

Chapter 5 - Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological structure for the thesis and gives an account of the considerations taken in designing the project. The chapter begins by outlining the project's initial data gathering and analytical methods, prior to the change of direction and problematization process outlined in Chapter 3. This data gathering/analysis process is outlined in full and a set of results is presented as a justification for the project's subsequent change in focus.

The subsequent research design process is then described, beginning with a consideration of the population to be sampled followed by a reflection on the data gathering methods best suited to sampling this demographic. The chapter ends with a reflection on the analytical tools chosen for use in this study and their appropriateness in terms of theoretical fit, responsiveness to the research questions, and the production of a suitable output for the project.

5.1 Initial data gathering and analysis

Originally, this thesis intended to explore the role of conductors in the development and training of singers' voices. In response to this research question, an online survey of UK-based choral conductors was developed as an initial data gathering instrument. The online survey was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, the online format offered ease of access to a

large number of participants, increasing the chances of obtaining a diverse sample. This was seen as a benefit due to the wide diversity of choral activity taking place in the UK (Voices Now, 2017). The survey also offered anonymity to participants. This made the choice of a survey preferential over other data gathering methods such as interviews or focus groups due to my status as an insider researcher which may have affected the amount and type of data offered by participants in face-to-face data collection situations (Costley et al., 2013).

5.1.1 Survey of UK-based Conductors

In 2018, an online survey collecting both qualitative and quantitative data was constructed using Snap Survey software (*Snap Surveys*, 2021) and distributed to conductors over the age of 18 who were currently working in the UK via Facebook and Twitter adverts, and via choir websites appearing on the British Choirs on the Net web listing. The survey remained open between July and October 2018 and over this period of time collected 231 responses.

Ethical approval for this survey and the pilot survey described below was granted by the Committee for Research Ethics & Governance in Arts, Social Sciences & Business.

Prior to distribution, an initial pilot test of the survey was undertaken drawing participants from the pool of conductors at the University of Aberdeen and via an advert posted on a Facebook forum for US-based conductors. These participants for the pilot were recruited on the basis that they would not be eligible for the main sample group either due to knowing me personally in the case of the Aberdeen-based conductors, or that they were not based in

the UK in the case of the US conductors. After the pilot phase, minor adjustments were made to the formatting and fonts size of participant instructions to ensure clarity.

A full copy of the conductor survey can be found in the appendix to this thesis (see p.349). The survey comprised two main sections. The first section collected demographic information about the type of choir the conductor worked with most frequently, and asked participants to indicate whether or not they: a) utilised warm-up exercises in their rehearsals and b) taught vocal skills as part of their rehearsals. If conductors answered 'yes' to either of these questions they were asked to supply an example of any exercise they used as part of these warm-up/teaching sessions and whether these had been drawn from any specific curriculum. Alternatively, if they answered 'no' to either question they were asked whether they had any specific reason for choosing not to engage in warm-up or vocal teaching exercises.

The second section of the survey comprised a set of Likert scales which asked conductors to rate the importance of various rehearsal elements on a scale of 1 (Not at all important) to 10 (Extremely important). The list of rehearsal elements to be rated by conductors was drawn from the overview of the conducting literature outlined in Chapter 2. These were:

- Duty of care to singers' voices (Rosa & Behlau, 2017)
- Teaching vocal skills/"Voice Building" (Haasemann & Jordan, 1991)
- Social integration (Hill et al., 2007)
- Concert preparation (Brewer, 1997)
- Singers' motivation/self-esteem (McElheran, 1989)
- Choral blend/sound unity (Durrant, 2018)
- Overall quality of choral sound (Emmons & Chase, 2006)

In this section of the survey conductors were also asked whether they had any other considerations to add to this list and were offered an opportunity to share any additional thoughts or information they wished.

On the final page of the survey demographic information relating to age, gender was collected along with details of any conducting training the participants had. Participants were offered the opportunity to remain anonymous or alternatively to supply contact details if they wished to volunteer for further involvement in the research.

5.1.2 Analysis of conductor survey and change of direction

As described above, the conductor survey was constructed in two halves and analysis of the survey consequently took place in two stages. Quantitative data collected via the Likert scale questions was first analysed. The number of respondents responding to each of the scale items were recorded as follows:

	Not at all important									Extremely important
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Duty of Care	1	0	5	2	12	9	19	46	24	111
Teaching vocal skills/Voice Building	3	2	11	10	20	24	30	57	16	55
Social Integration	4	1	5	3	15	18	27	41	40	77
Concert preparation	5	2	2	5	9	7	21	34	50	94
Singers' motivation/self esteem	1	1	1	4	3	5	12	34	45	121
Choral blend/sound unity	2	0	2	0	9	5	22	44	40	105
Overall quality of choral sound	2	1	0	0	2	4	18	45	34	123

Figure 1 - Table of analysis of responses to Likert scale items in conductor survey

Percentages of those rating any rehearsal elements as 8,9, or 10 were then calculated as follows:

**Percentage of participants who rated the importance of each rehearsal aspect as being important, i.e. between 8 – 10 on a scale of 1 – 10
(1 = Not important and 10 = Very important)**

	8	9	10	Total (as a % of all responses)
Duty of Care to singers' voices	20	11	49	80
Teaching Vocal Skills	25	7	24	56
Social integration	18	17	33	68
Concert preparation	15	22	41	78
Singers' motivation/self-esteem	15	20	53	88
Choral blend/sound unity	19	18	46	83
Overall quality of sound	20	15	54	89

Figure 2 - Percentages of participants rating rehearsal aspects as important in conductor survey

As shown in the table above, the percentage of participants rating the teaching of vocal skills as important was just 56%, which is significantly lower than any other rehearsal aspect. This was particularly surprising due to the survey's explicit focus on choral-vocal pedagogy. The opening page of the survey contained participant information which stated: "This project aims to establish current attitudes towards the teaching of vocal skills to singers during rehearsals" [Conductor Survey, p.1], emphasising that this question was fundamental to the project's approach. It was therefore surprising that conductors who chose to engage with this survey after reading the participant information sheet indicated that vocal teaching was not a priority in their practice. These results therefore prompted deep reflection on whether the research's aim and research questions were appropriate.

This pragmatic reflection led to a realisation that the review of the choral conducting literature (Chapter 2) had not resulted in the formation of a suitable theoretical framework for the research. Consequently, this had led to initial data gathering in an area that did not respond well to the problem identified originally, that is the perception that conductors' treatment of singers' voices appeared to vary widely in terms of efficacy and safety.

It was therefore necessary to return to the literature and problematize the choral conductor's role to develop a more appropriate theoretical framework and set of research questions (Chapter 3). Consequently, data gathering in this area was halted and further analysis of the data relating to vocal warm-ups and teaching exercises is not used in this thesis.

