# Chapter 8 - Conclusion

The final chapter of this thesis will begin with an overview of the project and a demonstration of the ways in which it has met its stated aim and responded to the study's research questions. Following this is a consideration of the implications, limitations, and future use of this research will be presented.

The aim of this research project as stated in the introductory chapter was "to explore what singers expect in terms of choral leadership from their conductors, with particular reference to the specifically voice-centred aspects of their role" (Chapter 1). The response to this aim led initially to a review of the existing literature in the field of choral conducting. This was followed by a problematization of this body of texts, which resulted in an identification of two areas in which the approach taken by previous authors could be adjusted in order to generate novel research questions, namely:

- Altering the root metaphor from a teacher/class dynamic to a leader/team dynamic
- Situating the research within a pragmatic paradigm, in contrast to the majority of previous research which sat either in a positivist or constructivist paradigm.

The following research questions were generated from these shifts in perspective:

1. **What do singers expect of a UK-based choral leader, with particular reference to the voice-centred aspects of their role?**

**1a. What areas of the singers' experience is the choral leader expected to take responsibility for?**

**1b. How might they enact responsibility in these areas?**

**1c. Might this set of responsibilities vary across genres/contexts?**

**1d. With which voice-centred areas of choral work are singers expecting a choral leader to be concerned?**

2. **What forms of leadership are valued within a choral context?**

These individual questions were then summed up in the final sub-research question: **2a. What does *voice-centred* choral leadership look like in practice?**

A pragmatically situated methodology was constructed in order to respond to these questions. Data was gathered from online job adverts and via an online survey of UK-based choral singers. The type of data gathered was primarily qualitative, however a small amount of quantitative data was also collected.

Both Reflexive and Codebook Thematic Analysis were used to analyse the qualitative data, and results of the analysis of the quantitative data were used to contextualise the qualitative analysis outputs. Following this analysis, findings were then presented as responses to the project's research questions. In response to question 1, **What do singers expect of a UK-based choral leader, with particular reference to the voice-centred aspects of their role?**, four meta-themes were generated, namely: *Variance; Areas of Responsibility;*

*Attributes;* and *Voice-centred concerns.* The constituent themes and codes of these meta-themes were then presented in response to sub-research questions 1a – 1d. In response to research question 2, **What forms of leadership are valued within a choral context?**, the findings presented indicated a strong preference among the sampled singers for leadership falling within the Visionary paradigm (Avery, 2004), and showed a particular alignment with Bass' theory of Transformational Leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006). There was also some support found for the use of Transactional leadership (Avery, 2004), however this type of leadership was only weakly supported by the findings and it was therefore suggested that this style should be used in conjunction with more Transformational behaviours, as opposed to in place of these.

The study's findings were then discussed using leadership theory and holistic conducting theory (Durrant, 2018; Jansson, 2013) as a framework. A Model of Voice-centred Choral Conductorship was developed from this discussion, integrating the four meta-themes from the analysis into a model of conductor behaviours and attributes. This model is shown below in Figure 60.

| *Variance* = context must determine choices made | Conductorship requires a consideration of 4 key A*reas of Responsibility*: | | | *Variance* = context must determine choices made |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Vision | | | |
| | Coordination | Safeguarding | Teaching | |
| | | | | |
| | *Voice-centred* conductorship adds a requirement to consider: | | | |
| | Vocal Advising | A vocal Duty of Care | [Singer prioritising] Demands | |
| | | | | |
| | Fulfilment of these responsibilities is achieved using conductor *Attributes* | | | |
| | Conducting Tools | Leadership style | Personal qualities | |

**Figure 60 - Voice-centred Choral Conductorship Model**

The model is constructed in three vertical layers with *Areas of Responsibility* placed at the top of the model, *Voice-centred Concerns* next, and finally *Attributes* on the bottom layer. This layered placement of meta-themes indicates that conducting practice should first consider the leader's responsibilities to the group, then within these *Areas of Responsibility* should next consider all three *Voice-centred* Concerns. Finally, only the *Attributes* necessary to respond to these responsibilities and concerns should be utilised, as opposed to developing practice from the conductor's existing skillset which may/may not align with the group's requirements. *Variance* is placed vertically on the model, indicating that contextual variance should influence every aspect of conductorship.

