strengthen vertical line-management type of relations and weaken horizontal relations between staff, as well as consultation of staff by managers. When these changes are combined with the PDR, there is a shift towards heightened surveillance and a managerialist atmosphere.

This finding is significant when considering Mahon's (2016) study, which highlights that staff motivation in the VCS can be fostered with the implementation of regular communication from management, as well as the development of team relations. Both serve to improve employee motivation. Yet, the findings suggest that technologies were employed which worked against staff motivation. Mahon (2016) notes that funded contracts place no importance on HR dimensions but focus instead on targets and outcomes. Consequently, it may be argued that, within Healthscape, the nature of the contract culture had devalued the importance of such functions.

Another aspect that emerged, linked to the theme of a changing office culture, was that two groups appeared in the workforce: those who supported the solutions, and those who did not. Support was shown by being on the side of the senior management and their decisions and embracing the changes (e.g. silence in the office). This change to the office culture, as well as the problem representation of

non-English-speaking staff, created tension within the office, leading to a division between employees, creating further distrust between employees, and stigmatising certain groups.

Charlotte's extract below illustrates the prevalence of 'sides' within the workforce:

> *[Researcher] What other tensions do you think there are in the organisation?*
>
> *[Interviewee] Of course, people don't know who's on Louise's side, who isn't on Louise's side. Actually, Louise didn't do anything wrong, but the things that happened with the help of our staff, whom she accepted, whom she didn't. (Charlotte, Healthscape)*

The notion of sides also led to some evidence of individualisation. Charlotte stated in one of her interviews that she would not leave, as she is on the right side and therefore the changes had not affected her personally. In the VCS, there are rarely pay-related bonuses to reward individuals or encourage a decollectivised workforce, but here, the value placed on employees who adhered to the changes in the organisation served as a form of market-type competition amongst staff.

Two groups had also emerged in relation to employees who spoke English as a first language and those who did not. There was evidence of stigmatisation of non-English speaking employees in my fieldwork which suggests that the way in which the problem has been represented by the managers served to legitimise a racialising of these weaknesses. This devaluing was witnessed in many of my field observations and conversations, where staff felt that some employees were not fit to work in the organisation due to their lack of 'proficiency' in English. On one occasion, a weekly staff newsletter contained an article, written by a front-line employee, discussing the need for staff to become more proficient in the use of IT systems and to improve their written English skills. The article had a discriminatory undertone which fed into the narrative that the non-English speaking staff were the problem. There were, therefore, very real and lived effects of the problem representation, as some staff felt inadequate, stigmatised and undervalued by management and by their own peers within

Healthscape. The development of two groups of employees was due to the rationalities and technologies at play, which served to divide, and raised individualism and stigmatisation in the workforce.

8.3 Conclusion

A number of solutions were put into place at Healthscape to address the perceived problem representation. These included an organisational restructure, including new job roles, clearer line management, new appraisals, a new office, standardised working practices, a focus on impact measurement and increased use of IT for accounting and marketing. The restructure had additional outcomes, such as a reduction in the BAME workforce. This may be explained by the status given to subjects who possessed particular skills (see Chapter 9). Notions of empowerment were drawn upon by managers as the rationale for some of the changes; however, these were primarily tied to the neoliberal, responsibilisation agenda.

In this chapter, I highlighted three technologies, implemented as a result of neoliberal rationalities. The introduction of the new project manager roles increased and prioritised managerialism, while also operating as a 'technology of agency' to transform the subjectivity of employees to become active and responsibilised. Whilst staff were being invited to take on more responsibility, they were not supported in this, and thus the strategy relied on individuals who were 'entrepreneurial' and open to reform. The new role of project managers served as a technology which governed individuals through the neoliberal concepts of responsibility and self-advancement to withstand structural changes.

The PDR was introduced into the organisation supposedly to make employees feel more empowered and have more ownership of their work. However, the findings suggested that it brought greater scrutiny but less power. Employees who were unable to align with the requirements of the organisation were seen as 'outcasts', 'willingly' wasting government funding. Similarly to the project

manager role, staff did not feel that the organisation was able to support them where they identified a need in their PDR, and this had subjectification effects on the type of employee one was expected to be: one who is willing to develop themselves in line with market demand and consider this an opportunity for self-improvement; and avoided focussing on the structural influences. Overall, the PDR also served to divide employees, as it further embedded the notion of who is deserving and who is undeserving in the organisation.

The final technology employed in changing the office culture decollectivised the workforce by reducing collective spaces and interactions between employees (both formal and informal) and by strengthening vertical line management. These changed working conditions resulted in employees feeling demoralised, mistrusted and struggling to fulfil some aspects of their roles. Autonomy was reduced as employees were heavily monitored. This may have been considered a strategy to manage those employees seen by managers as a risk to the new vision for the organisation.

Some employees resisted the changes to office culture by continuing to engage with colleagues in 'hidden' spaces and made efforts to discuss management strategies and bullying. However, there was also evidence of division in the workforce, between those who were willing to adopt the neoliberal subject being elicited and those who were not. The combination of these technologies was, therefore, divisive. The implications of the groups also led to individualism, as the changes in the culture brought a form of market-style competition amongst employees.

Chapter 9: Conclusion: Markers of Neoliberal Governmentality

9.1 Introduction

A principal aim of this study was to identify how the neoliberal project operates in the VCS and, from a governmentality perspective, whether the political rationality of neoliberalism is the prevailing form of governance in the sector. According to Hamann (2009), 'the central aim of neoliberal governmentality ("the conduct of conduct") is the strategic creation of social conditions that encourage and necessitate the production of the *homo economicus,* a historically specific form of subjectivity constituted as a free and autonomous 'atom' of self-interest' (p.37). This study, therefore, set out to identify indicators of a neoliberal discursive environment within the two case-study organisations, and its impacts on front-line employees. The findings from the study support the notion that neoliberal governmentality operates through discourses and practices to shift responsibility for external and structural factors to the individual. This process of 'responsibilitisation' is achieved when subjects are encouraged to refashion themselves, through practices of subjectification, to align with the neoliberal and agile subject and is made intelligible through the ways in which the managers within VCSOs problematise the challenges facing the organisations.

In this concluding chapter, I consider how the findings presented in Chapters 5 to 8 help to answer the overall research questions outlined in the introduction; how has the neoliberal landscape changed the organisation of work in the VCS sector, how are current shifts in work organisation shaping employee working practices and interpersonal experiences and can the emerging theoretical discourse on neoliberal governmentality explain the restructuring of the VCS and its impacts on front-line staff? The discussion focusses on the identification of elements of neoliberal governmentality within the VCS and their implications for employees, concluding that neoliberal governmentality helps us gain a greater understanding of how the macro context impacts on front-line employees, the focus of my third research question. I discuss three key points illuminated in this thesis in attempting to

understand how the neoliberal context shapes the experiences of employees. My first point explores the role of disciplinary mechanisms and how neoliberal rationalities stigmatise those who do not conform to the desired subject; the second point elaborates on the various mechanisms utilised to construct subjects as responsible agents and the final point examines the implications of the neoliberal rationalities which underpin the problematisations created by managers within the organisations and the consequences these may pose for collectivity and alignment between managers and employees within an organisation.