5.2 Change of direction

Following this process, the focus of this project altered considerably. A problematization process was used to generate new research questions and to situate the research within a pragmatic paradigm (Chapter 3). In responding to these research questions, a pragmatic approach provides space for the researcher to draw from existing literature in the field, and from the practical experiences of the self and others (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). The researcher should then use this to address a specific problem or to problematise observable practices. Therefore during this study my practical experience alongside both the conducting literature and leadership theory were drawn upon in shaping the research design. Due to the inevitably unique nature of personal practical experience and the fact that an interdisciplinary body of literature was drawn upon, it was judged to be unlikely that an “off-the-shelf” methodology” (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p.2) which comprises a rigidly pre-set bundle of theory, form of analysis, and research design would be appropriate. Rather, a bespoke research design comprising a complementary set of data gathering tools and analytical processes was required. The process of shaping this design thus stemmed from an initial consideration of the type of data necessary to respond to the stated research questions.

5.3 Data Types - Rationale

In responding to the primary research question, **What do singers expect of a UK-based choral leader, with particular reference to the voice-centred aspects of their role?**, it was clearly necessary to collect data which first and foremost took account of the singers' experience in a choral setting. The "impact view" (Jansson, 2019, p.866), that is to say the effect of a conductor's actions on singers, is an important yet often overlooked aspect of choral leadership research, with data more frequently gathered from choral leaders than their followers. This factor is responded to in the primary research question in that the focus is placed on singers' expectations. Singers are an underrepresented group of stakeholders in choral research (Jansson, 2019), so it was appropriate to gather data directly from them. In addition to this, pragmatically speaking in order to produce positive change for singers, it is logical to collect data from singers during the study in order to understand their current experiences, both positive and negative, of choral leadership.

In considering singers to be a relatively underrepresented group in this area of research (*ibid.*), and in order to respond to the research questions relating to their expectations and perceptions of the choral leader's role, the focus was on gathering of qualitative data which 'gives voice' to choral singers. Due to the potentially wide demographic spread of choral singers that might participate in the study, the gathering of a small amount of quantitative data was also useful in order to contextualise the participants' responses. As a pragmatic study, the use of mixed methods in data gathering presented no epistemological issues. This was justified with a pragmatic rejection of the notion that reality can be accessed via only one scientific method, and that instead there may be a single or multiple realities, accessed

by a variety of methods of inquiry (Kaushik & Walsh, 2019). It was therefore determined that it would be acceptable, to collect both forms of data. However, the amount of quantitative data collected was intentionally limited with the qualitative data informing the majority of the analysis in order to amplify participant voices in this research.

In taking a pragmatic approach, a commitment was made to producing results that can lead to positive social change and/or make a positive contribution to future practice (Hogan, 2017). The decision to gather data primarily from singers and to place emphasis on the gathering of qualitative data to highlight singers' experiences and opinions was judged to satisfy this commitment. Taking a pragmatic approach, however, also meant accepting that the study's results are unlikely to represent definitive knowledge or truths, rather that warranted assertions would be made which would be useful for future inquiry only in certain contexts (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). It was therefore important to clearly delineate the scope of the project in order to determine where these assertions would be likely to be of practical use.

5.3.1 Scope of study

The UK has a large choral community, with an estimated 40,000 choirs and 2.14 million singers participating in choral singing each week (Voices Now, 2017). This is the 4th highest estimated number of active choral singers in any country in Europe (Bartel & Cooper, 2015). The 2017 Voices Now choral census revealed that a wide variety of types of choirs are active within the UK:

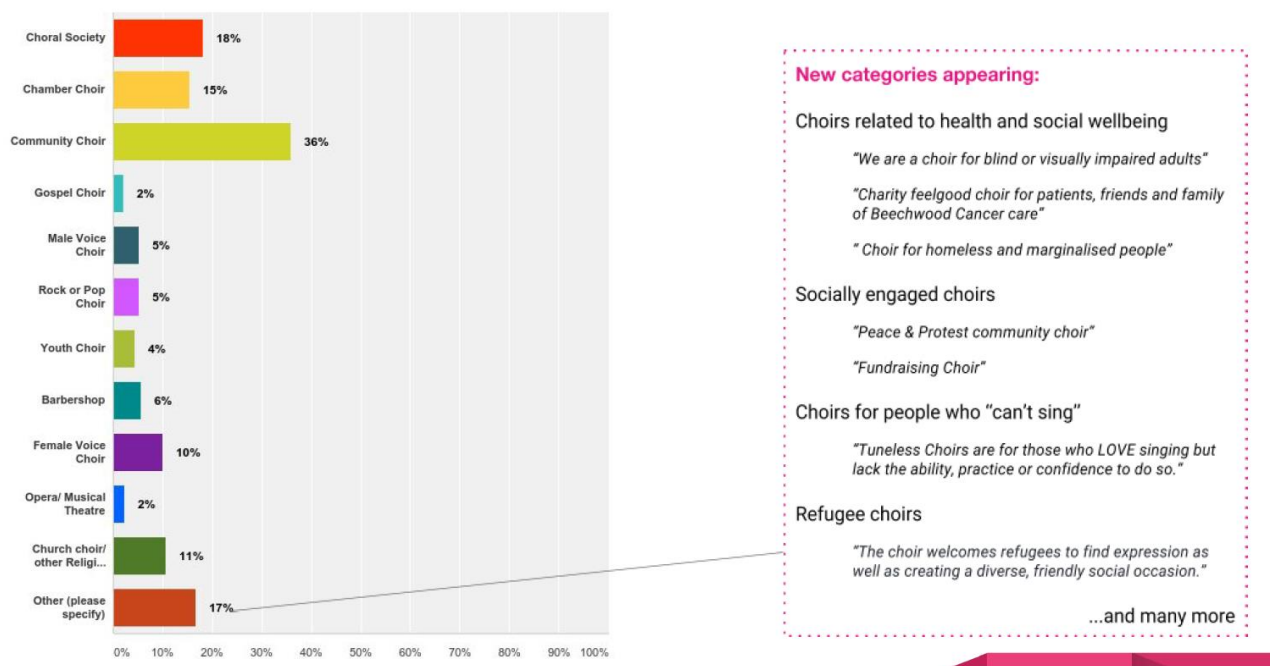


Figure 3 - "Type of Choir" participated in by UK choral singers from the Voices Now Big Choral Census (Voices Now, 2017, p.10)

Whilst community choirs are more heavily represented than any other choral group in Figure 12, making up around one third of the choir types identified, there is still considerable variety. It is also demonstrably true that "community choir" is a flexible term, encompassing many different types of choir (Voices Now, 2017). This is seen in the text box accompanying the table where a "Peace and protest *community* choir" [emphasis added] is recorded as a "socially engaged choir" in the "Other (please specify)" category, as opposed to being defined as just a community choir.

