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Changing Motivations of the Special Constable: A Qualitative Analysis of the Role of Organisational Experience in Retaining Satisfaction and Commitment.

Pauline Ramshaw and Faye Cosgrove

Abstract

In a climate of diminishing resources, securing a prolonged commitment to volunteer from special constables is an aspirational goal for police organisations. This paper moves beyond traditional egoistic and altruistic standpoints that draw people into this unpaid role, to consider ongoing decision-making processes that occur in post, which can shape a long-term career path as an unpaid volunteer special constable. Rich narratives, drawn from semi-structured interviews with volunteer special constables, capture a unique and original perspective largely absent from discussion around special constable motivation. Data and findings speak to important gaps in existing knowledge about how and why orientations to volunteering can change over the duration of a special constable's service, resulting from organisational rather than policing experiences. Findings serve as a timely reminder that while it is important to develop deeper understandings of motives to becoming a special, so too is the significance of furthering knowledge on ways in which the experience of being a special constable within the police organisation can work to sustain commitment, motivation and thus encourage retention.

Keywords

Special Constable; Motivation; Commitment; Reorientation; Organisational Experience

Introduction

The special constabulary is a police force consisting of unpaid special constable volunteers, closely integrated into regular police forces through the Police Act 1996 (Leon, 2018). Special constables hold the same powers as regular police officers, wear a similar uniform, and contribute to all areas front-line police work. Special constables attend a period of formal training to equip them with the knowledge regarding the foundations of police work prior to commencing their duties; this typically includes training in powers of arrest, self defence and use of protective equipment, administrative procedure and requirements, and preparing evidence for court. Once in post, Specials receive ongoing training and are expected to complete the Initial Learning for the Special Constabulary (IL4SC) programme. Due to the parity in powers, the IL4SC, in terms of content and purpose, maps onto the two-year Independent Police Learning and Development Programme. However, due to their volunteer status and restricted capacity as volunteers, the period of professional learning under the IL4SC is broken down into 3 phases, taking Specials from being fit for accompanied patrol to independent status and completion of a Diploma in Policing. Completion of the three stages will vary considerably between Specials and across police services, depending on the frequency of volunteering, deployment and experience, and mentoring provided. The special constable role is wide ranging encompassing intelligence-based patrol, crime prevention, policing major incidents and events, and providing operational support (Leon, 2018). While communal involvement in peacekeeping, including the obligation to assist officials has a long and rich history (Seth, 1961), the special constable role is thought of as coinciding with the emergence of the new police in the early nineteenth century and the introduction of the Special Constables Act 1831 (Straine-Francis, 2018).

While scholarly work on special constables is relatively scant, academic interest during the 1980s and 1990s compared volunteering in the police service with other criminal justice agencies in the UK (Gill, 1986), and beyond (Gill and Mawby, 1990a). A desire to increase numbers of special constables in the late-1990s heightened academic scrutiny of recruitment, retention, and deployment (Gaston and Alexander, 2001). More recent academic attention has notably occurred post the 2008 economic crisis focusing on the extent to which volunteer special constables offer value for money (Whittle, 2018); their occupational experiences (IPSCJ, 2014); diversity amongst their ranks (Bullock, 2014); deployment, management (Bullock and Leeney, 2016); and their initial motivation to volunteer (Hieke, 2018).

Austerity and dwindling police officer numbers have seen forces turn to the special constabulary to supplement regular and visible policing, providing an essential contribution to operational policing (HMIC, 2002). In terms of its composition, the Special Constabulary is more ethnically diverse than the police officer workforce, with 11%, compared to 7%, identifying as British minority ethnic (BME), and has higher proportions of officers aged 25 and under (37%) compared to paid officers (6%) but smaller proportions of officers over 40 compared to paid police officers, at 21% compared to 46% (Hargreaves et al, 2018). Yet, since 2012 when numbers peaked at 20,343 there has been a steady decline, and as of 31st March 2018 there were 11,690 special constables in England and Wales (Home Office, 2018). Reductions in numbers may be attributed in part to those transitioning from special to police officer given a key motivational driver to join the special constabulary is as a pathway into the regulars (Pepper, 2014), yet turnover rates of specials leaving to join the regulars is inconsistent and numbers tend to be low (Hieke, 2018). As the disparity between long and short-term volunteering in this role

is intrinsically linked to motivation, investing in individuals with a long-term career commitment to being a special constable is a desirable goal for police forces (Callender et al, 2018).

Developing a richer understanding of the relationship between motivation, recruitment and commitment is therefore imperative given the implications for attrition and turnover.