The Voice-centred Choral Conductorship Model therefore responds to the study's final research question 2a., **What does voice-centred choral leadership look like in practice?** The model demonstrates that in practice conductorship may alter according to context, however at a fundamental level it involves enacting responsibility in terms of *Vision, Coordination, Safeguarding,* and *Teaching,* whilst considering *Vocal Advising*, a *Vocal Duty of Care,* and *Singer Prioritising Demands.* The model also demonstrates that in responding to these responsibilities conductors should utilise their set of *Conducting Tools* which consist of both musical and non-musical skills, a predominantly Transformational *Leadership Style*, and display appropriate *Personal Qualities* during their practice. In responding to question 2a in this manner, the study's findings therefore meet the project's stated aim of exploring "what singers expect in terms of choral leadership from their conductors, with particular reference to the specifically voice-centred aspects of their role" (Chapter 1).

## 8.1 Implications

As a pragmatic piece of research, it is expected that the results of this study have the potential to alter future action (Hogan, 2017). I will now outline possible ways in which the results of this study could be used in the context of both academic study and practice.

Firstly, I argue that the strongest implication of the study's findings could be found in the use of the Voice-centred Conductorship Model as a new framework for the academic discussion of choral leadership. At present there are very few scholars conceptualising conducting as a holistic phenomenon (Jansson, 2013). There is also a lack of theory generated inductively from the perspective of choral singers (Jansson, 2019). The model produced in this study is original in that it presents a holistic conceptualisation of conductorship, as expected by choral singers. Centring the singers' perspective is a critical aspect of this research and is important as singers will bear the impact of any adjustments made to conducting practice on the basis of the findings of this study. Additionally, the conductorship model is novel in presenting both *what* is expected of the conductor as part of their role, and *what skills/qualities* they are expected to use in this role.

The use of the Voice-centred Conductorship Model as a framework for discussing conducting practice also has implications in terms of the types of choral activity which may be jointly discussed under the banner of 'conductorship'. On the surface, it may appear that leaders of, for example, singing for lung health groups, or singing for Parkinson's choirs

perform a very different role to those leading professional chamber vocal ensembles or large choral societies performing oratorios. This model however allows for the discussion of the role of conductors leading all of these groups within one single framework, highlighting overlaps in their practice at a fundamental level. This not only expands the range of choral activities that may be concurrently examined academically, but also opens up the possibility of discussion and sharing of practice between disparate groups of practitioners.

Following on from this, I also propose a number of practice-focused implications of the finding in this study. Firstly, I propose that using the Voice-centred Conductorship Model as a lens through which to evaluate conducting practice could help identify behaviours that promote/impede success in choral settings. One could, for example, determine whether or not a conductor is fulfilling all 4 Areas of Responsibility to their choir and, if not, use the lower level themes and codes within this meta-theme to suggest ways in which these areas of responsibility could be met. It would therefore be possible to use the model as a template for reviewing practice to identify areas in which conductors are/are not meeting singers' expectations.

The model may also be used as the basis of a curriculum for training choral conductors. Due to its non-prescriptive/flexible nature, it would be possible to produce multiple training programmes based upon its structure. These programmes could be adapted to be suitable for a range of entry levels, from beginner (suitable for weekend or summer courses) to degree level students. I would suggest that ensuring that conductors-in-training receive tuition in relation to each of the *Attributes* within the model would provide them with a

comprehensive set of skills to use in their practice. Additionally, I would suggest that using the *Areas of Responsibility* and *Voice-centred Concerns* as a template for planning choral activity would result in practice that meets singers' expectations and would therefore be beneficial to conductors learning to run choirs.