The UK's choral scene is varied with many different types of choir in existence. As noted in the Voices Now report, "Choirs are diverse. Choirs can have as many as 700 people singing in them or as few as 4. Some choirs sing exclusively pop music or classical music whilst

others sing a range of music from gospel to musical theatre (Voices Now, 2017, p.15).” In order to answer the question of what is expected of a UK-based choral leader by singers, a research design which takes account of the breadth of choral activity in the UK was required. It was thus necessary to select data gathering methods which would be capable of sampling a broad cross-section of the UK choral community.

5.4 Data gathering tools

5.4.1 Online, mixed-method surveys

Due to the need to collect data from a broad spectrum of participants, online mixed-method surveys were identified as appropriate data gathering tools due to their accessibility and capacity for gathering data from large numbers of participants (Braun et al., 2020). As previously noted, the majority of data collected was qualitative with a smaller set of quantitative data gathered to contextualise the qualitative responses. The use of questionnaires to gather quantitative data is well established. The use of online surveys to gather qualitative data however, whilst not original, is less common than the use of other methods such as focus groups or interviews (Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004). A comprehensive rationale will therefore be offered for collecting qualitative data in this way.

First and foremost, gathering qualitative data via surveys offers an excellent method of gathering a “wide-angle lens” (Braun et al., 2020, p.3) perspective on a subject. This is distinct from other qualitative methods which favour small sample sizes. This provides a

useful method of recording a diverse range of perspectives and experiences which is useful in research that focuses on underexplored samples or topics (Frith & Gleeson, 2008). The singer's perception of the role of a UK-based choral leader is an under-explored area, particularly within a leadership framework. An exploration of this area would therefore clearly benefit from the diversity of voices a qualitative survey can capture. With a pragmatic focus on social justice, a qualitative survey also represents a good choice in terms of participant inclusion (Braun et al., 2020). If done carefully, gathering a larger sample size may help the researcher avoid missing marginalised groups within the target community. The choral community is large and varied and so it is important that within this group underrepresented voices are not overlooked. Braun et al. (2020) present a strong case for using qualitative surveys to achieve this, arguing that in qualitative research which gathers data from multiple participants the range and diversity of the sample is important in improving the quality of results generated. They propose that qualitative surveys provide an opportunity for participants who may not be able to engage in more traditional data gathering methods such as interviews to be included in the sample (*Ibid.*).

The use of surveys also offers potential advantages over other qualitative methods in terms of the amount of data that can be generated. Gathering data via an online survey means no time is spent transcribing audio which affords a researcher more time which can be spent on analysis. This might allow a researcher time to collect a larger sample and successfully analyse a larger volume of responses, increasing the potential variety of data analysed (Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004). Whilst research incorporating qualitative data is generally not concerned with generalisability, this is still of benefit as it decreases the likelihood of any

one participant's viewpoint being represented as the definitive view of their social group (Braun et al., 2020). This is particularly useful in pragmatic research where the consequences of a marginal viewpoint being overrepresented could be detrimental if the research output is used to attempt to make changes to practice affecting social groups.

Finally, online surveys offer participants the option of replying to the researcher anonymously. "[T]alking back" (Braun et al., 2020, p.6) to researchers via the survey, i.e. critiquing the researcher's survey questions or their research intentions, is another useful form of data that may be generated. If a participant feels strongly that a question is inappropriate, badly constructed or do not ask for pertinent information, they have the opportunity to feed this back to the researcher in a direct manner. This data is useful in prompting the researcher to reflect on either their survey construction or their research questions. This is useful, particularly if a large volume of responses contain talk-back relating to any one question or particular aspect of the research. Talking-back is a feature of survey data which is less likely to be obtained via face-to-face data gathering methods as participants are more likely to feel comfortable offering this in an indirect manner than they would be during a conversation with a researcher (Braun et al., 2020).

There are, however, a number of potential drawbacks to gathering qualitative data via a survey. The potential for generating large numbers of responses risks overwhelming the researcher with a surplus of data, making analysis difficult to carry out thoroughly (Garcia et al., 2004). It is also possible that participants will supply too little data by submitting shorter

responses to questions (Jowett & Peel, 2009). Criticism in this area has been aimed at the use of surveys to generate qualitative data, with critics suggesting that surveys may gather data that is wide in breadth but too shallow in depth (Braun et al., 2020). It is true that where in an interview a researcher could ask the participant to elaborate on a statement, the scope for this is more limited in a survey where the questions are pre-determined. It is however possible to avoid this situation by enlarging text boxes to give a visual clue for participants as to how much the researcher is hoping they will write in response to a question, potentially encouraging them to supply more information (Jowett & Peel, 2009). It is also good practice to add prompts such as 'please explain why' or 'can you give an example of this' in order to encourage fuller answers to questions (Braun et al., 2020). Researchers may also choose to add a final question to the survey which asks participants if they have any other thoughts or information that they would like to add. This encourages talk-back and also allows participants to share opinions or experiences that they feel are relevant. This often generates extremely rich data. Indeed, it has not been found that survey data is necessarily shallow in depth, only that researchers must be cautious when constructing their surveys to avoid missing pertinent or interesting information that participants might otherwise provide (*Ibid.*).

Unlike semi-structured or unstructured interviews, the way that an online survey is constructed is usually fixed, meaning that the order of the questions, the way in which they are phrased, and the scope of what is asked of the participants is unable to be altered in real time as participants interact with the survey (Toerien & Wilkinson, 2004). It is therefore of vital importance that questions are phrased and ordered in a clear way, using examples if

necessary, to clarify what is being asked of participants. If a researcher is unsuccessful in their survey construction either by missing an opportunity to ask an important question or by phrasing the question poorly, there is little to no chance of recovering the missed information from a participant. This would be detrimental to the data analysis process as the researcher could be forced to omit the participant's data from the analysis completely. It is however possible to mitigate this. Participants may be offered the option of supplying contact details in case the researcher wishes to carry out follow-up work. Supplying these details would identify the participant but, if made optional, this strikes a balance between offering anonymity and allowing the researcher to collect further information from participants. It is also possible, and advisable, to run a pilot test of the survey with a small number of participants to check that rich and appropriate data is collected (Braun et al., 2020). If necessary, alterations may be made to the survey after piloting to improve the researcher's chances of obtaining good quality data. This pilot testing process will be discussed in more detail in Section 5.2.6.2.