Drawing on interview data from nineteen special constables volunteering within two constabularies in England and Wales, this paper captures a unique and original perspective largely absent from discussion around motivation. The data speaks to an important gap in existing knowledge about how and why orientations to volunteering can change over the duration of a special constables' service. Police officers are known to experience re-orientations during their careers (Reiner, 1978), and move between formative and secondary job stages with the latter representing their long-term commitment to pursue a career in policing (McElroy et al, 1999). Exploring second stage career trajectories of police officers reveals much about the repositioning of career paths, objective and subjective rewards and goals, job satisfaction (Ramshaw, 2013), and retention (Cooper and Ingram, 2004). While special constables do share similar altruistic motivations as police officers for engaging in police work and we note crossovers in the importance of providing variety and challenging work as a means of maintaining motivation, the central intention of this paper is not to draw comparisons in motivation between police officers and special constables. Indeed, their status as 'paid employee' and 'unpaid volunteer' renders this a moot point. Rather, this paper seeks to develop understanding of how and in what ways occupational experiences shape special constables' motivations, reorientations, and continued commitment to volunteer. The paper opens with discussion around volunteering and motivation, before summarising the methodology and

unpacking key findings organised around themes of becoming and being a special constable, reorientations and volunteer career paths, satisfaction, value, and professional development.

Volunteering and Motivation

Understanding why people give their time to participate in work for which there is no financial reward underpins much research on volunteering. Most people volunteer as a result of egoist or altruist motives, or a combination of both, yet retaining their unpaid services depends upon conditions inherent to the individual as well as socio-economic factors external to the act of volunteering. Volunteer motives can, therefore, change over time and the reason a person remains committed to the act of volunteering often differs from that which brought them into the unpaid role. Traditional views of volunteer work as a leisure pursuit marginalised empirical studies of volunteerism, however as the giving of time without expectation of financial reward now plays an integral role within many organisational settings, research in the field has grown (Rochester, 2006). The two-factor model that emerged in the 1980s (Gillespie and King, 1985), drawing upon the distinction between altruistic and egoistic motives, was developed further in the 1990s through psychological and sociological approaches.

Psychological theories of functional analysis connect motive with behaviour in an attempt to explain the desire individuals have to meet particular psychological needs (Clary and Snyder, 1999). Psychological approaches assist in identifying different motives, yet offer little or no opportunity to consider how and why motivation may change over time (Hieke, 2018). In contrast, sociological approaches disregard motivational behaviour as a way of satisfying need, and instead see motivation as individual explanations of how people make sense of their decision

to volunteer (Rochester et al, 2012). While much work around the motivation of special constables is grounded in both approaches, of particular interest to this paper is sociological work stemming from the premise that motivation can be best understood by seeking individual explanations underpinning initial and continuing reasons to volunteer as a special constable. Sociological perspectives capture the meaning volunteers place on social interactions, behaviours, and events encountered on their volunteering journey, demonstrating how and why motivation to volunteer can change over time (Hieke, 2018).

Motivation and Volunteering as a Special Constable

Exploring why people give up their time to work with no financial incentive for the special constabulary is important on a number of levels, not least of which are issues of recruitment, retention, management, and deployment. Recognising countless reasons attributed to motivation (Hieke, 2018) it is possible to identify commonalities and what is particularly striking about volunteer special constables is their overwhelming interest in the police organisation, policing, and police work (Gill, 1986, Gill and Mawby, 1990b, Gaston and Alexander, 2001, IPSCJ, 2014, Bullock and Leeney, 2016). While pull factors to volunteer in this role encompass both instrumental and non-instrumental reasoning, given the tendency for volunteers to use a mix of altruism and egoism when articulating the motivational reasoning underpinning their volunteering (Rochester et al, 2012), overlap is common and motivations can apply concurrently (Bullock and Leeney, 2016).

Motivation is further compounded by notable differences underpinning the desire to volunteer between young people viewing the special constable role as a way to progress into the regular

police, and older respondents looking for ways to fill their time and give back to the community (Gaston and Alexander, 2001.) A recent national survey of special constables by Callender et al (2018) identifies key differences in motivations by age and length of service. For instance, recent recruitment trends suggest the majority of those joining the specials are young, motivated by securing paid employment in the police service, and crucially, were unlikely to see themselves volunteering beyond three years. In contrast, those whose volunteerism was driven by self-oriented motivations were likely to have longer lengths of service.