I conclude by summarising how this study has contributed to the existing literature, the practical implications, opportunities for future research and the limitations of this study.

9.2 Elements of Neoliberal Governmentality

9.2.1. Production of an agile subject

The first indicator of a neoliberal governmentality as a mode of governance was the discursive framing of the 'appropriate and good' subject that was elicited by managers as a solution to the challenges facing both organisations. Pertinently, employees were called upon to become 'agile'. As noted in section 2.4 of this thesis, Gillies (2011) suggests that the call to become an agile subject is problematic for three reasons: 1) it is underpinned by neoliberal principles and causes the world to be seen through the market; 2) the agile self is focussed on the individual as the goal is to survive the economic terrain, not to benefit the community or society; and 3) if agility is to be the overriding principle, to what degree are other principles marginalised at its expense.

In relation to Gillies's first point, the production of the agile subject served as a mechanism whereby employees took responsibility for the survival of the organisation and felt obliged to do so. Employees were required to adopt an agile subjectivity, by demonstrating creativity, dynamic (Simons and Masschelein (2006:53) and 'professional' approaches in accordance with the demands of the market-influenced changes in the voluntary sector. This call for the agile subject was tied to

narratives of survival; consequently, employees who were not considered capable of these changes were seen as threatening the future of the organisation as well as their own employment status.

Points two and three identified by Gillies are consistent with the findings of this research and the impact of the neoliberal discursive environment on employees: if staff are called upon to be agile subjects, what is sacrificed and for what purpose? In both Community Life and Healthscape, the encouragement to refashion themselves in line with the demands of the market required employees to prioritise the quantification of work and to engage with other tools, rooted in managerialism, at the expense of quality engagement with participants and the associated complexity of working with people living in deprived and traditionally marginalised communities. The neoliberal discursive and non-discursive environment in Community Life demanded that employees reduce their work to numbers through the use of the database. This had discursive effects which shaped what work could be recorded. Further, the focus on quantification reduced the amount of relational work employees could engage in, leading to demotivation and disenchantment with their roles. In Healthscape, the introduction of the project manager role served to establish the subjectivity of the employee by placing greater value on management and accounting practices and standardisation of work, whilst marginalising the community-focussed work.

This research has also shown that, in Healthscape, the production of the agile subject was to the detriment of collegiate relations. The new managerialist version of the organisation demanded a version of professionalism that constructed collegiate relationships as 'odd' and a waste of the government's money; consequently, strategies were put in place by the management to discourage staff interactions. This was deemed necessary at a time when the organisation was 'recovering from a crisis' so employees were expected to make the sacrifice of collegiate relationships to withstand the demands of the market. This resulted in employees feeling they were less able to collaborate with colleagues, served as a demotivating factor, and decollectivised the workforce, a point I will return to later.

Taking these three points together, the elicitation of a subject who is able to withstand and refashion themselves in line with market demands, such as an increased demand of the use of managerialist technologies, may well affect the degree to which other principles and knowledges are subjugated. Further, the production of the agile subject values employees who are able to view themselves as capable and responsible for the survival of the organisation by reinventing themselves through market principles.

The findings from this research identify that the call for agile subjects poses significant risk of a fundamental mismatch between the traditional values of the VCS and the colonisation of market values stemming from neoliberal rationalities. Given the traditional values of social justice, and more specifically for the two organisations studied here, empowerment and social change for marginalised groups, then the call to become an agile subject and the consequential marginalisation of certain values highlights what is at stake politically when the VCS is overrun by neoliberal rationalities.

9.2.2. Disciplining mechanisms

The production of the agile subject relies predominantly on individuals being able to work on themselves, as notions of responsibility and entrepreneurialism, animated by the discursive environment, are realised by individuals. However, the evaluation of workers in alignment with market principles also allows for the use of dividing practices to be introduced (Miller and Rose, 2008:98). These dividing practices identify those who can successfully navigate market changes, challenges and demands, and those who are deemed failures. Foucault notes that governmentality does not replace sovereignty or disciplinary power, but instead suggests there is a triangle of rule (Foucault, 1991:102). The findings from both studies illustrate that disciplinary practices were used to complement governmental power. The subject was structured through dividing practices using discursive and non-discursive practices.

The supremacy of the agile subject discourse serves as a technology of normalisation and classifies practice, causing particular behaviours, thoughts and skills to be valued in both

organisations, whilst marginalising others. The normalisation of the agile subject as the ideal employee who has assumed responsibility creates an environment in which the need to exercise disciplinary power through dividing practices is made intelligible. The three main solutions, discussed in Chapter 8, identified in Healthscape -- the role of the project manager, the PDR and the changes to the office culture -- were aligned with disciplinary power techniques such as surveillance and examination which constituted and made visible particular subjects. The technologies functioned as a means to elicit information which rendered the subjects knowable, leaving them open to evaluation and judgment by to other employees.

Similarly, the accounting technologies in Community Life rendered employees visible and operated as a normalising gaze. However, whilst these practices were institutionalised by managers and activated through the internal neoliberal discourse, the technology itself was imposed by external funders. The use of surveillance technologies made the employees feel a lack of trust and had subjective effects on what could be discussed and reported, particularly given that it reduced work to quantifiable measures. Further, the disciplinary practices did not account for differences in size of organisation or nature of clients and consequently, served as a silencing mechanism for problematising external factors affecting the organisation. The accounting technologies thus normalised what an ideal subject is: someone who is willing to engage with calculative tools and who does not engage with counter-discourse or problematise external factors. The quality assurance framework, which normalised judgement, as it opened up a space for surveillance and visible arena for judgment of employee conduct, was implemented and designed by the organisation itself. It served to create a visible space for organisations to compare their practices with one another and valued the standardisation of work.

The ‘abnormality’ of certain individuals was made intelligible by the management’s problematisation of employees’ conduct, and further institutionalised in Healthscape by the demeaning tone adopted by management, indicative of management identifying where individuals

have failed to engage in neoliberal subjectification. Employees were constituted as having 'mismanaged' (Brown, 2003) their lives: they did not accord with neoliberal demands, and this was seen as a failing of the individual. The employees' skills are undervalued; they are criticised for not having the appropriate skills now demanded, for having been recruited inappropriately, and are consequently viewed as inadequate. There is little or no acceptance by management of the changes in the market which may have led to staff not having the appropriate skills, for example, the lack of infrastructure costs awarded in contract funding. Instead, it is the individual who is punished for not being able to maintain and develop their human capital to meet the ever-changing requirements of the market. This failure to note the structural changes which have occurred over decades in the sector is in alignment with neoliberal rationalities (Hamann, 2009).