After consideration of the points made above, it was concluded that online surveys which collected both quantitative and qualitative data would be likely to generate honest, pertinent, rich data from a wide range of participants. This final benefit, the diversity of participant voices, was the defining factor in choosing to gather data using this method over alternative methods such as focus groups, interviews, or observations. These alternative methods focus, by necessity, on smaller sample sizes. Whilst this would be a valid and interesting avenue to pursue, given the wide diversity of the choral scene in the UK, exploring the role of a UK-based choral conductor using data from a small pool of

participants and then arguing that this could be used to enact social change for such a diverse community would be of limited use. In choosing to gather information via surveys an attempt was made to gather responses from a diverse range of stakeholders in the choral community in order to best answer the research questions.

5.4.2 Online job advert texts

In addition to gathering data from individual participants via surveys, consideration was also given to the collective opinions of choral groups. The analysis of job adverts is a well-established method of exploring the skills required in workplaces (Harper, 2012) and online job adverts seeking candidates for the role of choral leader can provide an insight into what choirs prioritise when seeking new leadership. Such job adverts represent either the collective expectations of the choral singers in each group or alternatively the opinions of designated representatives within the choir chosen to write the adverts seeking a new leader for the group. In either case, the adverts outline each choir's desired qualities and/or capabilities in a choral leader. This data is distinct from the survey data which collected individual opinions and allowed singers to write longer, more detailed, and idiosyncratic preferences. Instead the job advert data represents group preferences which would be likely to represent majority views within each group in order to attract appropriate candidates for the choral leader posts.

Online job advert texts are a source of rich qualitative data, generated by choirs, free from any researcher interaction. They therefore represented an excellent choice in terms of

giving voice to participants and responding to “the impact view” (Jansson, 2019, p.866) in that they directly address the needs and preferences of choral singers and are created in order to generate positive outcomes for these groups. Collecting data from these adverts also responded directly to the overarching research question for this thesis, “what do singers expect of a UK-based choral leader...?” and the sub-questions “What areas of the singers’ experience is the choral leader expected to take responsibility for?” and “What voice-related areas of choral work are singers expecting a choral leader to be concerned with?” (see section 3.3).

The use of online job advert data does have some limitations. Firstly, these adverts were created independently of the research, and so it is possible that a proportion of the content of the adverts may be limited or irrelevant to the project. When collecting this type of data, it is not possible for the researcher to guide the authors. This represents a limitation in that the data set cannot be enhanced by the researcher asking follow-up questions or asking for clarification which may have been possible if other methods of data collection such as semi-structured interviews had been employed. It is also true however that the data set’s independence of researcher prompting represents a benefit in that the original data has been created free from researcher bias and the authors of these texts therefore centre their own group’s priorities as opposed to those of the researcher.

Secondly, although in practical terms, public domain online text is relatively easy to obtain and prepare for analysis, job adverts are time-sensitive texts. It is possible that they will be available for only a short period of time and may be deleted once the advertised post has

been filled. The management of the time-sensitive aspect of job advert texts in this study is discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

5.5 Ethical Considerations/Researcher Positioning

As stated previously, I position myself as an insider researcher within the conducting field, due to my professional experience as a conductor, singer, and singing teacher. This position affords both benefits and challenges in conducting research (Costley et al., 2013). This position impacts on the ethical considerations made in undertaking research within the conducting field. It is incumbent upon me to consider issues of confidentiality and power surrounding my interaction with participants and my use of the data they supply (Greene, 2014).

I therefore reflected on the data gathering methods chosen for this study, and how I could ensure that I maintained confidentiality for participants in order to avoid any detriment or distress to them in taking part in the research. I also reflected on the methods chosen in terms of their potential for obtaining data without an imbalanced power dynamic influencing the data gathering process.

Job Advert Collection

It has been argued that, as qualitative textual analysis is an unobtrusive form of analysis, the collection of job adverts may be conducted without influencing the authors of the texts (Cali, 2000). For this reason the initial collection of this form of data mitigated any power

imbalance between myself and participants as I was not present during the generation of the data. From an ethical perspective, it has been argued that the collection of public domain texts, particularly those intended for advertisement, presents no ethical issues in research provided that the texts have been collected from a public space where there are no “reasonable expectations of privacy” (Convery & Cox, 2012, p.51) and the collection of this data does not present a risk of harm to those generating the data (Convery & Cox, 2012). The collection of job advert data could therefore be compared to the collection of data from a newspaper in that the authors are “seeking ‘public visibility’” (Convery & Cox, 2012, p.51). There is however a key difference between newspaper and online data, that is that the use of search engines may be employed to find any quotes published in a research write-up, and this could lead to a loss of anonymity for the author.

Whilst it was deemed unlikely that authors of job adverts would suffer any detriment in this data being used, it was acknowledged that as the UK choral scene is closely networked, it would potentially be unfair to allow these authors to be identified in the research. In addition to following Harper’s guidance on the anonymisation of identifying contact details or information contained within the data set prior to analysis (Harper, 2012), no direct quotes from advertisements are included within the thesis and appendix to avoid any possibility of authors being identified using a search engine. Due to the fact that the results of the job advert analysis were intended for use only as a structure for further analysis (see section 5.6), it was not anticipated that presenting quotations would be necessary. It was however decided that if examples from the data set became necessary in the write-up, these would be paraphrased, not directly quoted.

Online Surveys

The use of online surveys as a qualitative data-gathering tool as opposed to interviews or focus groups allowed me to maintain a distance from participants during the data gathering process and offer them anonymity in the data gathering process. This was beneficial both in reducing my potential to unconsciously bias the participants, and in reducing the participants' potential perceptions of a power imbalance between myself and them during data gathering which could influence the honesty or depth of the participants' responses.

Both conductors and singers may have felt self-conscious about speaking to me in interviews or focus groups due to my position and experience in the conducting field. It is worth noting that the UK choral conducting community is well-networked, with online forums and word-of-mouth networks allowing a free flow of communication between practitioners. There is therefore a risk that participants may have avoided sharing negative opinions with me as a member of this community and their tact may have obscured useful data that could have been obtained. A survey that gives participants anonymity in the process allows greater freedom to participants to speak honestly and unselfconsciously.

An information and consent sheet including information about participants' right to withdraw from the study were included on the opening page of the survey. Contact details for the researcher and the school's Ethics Officer were also included on this page for use by

any participants who had questions about the research or concerns about the way in which it was being conducted. No such concerns were reported by participants during the research period. Participants were required to confirm that they had read this information and that they were both over 18 years of age and a choral singer based in the UK before they could participate in the survey.

Ethical approval for the job advert collection, pilot survey and the main survey was granted by The Committee for Research Ethics & Governance in Arts, Social Sciences & Business, University of Aberdeen.