Joining the specials as a route to the regulars has been explicitly encouraged during periods of police officer recruitment freezes since they provide a pool of ready-made, trained recruits (Pepper, 2014). Yet in reality very few realise this goal and are thought to leave the specials when their aspiration to become police officers fail to reach fruition, or when they see recruits with no experience of police work securing positions over them (Gaston and Alexander, 2001). While the wider police service undoubtedly benefits from recruiting experienced specials, evidence of high turnover rates as a result of movement from special to regular, is inconclusive (Whittle, 2018). Emphasising the special constable role as a stepping-stone to becoming a regular officer undermines the organisational value attached to career-specials invested in the role for the longer term, reduces continuity of experienced specials, and thus the potential contribution of the special constabulary in supporting the wider police service. Hence, as stressed by Callender et al (2018), older specials represent greater ‘value for money’ with regard to the experience and competence they accumulate, and ultimately the contribution they make *to* policing *as* an unpaid volunteer.

Differences between motivation and age of volunteer also raise issues around volunteers' expectations of the role. Egoistic specials joining to transition to the regulars may harbor unrealistic expectations of the role as a route to becoming a police officer that cannot be met. When applications to the regular police are unsuccessful, satisfaction, sense of value, and levels of commitment can diminish (Gaston and Alexander, 2001), leading to reduced length of service compared to peers joining for alternative egoistic reasons (Whittle, 2018). Yet, the relationship between realistic job expectations and organisational commitment is also significant for those who volunteer with the sole purpose of pursuing a career as a special. For the egoistic career-special, deployment and feeling a sense of value have long been important factors in maintaining enthusiasm for the role and ensuring continued commitment (Gill and Mawby, 1990b).

Gill (1986) captured the complexity of special constable's decision-making processes demonstrating how the decision to seek out volunteer work cannot always be seen as independent of the decision to join a specific agency. One can choose to volunteer as a special out of a desire to join the regular police service, or because it is the next best thing if a police officer job is unattainable, or from a keenness to help others and assist the community by tackling law and order problems. Motivational decisions are therefore instrumental as they involve elements of individual gain or reward, yet differences between egoistic reasoning, however marginal, highlight the need for individual and careful consideration. Bullock and Leeney (2016) illustrate this and demonstrate how special constables are a heterogeneous group. The authors differentiate between altruistic and the more frequently cited egoistic motivation, identifying several sub-groups amongst the egoistic category. Thus, a critical reading of extant

literature appears to accept the more complex egoistic motivation as inherent in decisions to become a special constable through the multiple incentives instrumental reasoning encompasses.

Like broader trends in volunteering, that individuals choose to volunteer with the special constabulary to fulfill egoistic rather than altruistic motivation exposes a rationale for doing unpaid work that is intrinsically fueled by the pursuit of specific outcomes (Whittle, 2018). That failure to achieve a desired result can lead to a withdrawal from volunteering alludes to a mismatch between volunteer expectations and reality (Bullock and Leeney, 2016), and the need to develop a deeper understanding of motivation and the factors conducive to a sustained commitment to volunteer with the special constabulary.

Unpacking an individual's decision to volunteer as a special constable beyond altruism to concentrate more specifically on variations in egoistic perspectives makes it possible to construct a framework from which motivational decision making can be better understood in a way that is beneficial to recruitment and retention. Moving discussion beyond somewhat deterministic accounts of egoistic variants, and resultant mismatched expectations, allows us to consider how and why a sustained commitment to volunteer develops. Gill (1986) recognised this and his work introduced the possibility that volunteer orientations change over time and are bound up in issues of commitment to the organisation and one's role within. Research around motivation, decision making, and career paths is evident in relation to police officers (Ramshaw, 2013). Yet, there is a lack of empirically driven qualitative research that considers how situated occupational experiences impact upon special constable satisfaction, commitment, and motivation to the role.

In times of global recession government reductions in public spending heighten pressure upon organisations to develop policies and practices to support volunteer workers, encourage retention, and secure prolonged commitment through an experience of volunteer work that is rewarding (Alfes et al, 2017). Broader literature around volunteering suggest motivation and commitment can be fueled and sustained by intrinsic rewards including enjoyment derived from doing the work and being in the role (Allen and Shaw, 2009), seeing how the fruits of one's unpaid labour make a difference to others, and receiving thanks and recognition for unpaid work (Fallon and Rice, 2015). Alfes et al (2017) identify three specific categories to commitment; the tasks volunteers undertake, the organisational support they receive, and the extent to which they feel involved in the organisation for which they volunteer. In relation to the special constabulary, Callender et al (2018) also emphasise the importance of quality of experience in supporting morale, retention and longevity of volunteers. Understanding volunteer motivation is central to appreciating what unpaid workers seek to achieve in terms of satisfaction, enjoyment, perceived contribution to the wider organisation, and valued intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. There is much scope to consider these points in the context of the special constable.