This view is further institutionalised by the management's belief that it is helping these employees by improving their further employment opportunities and that they are oblivious to this opportunity. Further, the employees are framed as wasting government money, so are further penalised, and deemed to be underserving, 'bad' neoliberal subjects. This perspective excludes the possibility that employees were employed on the basis of the skills they possessed, which served the communities for which they work, i.e. an ethical evaluation, and merely views their contribution in economic terms in relation to the human capital they have acquired.

The binary view in Healthscape of professional or unprofessional served to identify those who were considered not capable of fulfilling the newly defined subject. Employees for whom English was not their first language, or who did not possess the 'basic skills' were deemed to be unprofessional. The research illuminated that, in a neoliberal context, assets and skills which were once highly valued in the VCS are not only no longer given priority but are also stigmatised. The abilities to communicate with communities in their own languages, to work 'out' in the community and to collaborate with colleagues are now marginalised and replaced with managerialist skills such as planning, reporting, marketing and strategy. Consequently, those who did not possess these skills

at the time of the restructuring were deemed a risk to the organisation and were subjected to both disciplinary and governmental interventions. These two technologies worked together to operate as a dividing practice. As Foucault (1982) notes, 'the subject is either divided in himself (sic) or divided from others' (p.208). The findings revealed that employees demonstrated both forms of division: on one hand, they questioned their own abilities and position within the organisation, and on the other, they were subjected to punitive subjectification and stigmatisation by management and peers alike. A significant finding from this marginalisation of non-English-speaking employees is the possibility of seeing whiteness as a form of human capital. Through the marginalisation of certain skills, racial hierarchies were implied. The value placed on these skills supports the notion that the expansion of a neoliberal rationality has the scope to maintain and reproduce a racialised society (Trafford, 2019). It is important to consider here that, as the voluntary sector becomes a space espousing neoliberal governmentality, there is the possibility that it excludes some people, labelling them unemployable, whilst at the same time maintaining the existing societal hierarchies (Ødegaard, 2017). Fundamentally, this highlights the implications of neoliberal rationalities and the risk they pose of undermining some of the traditional values of the VCS, particularly in light of the historical roots of the VCS in anti-racism in society.

9.2.3. Responsibilisation agenda

According to Lemke (2001:203), neoliberalism is a political rationality which, amongst other goals, seeks to cast structural factors as individual issues and largely relies upon the 'responsibilising' of agents. Neoliberal rule thus seeks to refashion agents to locate strategies within themselves in order to overcome structural and external concerns. For the responsibilising agenda to take effect, literature on neoliberal governmentality, as outlined in section 2.4. of this thesis, suggests the need for a neoliberal discursive environment which problematises social issues as able to be resolved by personal action and governance of the self, and agents thus assuming personal responsibility (Miller and Rose, 2008).

As outlined in section 2.4, responsibilisation may operate through two mechanisms: firstly, through the appeal of freedom and, secondly, through the threat to personal control (Pyysiäinen et al, 2017). Community Life's approach and understanding of the issues seemed to align more closely with an organisation that felt it had little control and, consequently, just wanted to survive, whilst Healthscape adopted a response which assumed it had control and just needed to adjust accordingly in order to thrive. What emerges from the findings is that Community Life, in the bid to survive, responsibilised agents through the threat to personal control, whilst Healthscape responsibilised their staff through the appeal of freedom. Both mechanisms are 'neoliberal responsibilising' (ibid:230), but do they result in different technologies, practices and discursive environments to which employees are subjected.

The findings in Community Life indicate that it sought to reshape employees through the threat to their personal control. Firstly, there was the threat that, if they did not refashion themselves, it would not survive as an organisation which, in turn, would threaten their livelihoods. As seen in Chapter 5, this was raised by front-line employees as a concern, given their personal financial and caring responsibilities. There was encouragement by management to draw on personal resources, such as creativity and dynamic approaches to their work, as these resources remain within the personal control of employees. The threat to personal control poses threats to the wellbeing and motivation of employees, and may lead to burn-out, as they seek to use their own resources to survive the challenging context.

In Healthscape, the process of responsibilisation was somewhat different and appealed to a sense of freedom and autonomy. This was evident in the notion that staff should want to upskill themselves, become more marketable, develop IT skills and English skills, so they could become self-steering, autonomous individuals, with increased human capital – making them more marketable in economic terms. The invitation to staff was constructed through narratives of empowerment and professionalism, both appealing constructs, which invite participation. However, the employees who

were constructed as 'bad subjects' also found their personal control threatened as the discursive environment rendered them unemployable (see section 9.4.2 on disciplining mechanisms) when they did not adequately transform themselves to fit the new version of the organisation.

Taken together, the findings corroborate Pyysiäinen et al.'s (2017) suggestion that, in the process of responsibilisation, both a threat to personal control and the appeal of freedom can operate to responsibilise agents. Further, the findings indicate that, despite the process or processes (practices or techniques) adopted, employees may assume responsibility through the neoliberal discursive environment.

9.2.4. Differences in the degree to which the organisations have taken on the neoliberal agenda

Both organisations sought to resolve the challenges facing them through internally orientated solutions and shifts in individual action. However, there was greater evidence of management in Community Life attributing blame to external factors, which has led to the organisation's current position. For example, the fieldwork showed that Community Life's management noted that funding cuts and poor funding practices had impacted on the organisation's stability and led to high levels of uncertainty. They also noted that these practices had an impact on staff motivation and retention. These external factors were, however, considered to be out of their control and ones they felt powerless to challenge; consequently, the solutions they sought were internally orientated. In contrast, Healthscape's management barely attributed the challenges within the organisation to external factors, but problematised individual decisions of the previous management, cast the organisation as unprofessional, with an incompetent workforce and suggested they were wasting government money as a result. It can therefore be suggested that the management within Healthscape failed to problematise the external factors, attributed blame to individuals and, consequently, constructed the solutions as ones which could be found within the workforce. Whilst both organisations sought solutions located at the individual level, internally orientated, the problematising (or lack of) of the

external factors may have influenced the intensity of the neoliberal discursive environment. This was evident in several ways: firstly, the degree of tension between employees and managers; secondly, the nature of the technologies imposed; and thirdly, the scope and forms of resistance evident from employees. Whilst I have separated these three points for clarity, it is important to note that they are interlinked. I will address each point in turn.