Within the study, analysis of the job advert data revealed a wide range of adverts seeking choral conductors which varied both in length and level of detail. Some adverts comprised multiple pages of information about the recruiting choir, the group's expectations and a full job description. In other cases, the adverts were only a few lines long with very little description of the successful candidate's expected skillset or approach. I therefore suggest that the model produced in this study might be suitable for use as a template for writing job adverts. An author of a job advert could therefore outline the recruiting choir's expectations in each of the *Areas of Responsibility, Voice-centred Concerns,* and *Attributes* to ensure that the candidate selected for interview/audition meets the choir's particular expectations as a conductor. The model might equally be used as a rubric or as a template for the question schedule at any interviews which take place as part of the recruitment process. I argue that using the model in this way during the hiring process would likely result in a choir recruiting a conductor whose skillset and approach meet the singers' expectations.

Finally, and perhaps most pertinently, the conductorship model is proposed as a template for designing choral activity which meets singers' expectations and therefore promotes engagement in choral singing. Although producing this template for successful practice is in itself is a desirable outcome of the research, it is further argued that this guidance is of

particular use at the present time. This research was undertaken between the years 2016 – 2021 during which time, along with the rest of the world, the UK choral community was blighted by the COVID-19 pandemic. In-person choral activity was severely restricted, with amateur choral singing banned completely for long periods of time. Conductors wishing to continue working with choirs during this time were forced to re-examine their practice and adapt either their rehearsals to online methods of delivery, or to alter the function of their choirs to temporarily become non-singing focused groups. At the time of writing, these restrictions remain in place and it is not yet clear whether or not, after restrictions on social gatherings ease, the Coronavirus pandemic will have long-lasting effects on the way choral singing is organised. It is possible that during the return to choral singing, conductors may choose to revaluate their practice and adopt new working practices in light of the skills and insight they have gained in altering their practice during the period of COVID-19 restrictions. It is also not yet clear whether or not choral singers will be comfortable returning to rehearsals in the large numbers seen pre-pandemic. It is therefore possible that conductors may be eager to offer encouragement to singers to return to choir and it is therefore desirable to offer guidance on what singers are seeking when engaging in choral singing. The Voice-centred Choral Conductorship Model is proposed as guidance in planning choral activity which meets singers' expectations and therefore appeals to choral singers.

## 8.2 Limitations/potential for future research

With the implications above stated, it is important next to acknowledge a number of limitations of the study. Firstly, the sample used in this study was limited to UK-based singers over the age of 18.  The model produced is therefore likely to be limited in

applicability outside of this geographic/cultural setting and age group. It is, for example, unlikely that conductorship within the US choral system would align with a model produced based on UK practice, due to the systematic and cultural differences between the two choral settings (Varvarigou & Durrant, 2011). It is therefore suggested that future research might seek to validate/refine the model across varying choral contexts. This type of research has in the past been undertaken in the form of quantitative studies utilizing elements of qualitatively produced choral conducting models as individual survey items to be rated by conductors across different geographical contexts (Jansson et al., 2019b, 2019a). It is suggested that a similar approach might be taken with the Voice-centred Choral Conductorship model.  It is also not necessarily likely that conductors working with younger singers would find success in basing their practice on the model produced in this study due to potential differences in expectations and needs between young people and the group sampled in this research. Future research might therefore recreate the inductive approach taken in this current study and use qualitative methods to develop a conductorship model based on the expectations of younger singers. This type of research would provide insight into the overlapping/differing needs and expectations of younger and adult singers.

Secondly, the data collected in this project was primarily self-reported by singers. It has been found that perceptions of choral leadership differ between leaders and followers (Ludwa, 2012). Although this study deliberately centred the perspective of singers due to the lack of singer-focused literature found in the literature review and noted by other scholars (Jansson, 2019), conductors are important figures within the choral setting and could provide valuable insight from an alternative point of view. It is also possible that in

developing a model from a singer perspective, the *Attributes* level of the model omits skills/qualities which are utilised by conductors to meet singers' needs but are unseen by singers. This study's findings are therefore limited in terms of perspective and it may therefore be of interest to conduct further research validating or refining the model using data generated from a conductor perspective.

It is also acknowledged that this study is cross-sectional in design and therefore limited in terms of the conclusions that can be drawn about singers' expectations of choral leadership across time. It is possible that a longitudinal study which measured singers' expectations of choral leadership multiple times over a number of years might reveal a shift in expectations as individual singers' length/breadth of choral experience changes.