Methodology

Existing studies on the special constabulary are predominantly quantitative, most often involving survey research (Whittle, 2014, Bullock and Leeney, 2016, Callender et al, 2018). Within the context of a limited body of literature, these studies, whilst valuable in highlighting pertinent issues with regards to recruitment, deployment and retention, are unable to examine or situate the perspectives and experiences of special constables within the occupational or organisational environment. Adopting a qualitative methodology was central to our study to document, capture,

and explore the shared experiences of men and women who volunteer as specials. Retaining a qualitative focus and generating rich in-depth data permits an understanding of what it meant, and what it means to be, an unpaid volunteer special with lived experiences of ‘doing’ police work. New empirical data was generated through nineteen semi-structured interviews with serving special constables from two police forces in England and Wales. Time and funding constraints meant only two forces were approached to take part in the study, both of which were selected based on authors’ existing connections. As small provincial forces they had comparable levels of police officer service strength and similar numbers of special constables. Participants were selected using a snowball sampling framework. Information about the study was circulated via each police force special constabulary intranet, encouraging respondents to contact the authors. Ten respondents volunteered with Force B, 2 females and 8 males, and nine with Force A, 4 females and 5 males. Collectively respondents’ occupations included students, social workers, housing officers, painter and decorators, offshore workers, solicitors, quantity surveyors, teachers, retail managers, company directors, and finance sector workers. Digitally recorded interviews were conducted between 2015-2016 in police stations and university buildings, lasting approximately one hour, and thematically structured around motivation and situated occupational experiences. To protect participant anonymity interview extracts are numbered and a prefix of A or B identifies the force. When reading the findings, it is important to acknowledge the study’s limitations. The small number of participants from each force do not permit generalisations to be made from findings presented in the paper. Rather, findings should be understood and interpreted as exploratory, formative, and a basis for further qualitative research around the issues raised for discussion.

Becoming and Being a Special Constable

Echoing earlier studies drawing attention to the inextricable link between motivation and pursuit of specific volunteer organisations, participants' motivation to volunteer as special constables was fueled by a strong desire to 'do' policing. The dichotomy expressed in existing research between 'stepping-stone' and 'careerist' motivation were salient factors in becoming and being a special.

Stepping-Stone Specials

Hoping to increase their prospects of securing paid employment, eight participants joined the special constabulary anticipating it to serve as a stepping-stone into the regular police service. Their motivation to volunteer was intrinsically bound up in aspirations to become a police officer:

I'll get to the point, it's a foot in the door for me. That's the sole purpose for me, it's to get experience and a foot in the door to get into the regular forces...that's the reason why I do it (B5).

Discussion moved between altruistic reasoning, largely underpinned by a desire to give back to the community, and egoistic optimism that working as a special would boost their chance of success upon application and interview for the regulars. Rather than express a desire to do voluntary work, participants were, in effect, talking about their motivation to become a police officer:

Well deep down I've always wanted to be a police officer, so joining the specials is just another step on the ladder. It didn't bother me that it was going to be for free or it was voluntary. And it's the same reason I want to be a police officer, because I want to be part of that team who helps people when they are in need...It's just the same reasons as being a normal police officer (A3).

This group volunteered to gain skills and experience while simultaneously applying to join the regular police service. For them, volunteering was a short-term objective, a means to an end. Egoistically motivated special constables have traditionally presented the special constabulary with problems around retention and securing a return on investment given the distinct possibility they will leave to join the regulars or leave altogether if applications are unsuccessful. Stepping-stone specials add value to the wider police service if they become police officers, yet their short-term perceptions of volunteering raise issues around length of service as a volunteer and value for money.

Career-Specials

In contrast, eleven participants did not become special constables with aspirations to join the regular police service. Instead, they volunteered to give something back to the community and do something worthwhile:

I'm someone who likes to involve myself in extracurricular activities ...do something, give something back ... I'm very much a career-special. I have no intentions of joining the regular

force. I'm there to volunteer and to enjoy volunteering. I've always said the day that I stop enjoying it will be the day I would hand the warrant card back and leave (A6).