The study illustrated that there were higher levels of tension between management and employees within Healthscape than in Community Life. The dominant sense of tension may be explained by the characteristics of the discursive environment, namely that staff were identified as both the problem and the solution. Within Healthscape, the findings illustrated that employees felt they were not trusted by management and were subjected to surveillance and close supervision. For example, when one employee discusses uncertainty around contracts, she felt this was intentionally created by management. Whether this was so was beyond the scope of this research, but it may be deduced that there was a high level of mistrust within the organisation. Other indicators of tension in management-employee relations included a dissonance between what each felt should be the direction of travel for the organisation, such as the employees' desire to focus on the outreach elements of the community-focussed work. This was exacerbated by the shifts in office culture, which served to silence the voices of front-line employees and break down peer relationships. Lastly, the lack of support from managers for training and skill development, and the intensified workloads due to organisational culture shifts were also sources of contention. This heightened tension in Healthscape between managers and employees may be due to the failure to acknowledge the external factors which have affected the organisation's position. This may suggest that management acknowledging and attributing blame to external factors, as was evident in Community Life, may serve as a supportive mechanism to employees, even when the solutions are still focussed at the individual level.

This tension was also closely linked to the nature of the solutions proposed by the Healthscape management. As employees were framed as central to the problem, the solutions were primarily

focussed around their conduct. The nature of the technologies operating to problematise, subjectify and divide employees were intensified in Healthscape, suggesting a higher degree of enrolment in neoliberal governmentality.

The starkest difference between the case studies was the attempt to decollectivise employees within Healthscape, which was not evident in Community Life. The rationale for this was the management's belief that the organisation was unprofessional and profligate, a narrative not evident in Community Life. In Healthscape, the decollectivising of staff and the underlying shifting of blame to the individuals created high levels of tension and mistrust between management and front-line staff. The decollectivisation of employees was detrimental to the nature of work, the scope for collaboration and for speaking truth to power. Employees reported that frameworks for their voices to be heard were dismantled by management. It may be argued that, in Community Life, the management's problematisation of the external factors influenced the nature of the internally focused solutions. Consequently, decollectivisation of staff was not considered a priority. This perhaps also served to reduce tension between management and front-line staff as maintaining collective spaces may have allowed for reflexive dialogue between management and employees, as well as between peers.

The lack of acknowledgment of external factors and the resulting approaches to finding solutions illustrate the importance of maintaining dialogue between management and staff and collegiate relations at times of instability for VCSOs. This would support Mahon's (2016) study which highlights open communication and strong team relations as important factors for maintaining the motivation of VCS employees and also as a means to express resistance against neoliberal rule.

Lastly, where the neoliberal discursive environment still allowed for the acknowledgment of the external factors, this may have enabled greater resistance amongst employees. This is both because of the nature of problematisation in the organisations by management, as well as the nature of the solutions implemented. As Bacchi (2009) argues, discourses can be conceptualised as assets which

can be used in ways which threaten 'taken-for granted' notions. Thus, the problematisation of external factors can be seen as a useful resource to opening up space for resistance. For example, in Community Life, there was a great focus on maintaining family-like relationships amongst the workforce, which served as a motivating factor for employees, as well as a potential space for critical dialogue amongst colleagues. Further, in Community Life, there was greater evidence of employees 'fighting-back' from the accounting technologies to which they were subjected. Whilst employees still engaged with the technologies, they problematised the technologies and their rationalities, and demonstrated attempts to undermine the use of the database, in particular. The strategies of resistance in relation to the use of the database support the notion that employees still felt their own professional knowledge was useful for maintaining quality engagement with participants.

Drawing on Vinthagen and Johansson's (2013) conceptualisation of resistance, it is argued that resistance should be viewed as a combination of strategies, not binary, but instead a combination of 'coping, survival, accommodation and resistance' (p.25). In the use of the database, it may be argued that the employees are demonstrating 'accommodation'; however, this occurs alongside acts of resistance. As with Scott's (1989) conceptualisation of everyday resistance, resistance may appear as accommodation when in fact these two occurring simultaneously can be argued to be 'disguised' forms of resistance. While staff completed the database, despite the demands it appeared to make on their working practices, they still attempted to undermine it by engaging with clients in their own way, without imposing the rigidity of the database into their interactions. While, on the one hand, they are upholding the power of the neoliberal technologies, they are also demonstrating acts of resistance which could to some degree undermine this logic. Drawing on Foucault's premise that discourse accomplishes things, the re-problematisation of these technologies is promising, as it can be seen as an asset or resource for challenging practices which the study found to be detrimental to the working lives of front-line employees. Further, the re-problematisation of the technologies also illustrated that employees were looking beyond the scope of the organisation, i.e. to the state, as a factor in changing the nature of work in the voluntary sector. This may be to some degree due to the

discursive environment, which problematised the external factors rather than focussing on the employees as the 'problem'. Taking these two points together, it may be suggested that employees within Community Life, to some degree, rejected the contours of the ideal neoliberal subject, such as the individualised subject and subscribing to calculative technologies to the detriment of quality engagement with participants, and this may be partially attributed to the characteristics of discursive space within which they operated.

The resistance towards the individualised subject encouraged by neoliberal discourse is promising in this context, as peer support is an integral element to the possibilities of opening up a reflexive critical dialogue. The possibility of such relationships enables conversations in which the introduction and implications of governmentality mechanisms can be unpacked and resisted, overtly or in everyday forms of resistance. Given the lack of unionisation in the VCS, such relationships between employees will be fundamental if there is to be any shift in the current entrenchment of neoliberal ideas and practices.

When direct acts of resistance were demonstrated, employees in Community Life felt isolated and liable to attack from management, but the notion that there is still scope for overt resistance and challenging resistance gives hope. However, in Healthscape, a culture of 'fear' was evident, institutionalised by divisive practices, the weakening of various forms of collectivity, and the imposition of surveillance techniques, which limited the acts of resistance, overt or covert. Despite these, employees still found opportunity to engage in subtle forms of resistance in newly created spaces. These acts may be described as everyday forms of resistance, which Scott (1989) argues are characterised by the 'pervasive use of disguise' (p.54) In the findings, these strategies of resistance were described as a means of overcoming the attempts to limit peer interactions. For example, employees found spaces out of sight of management, to talk amongst themselves, even if only in a whisper. Whilst they were framed as merely 'gossiping', Jameson (2017) conceptualises it as more than that, rather as a means of 'letting off steam' and managing upwards in resistance to managerial

technologies, by what is called 'critical corridor conversations'. Such strategies are considered a fundamental survival strategy, particularly in uncertain times, where challenging management authority may threaten one's own job security within the organisation. Consequently, employees may engage in hidden counter-discourse conversations to avoid open reactions to management decisions and behaviours. However, due to the dividing practices operating in the organisation, it may be unlikely that these subtle acts of resistance can shift into more overt forms of resistance. This is best illustrated by the ramifications for employees who engaged in an act of resistance, working in the office away from management and their surveillance technologies. These employees were then framed by narratives of 'hiding' by their peers and stigmatised as hiding their 'failure' to embrace the new version of the organisation. This indicates that everyday acts of resistance are stigmatised and framed around perceived incompetence even by peers. Scott (1989) argues that 'a certain unity' (p.37) and cooperation are required, a unity that had been weakened in Healthscape. Given the division between front-line employees and Scott's (1989) view on the development of everyday acts of resistance into more direct forms, the scope becomes limited.