5.6 Data Gathering Procedure

It was determined that it would not be logical to collect and analyse both types of data i.e. job advert texts and survey responses, simultaneously. This was due to the fact that job advert data would likely represent collective choir group priorities and singer survey data would represent individual opinions. Amalgamating both types of data would not be productive.

A two-phase approach to data gathering was therefore designed. Firstly, job advert data was collected on a relatively small scale and analysed to gain an initial overview of choir priorities in choral leadership. The results of this analysis were then used in the construction and analysis of the singer survey which then gathered data from individuals on

a larger scale. Selected extracts of the job advert analysis results will be presented within the following sections of this chapter, not as findings, but as part of the study's methodological structure. The full results of the job advert analysis are also included for reference however in the Appendix to this thesis (see p.360).

Using the results of the initial job advert analysis as a structure for the second phase of the research allows for more efficient analysis and therefore the possibility of analysing a larger data set. This design addresses both the primary research question which relates to singer expectations of choral leadership, and, due to the larger scale of data gathering in phase 2, also sub-research question 1c. **Might this set of responsibilities vary across genres/contexts?.**

5.6.1 Online Choral Conductor Job Adverts

5.6.1.1 Data collection process

In a review of research methodology relating to the collection and analysis of job advertisements Harper (2012) notes that “the majority of studies analysed more than 100 job adverts in their sample, suggesting that this could be an acceptable minimum sample size” (*Ibid.*, p.35). He does however advise that “[t]here are drawbacks to a large sample size. A major problem is that analysis cannot be carried out in depth, because the data are atomistic. This means that the loss of contextual meaning is likely” (Harper, 2012, p.39). The target sample size was therefore set at 100.

Harper also notes that the time-sensitive nature of job adverts means a data collection process must be designed which takes account of this. Job adverts may be deleted after the post has been filled, therefore these data must be collected at staggered intervals to ensure that the researcher does not miss data which has been removed. He suggests that “[t]his means that census points for data collection should be set” (Harper, 2012, p.39) and batches of job adverts should be collected and compiled to form a data set of the required size.

Data collection was subsequently carried out in two batches. Job adverts seeking leaders for singing groups/choirs were gathered primarily from the “Vacancies” page of the Association of British Choir Directors (ABCD), and British Choirs on the Net (BCOTN). These websites were chosen for their prominent online presence and relative abundance of available job adverts. A further Google search returned additional, smaller numbers of adverts from a broader range of websites, namely: Gerontius; Arts Council England; the Royal School of Church Music; and the “Find a Job” page of the Gov.UK website. The first search (including only the ABCD and BCOTN websites) returned 33 adverts. 6 months later, the search process was repeated (this time including the Google search) and a further 78 adverts were found, taking the sample total to 111 adverts.

5.6.1.2 Data set preparation

Before formal analysis took place, the data set was examined and 29 of the adverts were rejected on the following basis:

- 6 were rejected on the grounds that the advert was seeking an 'assistant' conductor, as opposed to the leader of the group. The duties required of an assistant conductor are likely to differ from those being examined in this study, i.e. those of a conductor in charge.
- 22 were rejected as the jobs offered included more than just choir leading duties, e.g. leading worship in church in addition to leading the church choir and so were outwith the aims of the project.
- 1 advert was rejected for being a duplicate of another advert in the data set.

The final data set comprised 82 job adverts seeking conductors for groups of singers made up of adult singers, based in the UK. Although this is below the target sample size of 100 adverts proceeding with the analysis was justified on the basis that this stage of analysis was preliminary and further data still needed to be gathered for the second phase of the project. Based on the speed of data gathering until this point, collecting additional job adverts to take the total data set to 100 units would have taken between 1 - 1.5 months. It was felt that it was not worth delaying analysis for this length of time and that any critical insight which was missed in this phase was likely to be caught during the second phase of data collection.

The length of and level of detail within individual job adverts varied considerably. Some adverts comprised multiple pages of text and included full job descriptions whilst others were as short as 1 paragraph long with very little information about the post included. The data set was anonymised and compiled as a single Word document for analysis.

5.6.2 Singer Survey

5.6.2.1 Survey Construction

The process of constructing the individual sections of the singer survey is outlined below. A full copy of the survey can also be found in the appendix to this thesis.

This study's primary research question **What do singers expect of a UK-based choral leader, with particular reference to the voice-centred aspects of their role?** can be considered as consisting of two parts:

1. Singers' expectations of a UK-based choral leader
2. A focus specifically on the voice-centred aspects of the conductor's role

Responding to this, the singer survey was constructed in two sections. Section 1 addressed singers' overall expectations of their choral leader, and Section 2 addressed singers' specifically voice-centred expectations. Structuring the survey this way aimed to ensure that data was collected which answered both halves of the primary research question.

Section 1 of the survey (see Appendix, p.354) asked questions relating to the singers' expectations of their choral leader. The questions in this section were:

1. **How would you describe the role the conductor has in your choir?**

- 2. What skills do you expect a conductor to have?**
- 3. What do you expect of your conductor as a leader?**
- 4. What personality traits/qualities do you look for in a conductor?**

Question 1 (above) was intended to relate to the participant's overall conception of the choral leader's role, whilst questions 2-4 (above) address specific aspects of this role. The specific wording of questions 2-4 was drawn from the analysis of the job advert data (see themes/codes in Figure 14, p.168)

Additional questions were asked in this section about the level of input singers felt they had to their singing group. These questions were generated from the job advert analysis which pointed towards a Visionary paradigm of leadership (Avery, 2004) being favoured by choirs (see Figure 15 p.171). This paradigm encourages consideration of follower input to the leadership process. Participants were also asked:

- Do you feel that you have enough input into the structure and/or tone of the rehearsals you attend? (i.e. scheduling, repertoire choices, choir's aims, atmosphere etc) Yes/No**
- If you would like to have more or less input to the running of the rehearsals, why?**

These questions were intended to encourage participants to reflect on encounters with choral leaders, positive and negative, which distinguished particular practices or attitudes that affected the singers' experience in order to respond to sub-research question **1c. Might this set of responsibilities vary across genres/contexts?**.

Section 2 of the survey (see Appendix p.354) contained questions pertaining specifically to voice-related choral work. Analysis of the job advert data (see Figure 14, p.168) had generated the following codes which could be identified as voice-related work:

- Safeguarding (including vocal safeguarding)
- Teaching Vocal Skills
- Training (of singers)
- Skill level of singers

Therefore, questions in this section of the survey asked specifically about how voices are looked after/safeguarded by choral leaders and also about choral-vocal teaching/training/skills:

- **Can you give 1 or more example(s) of something a conductor has done which made you feel that your voice was being looked after well?**
- **Can you give 1 (or more) example(s) of something a conductor has done which made you feel that your voice was not being looked after well?**
- **Can you give 1 (or more) example(s) of a way in which a conductor has developed your voice or taught you a vocal skill?**

- Can you give 1 (or more) example(s) of a time when a conductor did not teach you a vocal skill when it would have been helpful for them to do so?