In addition to altruistic motivation, volunteering as a Special Constable for a number of officers engaged in this study satisfied a personal goal to work in a policing role. Doing policing was an ambition that had never been fulfilled either due to unsuccessful applications to join the police service or a failure to pursue long-standing career aspirations to be a police officer. However, ultimately, it was apparent that a paid career in policing was not under consideration as it was no longer economically viable even though their motivation to engage in a policing role in the organisation remained. For some, their current employment was simply too well paid to consider changing career direction. For others, an unsuccessful application to join the regular police meant pursuing an alternative career and thoughts about reapplying for a police officer post became untenable once a financially comfortable and secure stage had been reached in the second-choice career:

If I'm being honest the difference between salaries in my day job and the police would make [leaving current job to become a police officer] extremely difficult ... [being a special constable] allows me to have the best of both worlds. The full-time job I enjoy, part-time job I enjoy (B10).

My aim was to join the police, and I applied ... didn't get in and they advised me to apply again but I didn't at the time, and I got various other jobs ... I applied again for the regulars... and again didn't get in. And then I just decided to give it up as a bad job and applied for the

Specials instead ...The trouble is I earn too much now...The wage drop would be absolutely huge. It's not just a little bit that you could suck up, it's really not (A8).

I can't afford it. It's as simple as that. I can't afford to drop down to 19, 20 grand a year (B1).

Not dissimilar to the stepping-stone special, the career-special contextualises motivation for this unpaid policing role in altruistic *and* egoistic terms. In contrast to their stepping-stone counterparts, the career-special reinforces the perception of adding value to the organisation through a long-term sustainable commitment to volunteering, and in doing so reinforces their desirability as the preferred recruitment option for special constabularies (Callender et al, 2018).

In addition to these dualistic pathways the qualitative narratives moved beyond traditional egoistic and altruistic standpoints revealing ongoing decision-making processes occurring in post. Data yielded evidence of a transitioning phase, a repositioning of self over time, particularly, but not exclusively, from stepping-stone to careerist volunteer. This motivational shift occurs at a specific stage in the volunteers' journey; a turning point where becoming a police officer is no longer an option, or a desire, yet the commitment to working as a special constable does not wane, thereby leading to reorientation. Conversely findings highlighted the potential to stimulate or revive special constables' interest in joining the police service when reform or modernisation agendas present new opportunities. If it is a specific type of volunteer who chooses to become a special constable, driven by an interest in the police service and police work as opposed to a vague interest in volunteering, then issues of motivation and reorientation

are particularly important. To illustrate, the data presented below draws on examples of stepping-stone and careerist motivation to explore transitional turning points and reorientations.

Reorientations and Transitions

Understanding what draws people to this unpaid role is an important yet partial snapshot of the decision-making process in becoming and being a special constable. It has long been recognised how a person's orientations to paid employment are shaped by factors external to the workplace and the tangible experience of work (Goldthorpe et al, 1968), and that in the occupation of policing officers can undergo periods of re-orientations during their career (McElroy et al, 1999). Caless (2018), recognising the unfolding nature of volunteer motivation, notes the methodological limitations of quantitative studies that seek to understand motivation post the onset of one's volunteering journey, and the difficulty of separating initial motivation from that which is relevant to the present. As a result, that special constables can undergo a reorientation stage has been absent from discussion in this field. The qualitative approach taken in this study has allowed for consideration of this additional dimension, presented below in three vignettes, offering an approach to understanding motivation that considers how and why orientations to volunteering can change throughout the duration of one's service as a special constable.

Vignette 1: the respondent whose reorientation phase results in a transition from stepping-stone to career-special where volunteering as a special constable becomes the end in itself as opposed to a means to an end.

A5 had been a special constable for nine years having previously made two applications to join the regular police. The first, one year into their volunteering, was unsuccessful at final interview. The disappointment they experienced after the first failed attempt to join the regulars temporarily affected motivation and commitment:

A5: I stopped going out as a special for quite some time...I would probably do the minimum 16 hours a month.

I: Did it change your motivation?

A5: It did. Yeah, it was a bit of kick in the teeth. However, you then think, well do you either pack it in, or do you just get back to normal and enjoy what you were doing. So, I took it on the chin and just got back to it.

The second application eighteen months later was successful, but national recruitment to the police service had been suspended amidst austerity cuts. A5 rationalised this setback in wider political and economic factors beyond their control, accepting their time had passed:

They've [police service] just started recruiting again but with my age now... I don't think there's any chance of me making a good career of it, pension wise and things like that. I'd have to take a drop in salary, which I was prepared to do a few years ago, but not now...I've decided to stay where I am and just do this for the foreseeable future (A5).

Vignette 2: the respondent who experiences multiple re-orientations, moving between career and stepping-stone as a response to uncertain decision making around career paths.