However, if Foucauldian (1978:95) notions of the interplay between techniques of resistance and power/knowledge relations are considered, the scope for acts of resistance is not completely diminished. Vinthagen and Johansson (2013) note that, as forms of resistance emerge, so can new techniques of power. From the findings above, we see that new techniques of power emerged in response to the resistance, which further reinforced the narratives of incompetence of some employees, this time espoused by peers, rather than managers alone. However, in the same vein, this scope for the ever-changing dynamics between power and resistance, described by Vinthagen and Johansson (2013) as a 'constant spiral-dynamics of actions and reactions' (p.30), may leave room for the opportunity for other acts of resistance to emerge, regardless of the pervasiveness of the neoliberal discourse.

As Bacchi (2009) notes, it is imperative to identify imbalances in the 'different styles of problematization' (p.7). Therefore, the differences between the dominant problematisations in the two organisations help to shed light on how managers within the VCS play a central role in institutionalising neoliberal discourse and how this can be minimised. Within Healthscape, the external context was not problematised; instead employees were invited to come on a journey regardless of the external factors. This time, however, they would be managed appropriately and thus the situation would improve if, of course, employees were willing to participate in doing what was 'right', particularly as they were framed as being at the root of the problem. However, in Community Life, some degree of problematisation was evident beyond the individual level. This suggests that by management within the VCS adopting some degree of a critical lens to the context in which they are operating, and maintaining some of the core values of the sector, whilst they may not be able to overcome challenges such as government funding cuts, they may be able to keep dialogue amongst staff open and transparent which, in turn, can encourage relations amongst the teams and form a platform for reflexive dialogue and resistance. If discourse is seen as a resource which is productive – holding both value and having effects – then managers have a fundamental role in their own reflexivity, as a means to improving the working conditions for front-line employees, particularly in times of uncertainty and austerity

9.3 Contribution to the field

This study identified gaps in the literature about changes for the VCS emanating from the wider political and economic context and how these impact on employees. A major contribution of this thesis is the provision of a new understanding of front-line employees' experiences of working in the VCS by highlighting the multiple effects on employees when neoliberalism is the dominant mode of governance.

Much of the existing literature has focussed on the relationship between funders (the state) and VCSOs and, in particular, on management experiences and how the organisation of work has altered due to changes in funding arrangements. Research has also focussed on the instability of the sector and how this has led to deteriorating working conditions for employees. This study has corroborated the existing literature by identifying the nature of uncertainty within VCSOs and the increased demands to engage with NPM tools and adopt business-like and 'professional' approaches. However, this study expands beyond these areas to examine the impact of such neoliberal demands infiltrating the VCS, and how this impact is consolidated within an organisation, by examining the rationalities, technologies and effects.

By drawing on a theoretical framework of governmentality, operationalised with WPR as an analytical approach, a novel understanding of working in the VCS has been presented. The WPR approach has traditionally been used to explore problem representation and modes of governance in policy; however, as Bacchi (2009) suggests, this analytical tool is not exclusive to policy analysis. This study has illustrated the usefulness of such a tool when researching work patterns. In addition, the use of the case-study method, including interviews and observations, has provided an in-depth insight into the working experiences of VCS employees and how they navigate the neoliberal discursive environment. By utilising a case-study methodology, this research has given value to the importance of context and, in particular, by interviewing and observing both managers and front-line employees, greater understanding is offered of how 'actual people' and 'actual processes' (Brady, 2014:14) contribute to the accomplishment of neoliberal governmentality. The theoretical framework, analytical framework and methods together reveal a new reading of how macro-level ideology and polices impact individuals at the micro level within the VCS. This approach contributes to current debates in the governmentality literature. As discussed in chapter 2.4 neoliberalism is frequently interpreted as a policy framework or ideology, which can results in totalising narratives of power, assuming neoliberalism is a coherent and top-down project and thus leaving limited scope for

identifying contradictions and possibilities for forms of resistance. This research has interpreted neoliberalism as a mode of governance and thus focussed on examining the rationales, practices and effects using ethnographic methods. The result of employing this approach has highlighted that whilst neoliberalism is the dominant mode of governance, it is not interpreted in the same fashion by all actors, it plays out and is enacted and activated by different discourses and practices. Markedly, neoliberalism does not exist without fractures, and actors are not passive in the subjectification process; whilst subjects are elicited to take up particular positions they do not do this passively. Instead, rationales and practices are contested and practices are taken up from below which bring to light alternative discourses and practices. These complexities and fragilities of the neoliberal project align with recent debates in the governmentality literature which argue for ethnographic methods to be taken up to highlight the complex realities of neoliberalism as a form of government (McKee, 2015; Brady; 2014; Bevir, 2018; Li, 2009).

The study provides empirical contributions by highlighting the challenges facing VCSOs and how they are problematised by the workforce, in particular by managers. The ways in which the problems are represented suggest that neoliberalism is the dominant mode of governance. The consequential solutions of this problematisation suggest that employees are best placed to tackle the external issues by working on themselves; they are thus made responsible in this process. This research highlights how this process occurs by examining the rationalities and technologies, shedding light on how 'truths' are developed and how solutions are legitimised, again highlighting the mode of rule within the case organisations. Whilst existing studies have highlighted the managerial perspectives of the implications of broader changes to the sector, there is little research which identifies how these are problematised and where the solutions are focussed. This study contributes to the field by exploring managers' solutions to external challenges, providing another perspective on how neoliberalism as mode of governance operates within the organisation and how power operates at a distance through the discursive environment and associated practices in the VCS.

In particular, the use of the WPR approach provided a framework to identify how problematisations serve to refashion the employees in accordance with neoliberal values. The focus on problematisation also shed light on how managers can contribute to or have deleterious effects on the employees' experiences; for example, in Healthscape, the problematisation of the work-force led to divisions and the stigmatisation of some groups of employees. This study, therefore, contributes to the literature by detailing how the discursive environment impacts the individual.

The effects of the manner in which challenges are problematised illuminate the experiences of front-line employees which have not been previously explored. This research provides an insight into the mechanisms which bring a subject into being. The study sheds light on the everyday micro techniques which shape subjects, focussing on micro-techniques which can otherwise be taken for granted and highlighting the multiple effects on employees.

The study also makes a useful contribution to achieving a greater understanding of how problematisations of challenges facing VCSOs have material, discursive and subjectification effects for employees. Much of the existing literature has focussed on the material impacts for front-line employees in the VCS, namely how the wider political and economic changes have filtered down to affect their working conditions. However, through the use of a neoliberal governmentality lens and the WPR approach, the research considers the discursive and subjectification effects that the neoliberal discursive environment can create.