A limited number of yes/no questions relating to vocal safeguarding and vocal training were also posed in order to generate a picture of not only what vocal-related expectations of the choral leader's role singers have, but also whether or not singers recognise choral leaders attending to these needs in practice. The decision to generate quantitative data in this way was not intended to create generalisable results. Nor was this intended to move the research design from a QUAL+quant approach to a QUAL+QUANT approach, that is to say that the study was structured as a concurrent nested design (Kroll & Neri, 2009), with both types of data collected simultaneously but with qualitative data being prioritised. The motivation for asking these questions was to provide context for the analysis of the qualitative responses to the voice-related questions in the survey. The data generated from the yes/no questions was intended to offer insight into whether the codes generated from the smaller sample of job adverts had successfully identified areas of interest shared by the wider participant group. This is of critical importance in answering this thesis' research sub-question 1d. **With which voice-centred areas of choral work are singers expecting a choral leader to be concerned?** A pragmatic approach to research design allows for the mixing of qualitative and quantitative methods within a methodology, providing that the methods chosen respond directly to the project's research questions. A pragmatic approach also allows for some flexibility in the research design as the research progresses and therefore the following quantitative questions were added to the singer survey at this stage:

- **Does your choir use warm-up exercises during rehearsals? (Yes/No)**

If the participant answered yes, they were then asked:

- **Do you find these exercises useful? (Yes/No)**
- **Why/why not? (open text box for response)**

If the participant answered no, they were instead asked:

- **Would you prefer that your group used warm-up exercises? (Yes/No)**
- **Why/why not? (open text box for response)**

and

- **Does your conductor teach you vocal skills as part of a rehearsal (i.e. do you learn singing technique during rehearsals as part of or in addition to singing pieces of music?)**

If the participant answered yes, they were then asked:

- **Do you find the vocal skills that you are taught are useful to you? (Yes/No)**
- **Why/why not? (open text box for response)**

If the participant answered no, they were instead asked:

- **Would you like your conductor to teach you vocal skills as part of a rehearsal? (Yes/no)**
- **Why/why not? (open text box for response)**

The fixed question structure asking questions about specific areas of the choral leader's voice-related work risked missing interesting and useful information that participants might

share if given free rein to voice their opinions. Two additional questions were therefore inserted into the survey asking for any additional information the participants wished to offer. These questions were:

- **If you have any other thoughts/information about conductors or choir related matters (that you have not shared above) that you would like to add then please do so here.**

And finally:

- **If you have any other thoughts or information that you would like to share with the research team, please do so here.**

Guided by Braun & Clarke's writing on designing qualitative surveys (Braun et al., 2020), on the final page of the survey demographic information was collected and the participants were offered the opportunity to volunteer for a follow-up interview should this prove useful in the future. Although many singers did volunteer to be contacted, after survey data gathering and analysis was concluded it was decided that sufficient data had been collected and no interviews were necessary at this stage. The Voices Now Big Choral Survey (Voices Now, 2017) was used as a template in designing the demographic questions. This choice was made in order to allow for the comparison of the demographic spread of types of choral singer participating in the current study against the Voices Now survey's report on the types of choral singing taking place across the UK. This was, however, not intended to allow for

generalisation of results, this information was gathered only to contextualise the qualitative results for discussion.

5.2.6.2 Pilot testing stage

A pilot test of the survey was carried out with the voluntary participation of singers from the University of Aberdeen Choral Society. Singers were invited to participate in the pilot via the society's private Facebook group. The group was informed that participating in the pilot was optional and that the data collected would not be used in the final analysis for this project and was instead intended to test the survey prior to being advertised publicly. Participation would also preclude them from participating in the public survey and they were informed that due to this they would not be invited to participate in the survey at a future date. The pilot run of the survey lasted 1 week, generating 13 responses. Following this pilot, minor revisions were made to the survey formatting however these did not affect the rationale and question structure described above. The only significant change made to the survey prior to being advertised was the length of time to complete the survey suggested on the opening page. During the pilot run, participants were advised that the survey would take between 10-15 minutes to complete. After feedback from the 13 pilot participants, this was revised to 'roughly 20 minutes' as it became clear that it was not possible to give reasonable answers to all questions in 10 minutes and risked participants either giving shallow, short responses or abandoning the survey before completion.

5.2.6.3 Participant Recruitment

A convenience sampling approach to participant recruitment was selected (Given & Saumure, 2008). This choice was made as no criteria for purposive sampling had been generated due to the wide variety of types of choral singers in the UK at present (Voices Now, 2017) and the intention not to exclude any of these types of choral singers. A random sampling approach in which all choral singers in the UK had an equal chance of participating in the survey was also deemed unrealistic due to the high number of choral singers in the UK at present (*Ibid.*). Although the use of convenience sampling is accompanied by a risk of obtaining data from participants with vested interests in the subject being studied as opposed to an unbiased population (Given & Saumure, 2008), this was countered by advertising the survey widely and collecting a relatively large sample size.

The survey was advertised via a Facebook advert which was posted on public UK choral forums and group pages. This advert attracted considerable interest and as a result was shared exactly 700 times, reaching a far greater number of people than anticipated. Consequently, the response rate to the survey was also extremely high with 1075 completions reached within 1 week of the survey being opened. Although it was originally planned to advertise the survey further, the amount of data generated was so large that the survey was closed after the 1 week period to avoid gathering an overwhelming number of responses. Within qualitative survey research, sample sizes are usually larger than in studies that use other data gathering methods such as interviews or focus groups (Braun et al., 2020). In their overview of qualitative survey research however the largest studies noted by Braun et al. (2020) generated over 500 responses. It was therefore determined that 1075

responses represented a very large sample size and it would not be prudent to continue collecting any more data than this.

As mentioned above in the 'Scope of study' section of this chapter, the aim of the sampling strategy was to gather responses from a wide range of choral participants to reflect the fact that the recent UK choral census revealed a diverse range of choral groups to be active in the UK. In the demographic section of the survey, participants were asked to identify the type of singing group they sing with and if they sing with more than one group to identify the group they sing with most frequently. The Voices Now Big Choral Census (Voices Now, 2017) was used as a template in designing potential answers to this survey question and the results of this question in both surveys can therefore be compared directly. As can be seen below in Figure 13, the distribution of types of choral singer in both surveys is similar, suggesting that although there is not a 100% match in sample distributions, convenience sampling was broadly successful in achieving the diversity of responses sought, with the variety of types of choral singer in the singer survey sample largely matching the Voices Now census' results. It is reasonable to argue that the singer survey data set broadly represents the general spread of types of choral singer currently active in the UK. The data gathered therefore likely represents a good description of the variety of expectations of a choral leader's role in the UK from the perspective of currently active choral singers.