B7 had been a special constable for eight years. Following a childhood desire to be a police officer B7 applied to the specials and the regulars simultaneously. Despite success during the early stages of the police officer recruitment process, B7 subsequently pursued a career in teaching and volunteered as a special:

I put in to [name of force] to be a regular and I got to the next stage at about 18-year-old at which point my dad's friend [who was a police officer] came around and said don't do it. Don't go into the regulars ... Go to uni, and that was what my parents always had in mind for us. So, I was destined to be a teacher...So the specials meant that I could do policing and teaching (B7).

Yet the desire to work as a police officer remained and a second application to join the police was made during B7s formative years as a teacher:

I: So, were you torn between education or teaching and policing for a while?

B7: Yes. I was a teacher for about three years and I applied to be a regular in [name of police force]. I got through the first bit, the second bit, got to the third bit [and] they knocked me back. It was a bit of a blow, but it didn't stop us from wanting to be a special, didn't demotivate us... and then I got stuck into my [teaching] career and I climbed the ladder a little bit, I earned a lot more money than I would as a police constable. So, I kind of got trapped in a way.

Vignette 3: the respondent on the cusp of a reorientation phase where a transition from career to stepping-stone saw volunteering as a special constable becoming a means to an end as opposed to the end itself.

A2 had previously applied to join the police twice, twenty years earlier, but on both occasions had been unsuccessful and pursued an alternative career path:

[being a police officer] was always what I wanted to do, career wise now with [existing job] it's a career you wouldn't walk away from, it's quite well paid and I certainly couldn't afford to start as a constable, so I just thought a special ticks lots of boxes. It satisfies that, I guess, life desire to do it. It allows me to do something in the community that's quite exciting and something that I would find...well, I do find, quite rewarding (A2).

While the financial stability of A2s existing job ruled out thoughts off reapplying to the regulars, the introduction of direct entry routes into senior positions reinvigorated a renewed interest in policing as an attractive career proposition:

I'm not going to apply for the regulars. The only reason I would probably consider doing that is if they did direct entry, which I know some forces have done. It's been massively over-subscribed, but if they were to open vacancies at chief inspector or superintendent, which tends to be where they pitch direct entry, and they were looking for someone to do a role that I felt I had the skill set for, then I would definitely look at that (A2).

Vignette 1 and **Vignette 2** challenge traditional perceptions of volunteers who view the special constable role as a stepping-stone into the police service and resign if this ambition fails to be realised. **Vignette 1** suggests age and money are turning points that keep people volunteering as a career-special to fulfil desires the day job doesn't bring. **Vignette 2** offers an example of multiple turning points fluctuating over time in response to uncertainty over career paths, ultimately shaped by financial security. The extent to which the experience of policing serves as a deterrent to the stepping-stone special's desire to transition to policing is unclear (Caless, 2018). Yet what is apparent is the very real possibility that the experience of *doing* policing and working *as* a special strengthens the determination to remain in this role, albeit as a volunteer, when thoughts of joining the police service dissipate. Despite embarking on this experience with potentially short-term aspirations of volunteering, faced with the prospect of leaving policing altogether, the unpaid volunteer role becomes the means to an end as opposed to the end in itself. In contrast **Vignette 3** highlights policy change as an influential turning point opening previously inaccessible recruitment opportunities. Current changes to recruitment practices and entry routes into policing (Ramshaw and Soppitt, 2018), including direct entry points at inspector and superintendent rank (CoP, 2018), present attractive propositions for a change of direction in terms of paid employment for some career-specials.

McElroy et al (1999) argue that once the decision to pursue a career in policing is seen as the correct occupational choice, officers' move from a trial stage to a second stage where they are likely to remain until retirement. That the vignettes' capture reorientations specials experience in post suggest the time volunteers invest in being a special constable strengthens their commitment to policing. Collectively they provide a fuller picture of pre-join and in-post decision making

that reveal much about how and in what ways these volunteer career paths unfold, and from a strategic perspective there is much to be accomplished around the retention of career-specials (Callender et al, 2018).

While the vignettes capture turning points underpinning transitional periods, and illustrate motivational reorientations, special constable's sense of value, satisfaction and commitment to the role, are also shaped by organisational factors. Our findings suggest that showing appreciation, engaging special constables in varied and adaptable deployment, and demonstrating commitment to special's continued development, are some of the ways in which the organisation can demonstrate the value attached to volunteering; better synchronise the journey of the special constable with their desired career path; and better support specials in navigating significant turning points in their motivational aspirations.