The identification of the discursive environment, and the introduction of associated technologies, reshapes the subjectivity of employees in accordance with neoliberal values. This close examination of everyday practices also serves to shed light on the multi-faceted nature of governmentality and how neoliberal rule is accomplished in different contexts. Further, by examining the techniques and

tools in place, the study displays the ways in which such practices and modes of rule are resisted by front-line employees. Thus, this study contributes to how neoliberal rule is manifested in the VCS and how the political rationality of neoliberalism is operationalised through problematisations, technologies and practices to reshape subjectivity. Further, the case-study approach illuminates how 'mundane' tools and techniques, which are often taken for granted, are animated to refashion subjects when underpinned by neoliberal rule.

The study also illuminates what is at stake when the neoliberal project is consolidated within the VCS: a new type of employee is elicited; structural issues are cast as matters of individual responsibility; and quality of work is measured only by numbers, with material, discursive and subjectification effects for employees. Further, the study highlights what is at stake for collegiate relationships and collective power and, in so doing, identifies strategies of resistance, both overt and covert, highlighting how the neoliberal project can be resisted in practice, how subjects make sense of the discursive environment or present counter-discourses challenging the dominant mentality of rule.

The contributions from this research also have practical implications; centrally, the possibility that alternatives are possible. As noted in both the literature review and empirical chapters, there is evidence that the neoliberal project is seen as monolithic and that thus there is no alternative – however, this research has illuminated that there are spaces and strategies for resistance and contestation of dominant narratives and patterns of thinking behind some of the course of actions adopted within the VCS. Accordingly, the feeding back of counter-narratives found within this study will be a critical element of this research process in order to fulfil any potential of transformation. By highlighting counter-narratives to organisations and ideally the sector more broadly, the contributions of this study may offer possibilities to shape the actions of the organisations and the individuals who

make them up. Therefore, the practical implications of this research rest upon to what extent we can hone in on and develop on where these possibilities and fragments exists.

One practical strategy for exploring this within organisations is the development of the WPR approach as a workshop tool. Given the value that the WPR approach has had for this study in illuminating the problems and the nature of the proposed solutions, a modified version of the WPR approach may provide a useful and practical tool in the sector to further unpack the challenges that organisations are faced with. The objective of this tool would be to examine the stated problems, the influential background motifs in the decision-making within VCSOs and the consequential solutions proposed. This would facilitate a critical engagement with unpacking the coherence of these and any possible alternatives. This suggestion arises from findings of this research, such as how the ways in which factors effecting the organisations are problematised by the managers do differ and as such have differing effects for employees. Thus, an exploration of the problems and the proposed solutions should be examined within the organisations. The development of a WPR organisational workshop may need to exclude some of the theoretical underpinning but could be of utility for managers and employees to think more critically about how problems are represented and open-up possibilities for how to fight/resist, as the existing discourse is one which upholds the notion that there is no alternative. This type of exploration may be best delivered based on participatory research methods as it gives value to the use of a facilitator (rather than researcher) and works from the premise that those within the organisation, including employees, are capable of analysing their problems and finding appropriate solutions whilst valuing the knowledge and experience they have (Chambers, 1995).

Another strategy to advance the idea that alternatives are possible is the maintenance and rebuilding of the democratic organisational structures, such as team-meetings, participative decision-making and staff-forums. The literature review illustrated that democratic structures are a notable motivating

factor for employees, something which also was demonstrated in chapters 5 and 8 of this research. Organisational democratic structures serve to enhance reflexive dialogue and when they are dismantled, they have detrimental effects on staff which can lead to divisive and stigmatising behaviour. For example, I have argued that family-like relations between staff are critical for opening up spaces for critical dialogue and therefore serve to both motivate staff and to keep them thinking critically with greater scope to hone in on alternatives and practices from below. Where these structures were dismantled they caused negative effects, such as a reduction in the ability to work collaboratively. Consequently, this research illuminates the need for organisations to consider how democratic structures can be maintained and developed.

Another key element of feeding back the findings to the organisations is that this research has given voice to the experiences of front-line workers, voices which are underrepresented in the existing body of work in this field. The empirical data presented in this study provides deeper insight into the effects on employees, effects which serve to demoralise and limit the actions of employees, whilst also leading to deteriorating working conditions. The data has revealed what preoccupies the employees' minds when they are undertaking their roles; for example, the demands to engage in accounting technologies and the extent to which they consider this a tedious activity which undermines the quality of work they do. With these types of findings, managers should seek to negotiate the types of technologies they use by pivoting towards ones which fully capture the quality of work - as this work is still being carried out, albeit unacknowledged. Further examples emerging from the findings which may serve managers when considering the organisation of work are the creation and implementation of workplace tools, such as the use of PDPs as a substitute for monthly supervision and the reduction of team interaction; as both have served to reduce the morale of staff, possibilities of collaboration and a sense of collectivity in the organisation. In this regard, the detailed analysis of everyday practices presented in this study can be a resource for managers within the VCS to think and do things differently.

This study covers significant ground in gaining a better understanding of how the neoliberal project is consolidated within the VCS and what the effects are for front-line employees. However, as is the case with all research, there are both limitations and potential for further inquiry. This research has also prompted some reflection on how limitations I have reflected on can be overcome in the future. I first will address the broad limitation of a case-study approach and then follow this with a more specific discussion of two limitations relating to how I gained access to the organisations included in my study and deciding what to include and exclude when writing up ethnographic data.

Firstly, addressing the limitations of a case study approach, some authors have criticised the case-study approach, on the basis that case studies cannot be generalised. My methodological standpoint differs from such criticism in considering there to be significant value in the case-study approach where the goal is not to prove a conjecture but, rather, to learn (Eysenck,1976:9). As discussed in Chapters 5 to 9, this study provides contributions to knowledge about what we know about the experiences of front-line employees working in a particular political and economic climate, i.e. context-dependent knowledge. However, it is also worth noting that the sector is changing rapidly, a particular theme being the increasing formation of consortiums between the VCS and private sector in applying for public-sector service contracts. Thus, whilst this research gives insight into the experiences of front-line employees in the context of the case-study organisations at a point in time, this experience could be examined in another context, particularly in view of the changing relationships. Given the findings of this research, an examination of employees recruited into organisations driven by social values, who are now working 'with' or for private sector organisations, which may elicit a different subject more strongly and detrimentally using different technologies and practices, would be an interesting piece of research to further understand how the funding context shapes the experiences of VCS front-line employees.