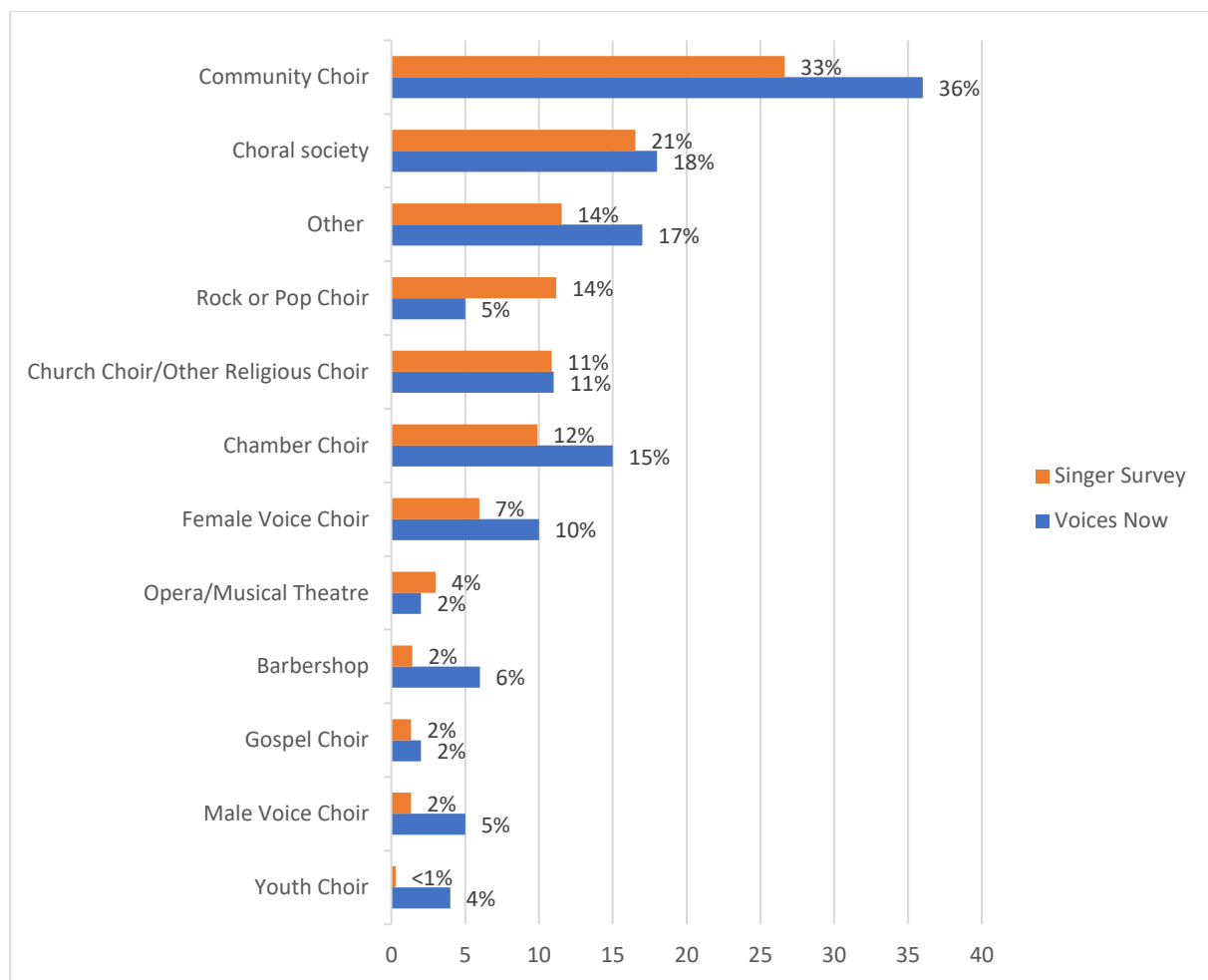


Figure 4 - Comparison of distribution of “Type of Choir” which singers participate in between singer survey and the Voices Now Big Choral Census (Voices Now, 2017, p.10)

5.7 Choice of analytic methods

As outlined above, the job adverts were first analysed and the results of this analysis used to create a framework for the analysis of the singer survey in the second phase of the study. A pragmatic approach allows a researcher to move between inductive and deductive analytical processes freely, without ontological or epistemological concerns tying them to just one or other of these approaches. Due to this project’s emphasis on amplifying singer opinions, an initial analysis with an inductive approach was most appropriate. The first

phase of analysis was therefore carried out inductively and the results used as a framework to then analyse the second data set deductively.

To carry out this phased approach to analysis it was necessary to select a paradigmatically flexible analytical method to allow for both inductive and/or deductive analysis. It was also crucial that the chosen analytical method was capable of generating, in the first case, an output which could be used as a framework for further analysis and in the second case, a pragmatic output which could provide the basis of guidance for use in making positive change in choral settings. A Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2020a) was chosen for use in analysing the job advert data during the first stage of this study, and a Codebook Thematic Analysis (*ibid.*) was chosen for analysing the singer survey data in the second stage. The rationale for these choices will be discussed firstly in terms of paradigmatic fit, and then in terms of their potential for outputting an appropriate set of results for this project.

5.7.1 Thematic Analysis

‘Thematic Analysis’ (TA) is commonly referred to as a method, however it is more usefully conceptualised as a family of related yet distinct methods (Braun & Clarke, 2020a). This family of methods has in common a process of reviewing, coding, and grouping qualitative data. It is, however, inaccurate and limiting to simply describe thematic analysis in this way. This description also risks confusing readers as this coding process is common to a range of

other qualitative methodologies such as Qualitative Content Analysis, Grounded Theory, and Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, to name just a few. A more accurate description of TA would acknowledge repeated readings of the data set, coding units of data, and grouping codes into themes as steps common to all types of TA, but then further acknowledge three schools of TA:

- **Coding reliability TA** takes a positivist approach to textual analysis, assuming that consensus between multiple coders can be achieved on how units of text can be grouped into codes and themes. This approach places emphasis on replicability, assuming that units of data can be reliably assigned to codes by multiple coders with low levels of discrepancy between their analysis. The coding process begins with a predetermined coding structure which is agreed upon by all coders who then work independently to analyse the data set. After coding, an agreement score is calculated based on the degree of overlap between coders. Coding teams aim for a score of 0.80 or above. If this level of overlap is not achieved, the coding is determined to be inaccurate and discrepancies must be resolved before the analysis is considered complete (Braun et al., 2019).
- **Reflexive TA** on the other hand rejects the positivist notion that the data contains a 'correct' answer that must be found. In this school of TA researchers argue that researcher subjectivity is an integral part of the process, with codes not emerging from the data like mined gems, but are instead actively generated by the researcher during coding. Within Reflexive TA, coding is an iterative process with codes being

created and merged during the researcher's repeated engagements with the data (*ibid.*). The concept of data saturation, common to many qualitative analysis types such as Grounded Theory or Qualitative Content Analysis, where data collection ends when researchers find no new codes appearing in the data set is not used in Reflexive TA. The notion that a code set can be defined as complete and no new interpretations of the data can be found does not align with the "big Q" (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p.594), (i.e. adopting both qualitative methods *and* qualitative paradigmatic worldviews) stance taken by those using Reflexive TA (Braun & Clarke, 2019b).