Satisfaction and Feeling Valued

Dealing with Crime and Receiving Thanks

All specials derived the greatest sense of satisfaction when engaged in a variety of tasks and when given responsibility and autonomy in decision making. Feelings of value and satisfaction derived from doing policing were unobtainable from their paid job and linked to altruistic motives to serve and protect the public:

The best bit is when you've dealt with a situation and you feel that you've dealt with it reasonably well and you've made a difference and you've helped somebody...you do feel good, and I don't get that from my day job (A7 career-special).

Reflecting the long heritage of research evidence demonstrating the value attached to crime fighting and getting results (see Manning, 1997), specials felt most valued when involved in crime control activities. Feelings of satisfaction, value, giving back, and a sense of justice were enhanced when securing definitive outcomes from their work, for example, helping affect an arrest or returning an individual to custody:

I always try and make a positive impact on people's life. That's something I take great satisfaction in doing. You lock someone up who has done something really nasty to a particular family, and they're out of circulation for a certain amount of time, it's nice (B5 stepping-stone).

Without fail I go home thinking I've made a difference...We stopped a vehicle...ran a check, no insurance...found £3,500 in cash and £5,000 in drugs...he's probably going to be locked up for two years...The force enabled us to do that, to take that action, and we did it. And that was a nice feeling. So yeah, job satisfaction can be absolutely immense, fantastic (B10 career-special).

Directly connected to the satisfaction derived from the role was a strong sense of helping the public by taking steps to improve their safety or contributing towards crime control demands. These factors potentially underpin turning points and reorientations. For instance, A4 is a stepping-stone special with four unsuccessful applications to the regulars who does not foresee

leaving the specials: *The Regulars is the goal, but I'll never give up the Specials. I'll never, because I like it too much. I am addicted to it (A4 stepping-stone).*

A4 articulates the centrality of crime control activities and enforcement in constructing special constable definitions of good police work and forging satisfaction and commitment:

They were so short...the supervision asked two of us to go over and help out, so we did. And we were getting called to everything, and I mean everything. That [distinction as a] special constable, that went away, you were dealing with emergency zeros (emergency calls for service), and things like that. And that's what I loved...The supervision were absolutely chuffed to ribbons¹ (A4 stepping-stone).

Special constables' sense of value and intrinsic motivation were enhanced when supervising officers praised or expressed confidence in their abilities, and showed their appreciation when they worked beyond their allocated shift times and proved their reliability and competence. According to Fallon and Rice (2015), receiving appreciation and support from supervisors, representative of 'symbolic payment', encourages retention and commitment of volunteers. For A4, praise, particularly when expressed in public, not only signaled acceptance from the organisation but provided validation in terms of their professionalism and abilities:

There's two sergeants...who have backed us up to the hilt, and it was one of the nicest things. I'll always remember it. We were going to a domestic again. We shouted up². The communications

¹ A phrase used in British slang for being pleased or even delighted.

² Informal term for speaking up on the radio.

operator said 'are specials alright going to this domestic?' ...I was just about to say I believe so, and this sergeant piped up and said I know these officers and they're both very competent (A4 stepping-stone).

Pepper (2014) suggests that when ambitions to become a police officer dominate initial motivation, such aspirations strengthen post recruitment and training phases. To this we would add that opportunities to contribute to crime control outcomes strengthen the pull to remain with the organisation, encouraging transitional turning points and movement from stepping-stone into a second stage of volunteering as a career-special. We also suggest that for stepping-stone specials, coming to terms with doing the job long-term as a career-special when this is the only option available, is also eased by thanks and recognition from police colleagues, reinforcing the power of intangible rewards and 'symbolic' payments.

Undertaking Mundane Duties

As amongst paid police officers, PCSOs (Cosgrove and Ramshaw, 2015), and special constables (Callender et al, 2018), satisfaction and sense of value was undermined when specials were deployed to mundane operational duties, such as scene preservation or guarding suspects and/or prisoners. Routinely deploying specials in mundane duties and in auxiliary capacities led to a loss of value and undermined integration with regular police officers:

You hear stuff coming out over the radio and then you hear things like just send a Special unit to that, don't tie up Regulars dealing with stuff like that, and you just think, really? (A2 career-special).

Utilising specials in such narrow terms concurrently led to insufficient attention given to the potentially unique and specialist contribution specials might make to operational police work, owing to their multifarious expertise and skills derived from their paid employment. Echoing the argument posed by Caless (2018), all participants agreed that their sense of value and morale could be significantly enhanced if supervising officers had a greater understanding of their skill base and were able to deploy them more creatively and flexibly:

I think our biggest challenge is not enough time is spent talking to us about who we are and what we can do, and how we can help.... I think we miss a trick sometimes, and it gets brought up every so often if we have a big meeting with Regulars, and they'll say, we don't really think about what you lot do outside of work. And I said well you don't. You've got myself as a teacher, you've got solicitors...we've got all this management experience and things like that...bringing all of this experience into policing (A8 career-special).