A second limitation of this study relates to the power relations which may have influenced the willingness of some participants to take part in my research based on how I gained access to my research sites. As noted in chapter 4 of this thesis, I gained access to my organisations through my network of contacts, that were developed during my time working in the sector, which may be considered a position of privilege. Gaining access to organisations often requires drawing on personal networks but it is important to note that this access may influence who spoke to me and how. As elaborated on in chapter 4, at times there was some difficulty building rapport with some participants and I sensed some reluctance in sharing in the data collections period. In my earlier reflections on this, I often rationalised this as the participants' time-constraints and fears about 'speaking-up.' Whilst to some degree this rationalisation may hold some value, it is also significant to consider the position of privilege I entered the field from and how this may have influenced the data collected and engagement I had with some of the participants in the study. Whilst I can agree that being in a position that allowed me to gain access was advantageous in some respects, entry to the organisation via my personal networks may have served to disadvantage my access at times, as when the personal contacts were no longer in their positions it effected the level of access I had at the research sites. Consequently, gaining access from personal networks illuminates power differences and may not always serve the researcher's aims or the participants' willingness to participate. Consequently, limitations of this research may include participants obscuring their truths as they navigate the position of power of the researcher.

Furthermore, access to the organisations was gained via senior managers which also highlights potential issues around the willingness to participate of the subordinate employees in the study (despite consent being carried out with each participant as discussed in section 4.6). Given the fragility of employees' positions in the organisations (as highlighted in chapters 5-8), it may be argued that employees were compelled to participate in the study due to the power relations between managers and employees. Similar power relations have been discussed elsewhere as a

concern for researchers when recruitment into a study occurs through a person of authority (Peel et al, 2006; Karnieli-Miller et al, 2009). As required in procedural ethics formal consent was gained from each participant to attempt to ensure all participants were both fully informed about the research and had a willingness to participate based on relevant information. However, such procedural approaches to gathering consent have been deemed as inadequate in ethnographic research (Griffin and Bengry-Howell, 2008). Therefore based on both the debates on gaining access in ethnographic research and my own observations of uncertainty and tensions during the early stages of my field-work, I also adopted a more flexible and ongoing approach in gaining consent in the spirit of the situational ethics approach advocated for in the social sciences to mitigate this limitation (Guillemin and Gillman, 2004). This approach to decisions around participation in research in the field is advocated for by Bengry-Howell and Griffin (2012) and rests upon a researcher making ethical decisions which value flexibility, respect and negotiated consent in ways which are not always adequately addressed or required in traditional professional ethical research codes. So whilst efforts were made to negotiate consent, the point still remains that access was gained from the top and it was not always possible to detect if participants were involved because of the hierarchy of positions within the organisation and thus may undermine the notion that informed consent was gained.

Implications that arise from gaining access by drawing on one's own position and also at the top layers of an hierarchical organisation have been discussed elsewhere as particularly nuanced and difficult to navigate in contexts that are characterised as closed, hierarchical and precarious environments and to some extent researchers must come to some sense of understanding that they can not 'win them all' (Baum-Talmor, 2019). However, one possible suggestion for researchers in this field and in particular, those who wish to unpack experiences of front-line employees or those in more junior positions within an organisation, is to consider bottom-up access (Silverman, 1999). Bottom-up access in this field may have included collecting data from front-line employees outside

of the organisations. Whilst this would limit the aims of this particular research study (as context is fundamental to grasping the messy realities of governmentality research), it may provide a different insight into experiences of front-line employees mitigating the limitations noted and might also be more aligned to the spirit of ethnography and transformative research.

A third limitation of this study is the decision I pursued as a researcher in deciding what data to include and exclude from the final write-up of the case study findings. There were some practices which I observed in the case-study organisations which I have made a decision to exclude in this research, such as direct acts of bullying. This decision was followed as I felt the internal confidentiality (Tolich, 2004) of participants may be compromised. The decision to exclude this data was internally challenging as I oscillated between achieving the goals of this research and the protection of participants . The decision executed was crucial to me given question 4 of the WPR approach adopted in my own analytical framework – what is left unproblematic, what is silenced? It may be debated that by excluding such practices I am complicit in perpetuating the problem. However, as a researcher an ethical decision had to be taken which rested on another fundamental question in my research approach, what is at stake and what are the effects for front-line employees? At this juncture, by writing up some of the data it might have jeopardised the internal confidentiality of participants and this was of paramount importance. The research has achieved its aims in exposing detrimental practices and their effects and by illuminating counter-narratives about the VCS when it is colonised by neoliberalism and thus a decision was taken that whilst the inclusion of further data might have added further evidence, including it would put the employees' livelihoods at stake. Another potential option in writing in more of the data I collected would have been to remove contextual identifiers, and whilst this may have allowed me to maintain internal confidentiality, it would not allow me to fulfil the goals of governmentality studies by capturing of messy realities and also risk altering the original meaning of the data. So whilst it is challenging as a researcher to 'give up' on findings which may be considered transformative or fulfil my own

research values, such as a commitment to social justice, I made a determination that an act of social justice can also be conceptualised by executing a decision which serves to protect the participants positions.

To summarise, the research makes a contribution to the literature on changes to the VCS and experiences of front-line employees. The study highlights how neoliberal rule is accomplished and what is at stake when it is consolidated within the VCS for managers and employees alike. The study provides a novel understanding of how VCS employees are constructed and reconstructed into neoliberal and agile subjects, a process which has multiple effects on their experiences of working in the VCS.

Therefore, whilst it is suggested in some of the literature that the VCS needs to focus on retaining its independence, this study has revealed that greater attention needs to be paid to the ways in which the external challenges are problematised. Critical attention needs to be paid to the wider context: how does the dominant political and ideology affect organisations and their employees and is there really no alternative? Where problematisations of the external issues can be attributed by management to wider external changes, there are greater possibilities for resistance. Being constructed as not having the right attitude, the right skills or the right degrees of professionalism only serves to demotivate and demoralise a workforce which is committed to the traditional values of their work. As the VCS enters a more competitive market space, with the private sector responsible for a larger proportion of public-sector services, it remains critical that management retains the values-based work that attracts many employees to the sector. It is imperative to maintain a workforce that remains close to the community and to develop services for those who are marginalised from public services. Further, it remains crucial that critical lenses are used to readjust and survive in the market-place and to produce counter-discourses, so that employees are not problematised in relation to external issues or called upon to be

resilient, faced with unfair, demoralising and responsibilising working conditions. The notion that there is no alternative must be challenged.

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Appendix 1 Table of Participants from Community Life

Name (anonymised)	**Job Role (Front-line or Management)**
Lucas	Manager
Ahmed	Manager
Mark	Manager
Cara	Front-line Worker
Chantelle	Front-line Worker
Lucy	Front-line Worker

Appendix 2 Table of Participants from Healthscape

Name (anonymised)	Job Role (Front-line or Management)
Louise	Manager
Nathan	Manager
Charlotte	Manager
Susie	Front-line Worker
Ashley	Front-line Worker
Ben	Front-line Worker
Asha	Front-line Worker
Arnold	Front-line Worker
Sharlene	Front-line Worker
Samia	Front-line Worker
Sophie	Front-line Worker
John	Front-line Worker
Tracey	Front-line Worker
Juliette	Front-line Worker
Mary	Front-line Worker

Appendix 3 Interview Guide

Thesis 'Working' Title: Inquiry into everyday experiences of front-line employees in the Voluntary and Community Sector

As a semi-structured interview method is being adopted, topics and grand tour questions (Spradley, 1980) are highlighted under each research question. It is anticipated that the interview schedule will be refined and areas of interest will emerge throughout the process. Where changes are significant, the ethics will be reconsidered and consultation with the board will be made.