The strength of the conductorship model lies in the notion of variance which permeates each level of the model. Whilst this allows for flexibility of use of the model across choral contexts and highlights overlaps in conducting practice between contexts at a fundamental level, it may however represent a limitation in terms of specificity. It may therefore be of interest for further research to explore individual items of the conductorship model within specific contexts. Although some quantitative analysis was carried out examining *Variance* across different choral contexts (see p.183), due to the fact that the study used a convenience sample and that Reflexive TA was used in **Part 2** of data analysis (see p.182), it would not be appropriate to generalise the output of this quantitative analysis to produce specific guidance for each of the types of choirs represented in this study. It may therefore be of interest for future research to examine *Variance* across these contexts and produce

guidance for individual choral contexts. As an example, it may be of interest to explore the balance of Transactional/Transformational leadership within a choral context. The findings in this study suggest that predominantly Transformational behaviours are preferred by singers but also that a number of Transactional behaviours may also be appropriate in conjunction with these. Further research might explore the balance between these two styles as a contextually situated approach.

## 8.3 Concluding thoughts

The initial motivation for this study stemmed from a personal concern over the treatment of singers' voices in choirs in a way that as a singing teacher I perceived to be detrimental. I therefore determined to investigate the efficacy of vocal pedagogy within UK-based choirs. During the course of the research however the direction of my investigation altered. As outlined in Chapter 3, initial data gathering suggested that the research questions formulated originally were too narrow in focus and a broader overview of the conductor's role and responsibilities to the choir was a more valuable avenue of investigation in which to fully explore the conductor's influence on singers' voices during choral activity. This widening in my perception of the conductor's function in relation to voices would in itself have been a valuable insight, moving as it did from the conception of conductor voice-centred activity gleaned from the literature review relating primarily to vocal pedagogy, vocal warm-ups and vocal hygiene, to a broader conception of voice-centred conducting which prioritises vocal concerns across every area of conductor responsibility. As the research progressed however and I developed the Model of Voice-centred Choral Conductorship, it became apparent that the application of a leadership lens to singers'

reports of choral conducting had also resulted in a novel conception of the conductor's role. This leadership-focused conception of the role not only responded to my initial aim of exploring voice-related aspects of choral conducting, but also revealed a number of strong expectations held by singers which are not strongly apparent in the conducting literature. The placement, for example, of *Vision* at the top level of the conductorship model is reflective of its relative importance in the results of the analysis of the singer survey data, an aspect of conductorship which was not found to be a recurring theme in the review of the conducting literature.

As a piece of pragmatic research, this study's success may be judged by its ability to inform future practice through the production of warranted assertions. The centring of the singers' perspective and using an initially inductive approach in this study has resulted in a model which prioritises *Vision* and contextual *Variance,* allowing for flexibility of use across varying circumstances, whilst ensuring coherence of conductor action with singers' motivations for attending a choir. I argue that this provides a solid basis for altering practice in a way which will positively impact choral singers.

The stated aim of exploring "what singers expect in terms of choral leadership from their conductors, with particular reference to the specifically voice-centred aspects of their role" (Chapter 1) has clearly been met in this thesis and is responded to comprehensively in the development of the Voice-centred Conductorship Model. I argue that further use of this model in both research and practice would promote the centring of the singers' perspective

in choral activity, something which is desirable as the field of choral leadership continues to develop.

On a personal note, this focus on choir ethos has also now become the focal point in planning choral sessions which I run in my own practice. Over the course of the COVID-19 restrictions, I have redesigned the way in which my choir rehearses to respond to the need for online delivery. Utilising the conductorship model, beginning with a focus on the choir's *Vision* and the singers' motivations for attending, has been key in this redesign process. Prior to the COVID-19 restrictions, during in-person rehearsals it was possible for me to evaluate rehearsals and their success/lack of success by reviewing the extent to which I met the four *Areas of Responsibility* and responded to *Voice-centred Concerns* during the session. Using the model as a tool in reflection on my practice has improved my performance as a conductor and my understanding of my own practice. It is my belief that other practitioners may be able to use the results of this study with similar levels of success.