- **Codebook TA** can be considered a middle ground between Coding Reliability TA and Reflexive TA. This method uses a predetermined coding structure in a similar manner to Coding Reliability TA as a starting point for analysis, however it also allows space for the researcher to alter this structure or to generate further codes if this is deemed appropriate during the coding process (Roberts et al., 2019). This flexibility is a by-product of Codebook TA's use of a broadly qualitative underlying philosophy, as opposed to Coding Reliability's more quantitative approach. Inter-coder agreement is not calculated in this form of TA and data saturation is not necessarily used to determine the point at which coding is complete. This is again a reflection of this school's use of researcher subjectivity as a tool for code generation (Braun & Clarke, 2020a).

In all types of TA, an additional consideration for the researcher is to what extent they decide to identify themes at a semantic or latent level (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A semantic approach involves the coding of explicitly stated content or surface meaning of the data. Latent coding moves beyond this to the examination of underlying ideas within the data set which shape the semantic content (Braun & Clarke, 2020a). In reality, it is not always possible to distinguish clearly between what a semantic and latent reading of a data set is, and the two levels of analysis are better seen as sitting on a spectrum as opposed to there being a binary separation of the two (Braun et al., 2019). The level of interpretation a researcher carries out during coding is inevitably tied to their underlying paradigmatic assumptions. Coding Reliability TA carried out by researchers within a positivist paradigm, for example, is likely to code data at a semantic level to improve coder accuracy and therefore improve the inter-coder reliability score. Researchers using Reflexive TA used within a constructionist paradigm however may instead aim to move beyond this to analysis at a latent level (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

As seen above, the various forms of TA differ widely in their paradigmatic stances and procedures. The successful use of TA is therefore contingent upon a researcher's reflection on the theoretical underpinning of their project and achieving a paradigmatic fit between their stated worldview and the variety of TA utilised. Pragmatic researchers are not bound to an ontological or epistemological stance which prevents the use of any of these three forms of TA, or indeed from combining them within a single research design. TA as a family of methods therefore is "theoretically flexible" (Braun & Clarke, 2020a, p.4) enough to be

appropriate for this project and selecting more than one form of TA will allow movement between inductive and deductive reasoning during the study.

Reflexive TA was therefore chosen as an inductive process of analysis during stage one of the data analysis and Codebook TA was then used as a flexible but primarily deductive process during stage two of the analysis. It was appropriate to combine these two methods in this study due to it being situated within a pragmatic paradigm which allows space for the two methods, despite their different theoretical underpinnings.

5.7.2 Output

The chosen forms of TA were also appropriate for this study in terms of their output. As outlined above, the research design involved collecting data from a diverse range of participants and generated a large data set. The large amount of data collected required a data analysis strategy that ensured that no data was overlooked, and that the analysis was rigorous. It was therefore necessary that the form of analysis used in the job advert analysis produced an output that could be used as a framework for the following stage of the study. The output of a Reflexive TA is a set of themes, theme descriptions, codes, and examples from the data. The hierarchy of themes and codes produced fulfils this requirement and so this was an appropriate method for the first stage of the study in terms of output.

The second form of TA used, Codebook Thematic Analysis, also generates a set of themes, theme descriptions, codes, and examples from the data. This output is appropriate in

responding to the stated research questions which require a synthesised description of participants' responses which can be used to show what singers expect of a choral leader, what voice-focused expectations they have, and what areas of experience, both voice-focused and non-voice-focused, the choral leader is expected to be responsible for. It was expected that gathering responses from a large and diverse range of singers would not generate a definitive description of the singers' expectations, rather that the themes and codes would describe a rich account of the varied ways that singers' interactions with choral leaders have influenced their conception of the leadership role. This is particularly appropriate as an output from a pragmatic study in which the researcher acknowledges that definitive truth or knowledge is not a realistic goal, rather that the aim of the study is to generate socially agreed upon warranted assertions to be used in future inquiry (Biesta & Burbules, 2003). It was therefore concluded that results of a Codebook TA comprising a hierarchy of themes, codes and examples of data would respond well to the research questions and was appropriate for use in this study.

5.7.3 Alternatives to Thematic Analysis

It is feasible that other research designs and methodological choices would provide equally useful and interesting results. In rejecting any pre-determined bundle of theory and methods, and instead choosing a pragmatic mixing of TA methods in a 2-step process, an effort was made to select methods which responded appropriately to the stated research questions. This particular design does not represent a definitive way of answering these questions. As Braun and Clarke point out,

“there is rarely one ideal method—or methodology—for a research project. There is no requirement to use an off-the-shelf methodology just because it is the most well-known approach associated with a particular type of qualitative research” (Braun & Clarke, 2020, p.2).

The pragmatic approach to research is sometimes summed up using the phrase “what works” (McCaslin, 2008, p.2). This is of course overly simplistic, but it is perhaps useful as a concluding sentiment here. Whilst there is no way of determining the ideal methodological choice for a research project, ‘what works’ is perhaps a satisfactory measure in determining whether or not a researcher has made the ‘right’ choice. The analytical choices outlined above were deemed logically sound and, combined with the data gathering tools described earlier, were considered to amount to ‘what works’.

5.8 Concluding notes

This chapter has outlined the process of constructing this project’s research design, using a pragmatic approach to respond to the research questions in selecting appropriate methods of data gathering and analysis and ensuring coherence between these and the stated worldview. As prior theory relating to choral leadership has focused primarily on the leader’s point of view, the methodology for this study was designed to explore choral singers’ perspectives on choral leadership and aimed to ensure diversity of participation. Data was collected from online job adverts and via an online survey of choral singers. A 2-phase analytical process using Reflexive and Codebook forms of Thematic Analysis was designed to analyse this data. The following chapter outlines the analytical procedure followed and presents the results of each of the phases of analysis described above.