Opening:

- Introduction – who am I? Aims of the research?
- Informed consent, anonymity and confidentiality.
    - Information sheet
    - Permission to record
    - Sign consent form
- Questions?

Research question 1:

- **How is the organisation of work changing in the VCS sector?**
- Role/background in the organisation – length of service, type of employment, job role
- Nature of current work – e.g. what types of projects, how are they funded?
- What is the organisation of work? Who does what within the organisation?
- How would you describe your day at work?
- Has anything changed in your everyday work routine or role since you first started in the organisation?

Research question 2:

- **How are current shifts in work organisation shaping employee working practices, rationales and interpersonal experiences?**
- What was your reason for joining this organisation?

- Does your current role reflect your initial motivations for working in this sector?
- What barriers do you face when trying to carry out your work responsibilities?
- What enables you to do your job well?
- Are there aspects of your role that you find difficult?
- Have you noticed any tensions within the organisations? Can you say where you think they stem from or what may help to resolve them?

Research question 3:

- **Can the emerging theoretical discourse on neoliberal governmentality adequately explain the restructuring of the VCS and its impacts on front line staff?**

- How are decisions made in the organisation?
- Do you find you have strategies to cope in the workplaces? For example if you were stressed one day, what would you do to reduce your stress?
- Do you feel you have adequate means to do your job? This may in regards to time, support, money etc.
- Do you have specific goals or targets to work towards?
- How do you prioritise your work? What things have the greatest influence on how you prioritise your work?
- What methods do you use to monitor your work progress? How do you feel if you are not achieving what you should be?
- Do you feel that you are able to or need to collaborate with other employees or organisation in your work?
- How would you describe your relationship with the funders of your work?
- Views on change, in all areas identified

Close:

- Thank for time

- Contact details
- Next stages of research

Appendix 4 Information Sheet

Date:

Dear Participant,

You are being invited to take part in a research study as a part of my Professional Doctorate programme. Before you decide to participate it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask if anything is unclear or if you would like more information.

What is the purpose of this research?

The aim of this research is to identify and explain how the changes in the voluntary and community sector have impacted on those who work in the sector. I am interested in understanding more about employee's experiences. I am keen to understand if you have experienced any changes in the sector, what your role involves – what is typical day like for you, what things help you to do your job well and what things may hinder you. I am interested how these experiences link to wider issues such as funding.

I am here as a researcher, therefore this is the only purpose of my research, I will not be looking to see how well you do your job or report what I find to anyone else within the organisation or to others associated to the organisation.

Who am I asking to participate?

I am asking all employees within the organisation to participate. I am also asking other key stakeholders of the organisation to participate for example, commissioners, volunteers and the board.

What will I be asked to do?

Participation will include being interviewed and observed in your everyday work practices. The interview may take between 1 and 1 ½ hours and we can arrange a mutually convenient time. The observations will not require you to give any additional time – I will be there to observe what would usually happen on an everyday

basis in the organisation. I also will be looking at existing documents in the organisation, such as reports, contracts and leaflets, if these are written/owned by you, then I will ask your permission to use them in my study.

Do I have to participate in the study?

You are under no obligation to participate in the study, it is entirely your choice. You will have a copy of this information sheet to take away, if you want to think about your participation or have any further questions at a later date. If you did decide to participate in the study, I will also ask you to sign a consent form to say you have understood what is involved and that you are happy to proceed. If at any time you become unsure about your involvement in the study, you can contact me to discuss any concerns you have. If you decide, you no longer want to take part you can inform me and I will ensure you are not included in the study; any data I will have already collected will be safely destroyed.

Will my information remain confidential and will my anonymity be maintained?

Yes. Should you agree to take part in the study, your views or information will only be seen by myself. The records will be stored safely on password protected computers and files. Once the data is published, you will not be identifiable at all. For example, the organisation name, your name and job role will be changed. You can also contact me if you want to see an example of the findings to be assured that your information will remain anonymous.

The interviews will take place in a private space. I would like to record interviews with your permission, in this case once the interviews have been typed up, the audio recordings will be destroyed.

The records collected will not be shared with other members within the organisation.

What are the possible benefits of participating in this study?

There are no direct benefits to participating in this study. However, I do hope that the final publication of my doctoral thesis will be used to consider how best to create a good working environment for employees in the voluntary and community sector.

What are the risks from participation in this study?

I do not see any risks for participants in this study, but please do let me know if you have any concerns.

How will the results of the study be published?

This study will be published as a doctoral thesis, in academic journal articles and may be presented at academic conferences. In all cases your information will not be identifiable. You will be able to read the final study if you wish to.

Who do I contact if I have queries or concerns about this study?

In the event of any problems, questions or concerns you have at any point of the study you may contact me by telephone on [authors telephone number] or email [authors email].

This study has been ethically reviewed by [authors institution] Research Ethics Committee. If you were to have any complaints about the conduct of this study you can contact the Research and Post Graduate Office on: [institutions telephone number]or email [institution email].

This information sheet is a copy for you to keep.

You will need to provide consent if you do decide to go ahead.

Thank you for your time,

[authors name and signature]

Doctoral Researcher

Appendix 5 Consent Form

Please complete this consent form once you are satisfied all of your questions have been answered, you are fully aware of what the study involves and you are happy to participate.

CONSENT STATEMENT

- I have been informed about the study to explore the experiences of employees in the voluntary and community sector carried out by [authors name]
- I declare that any questions or concerns I have about the research have been satisfactorily answered.
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the research at any time, without giving any reason.
- I am aware of what my participation will involve
- I understand that the researcher will keep all of my information confidentially and I will not be identifiable in the publications of the study.
- I understand that there are no risks involved in the participation of this study.
- I declare that my participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I have a right to withdraw at any time before it is published, without being prejudiced in any way. I understand I do not need to give a reason for withdrawing from the study
- I understand that I may contact the researcher, [authors name], on [authors telephone number] or [authors email] if I have any queries or concerns about the study.
- If I have any complaints about the conduct of this study I can contact the [authors institution] Research and Post Graduate Office on: [institution contact number] or email [institution email address]
-

Please tick if you agree:

- I consent to being:
    - Interviewed
    - Interviews being electronically recorded

    - Observations taking place of my involvement within the organisation or when carrying out organisational activities

- I consent to:
    - Documents, that I have written or been involved with, being collected

- I consent to:
    - my data being used as a part of [authors name] doctoral thesis and also published in academic journals. In all instances, I will not be identifiable.

Participant's signature: _____

Participant's name (please print): _____

Date: _____