Routinely engaging in mundane operational duties tests the commitment of any volunteer and is at odds with the crime-oriented expectations and motivations specials typically hold (Bullock and Leeney, 2016). In her study on PCSO orientations to work, Cosgrove (2016) details how habitually engaging in such activities led to frustration and loss of value for those motivated by a desire to become regular police officers. It is possible, given their shared civilian status, that this could also be the case for stepping-stone specials, and that such dissatisfaction could lead to withdrawal and resignation rather than the pursuit of a longer-term career orientation to the specials. This not to say that there is room for complacency with career-specials. Understanding

the individual special constable, their aspirations and volunteering journey, signals organisational commitment to the individual. For the career-special, driven by non-instrumental reasoning, adapting deployment to the individual and demonstrating their organisational value is centrally tied to their continued commitment to the organisation and longevity in post.

Satisfaction and Professional Development of Special Constables

Rank Structure

Except for one police force in England and Wales, special constables are supported, managed and directed through a rank structure. Having a rank structure has a range of potential benefits; it can assist with retention and continuity, improve effectiveness, help build a sense of belonging, and support motivation. However, findings revealed mixed support regarding the benefits and attraction of moving up the ranks. For the most part, progressing through the ranks for stepping-stone specials provided little appeal since they were focused on transitioning to a police officer. Yet A3, a stepping-stone special who openly stated their determination to continue as a special if applications to the regulars was unsuccessful, saw value in rank structure as an attractive opportunity for personal development and challenge in the event of that transition being blocked:

I will always want to be in the regulars...But before that happens, or if it doesn't ever happen, I do see myself as trying to go up the ranks...I would love to go up in the ranks and become sergeant, maybe even inspector one day (B3 stepping-stone).

Rank is a factor that holds appeal and potentially strengthens commitment during a transitional stage from stepping-stone to careerist. Having a rank structure was more highly valued amongst career-specials with some viewing it as an opportunity to advance their professional development or to reinvigorate motivation if the role became tiresome:

If I fast forward a few years I can see [the specials] becoming a bit mundane...that's maybe at a point where there's an opportunity to progress into a more senior position and with that comes more responsibility and the mundaneness of the role will then be countered by the fact that you've got more to do in that senior position (A2 career-special).

Vignettes one and two reached senior ranks in their second stage volunteering as career-specials, reinforcing the value of rank and opportunities for hierarchical progression in terms of encouraging retention among career-specials. However, there is an important distinction to be made in relation to motivation. Some career-specials who progressed into senior positions put themselves forward out of obligation, rather than personal aspirations for progression or perceived increase in status. These altruistically minded specials were mindful that they possessed the required skills for the role from their employment experience and felt duty-bound to support the organisation and their fellow special constables:

I wasn't really interested in this [promotion] because I've got so much going on with my family and teaching and all that. It's a massive workload. But about a month ago [two newly appointed sergeants resigned] ...I quite like [name of Inspector] as a professional... And I thought right,

what's he going to do. He's going to be in it a bit there, so I thought I'll offer my services... so it was really just to help out (B9 career-special).

Equally, some career-specials had misgivings regarding the rank structure that dissuaded them from pursuing progression opportunities, including perceptions that administrative duties attached to the role would remove them from operational duties; the role would bring too much parity with paid employment; promotion would increase strain on time and in balancing employment and family demands; and a concern that the role did not give sufficient autonomy in decision making due to the lack of seniority over regular officers. Therefore, for some career-specials the rank structure had the potential to negatively impact on, rather than enhance, enjoyment and motivation. Findings suggest the value specials attach to hierarchical progression is inconsistent and the suitability of progression for the individual special should be judged from the point of leadership and management according to individual motivations and longer-term career aspirations.

Professional Development and Specialisation

Specials are typically attached to reactive response duties or neighbourhood teams. However, forces are frequently expanding their duties and activities via specialist training, including public order, method of entry, statements and interview, and/or attachment to specialist sections, including dog handling, traffic, safeguarding³, and the mounted volunteers. Diversifying deployment in this way was welcomed by both career and stepping-stone specials, who felt such

³ Safeguarding relates to an increasingly important police responsibility to protect children and vulnerable adults from harm. Specialist divisions, including Multi-agency Safeguarding Hubs, have been established to devote resources to this priority area. For a discussion on the growing significance of vulnerability and safeguarding to policing, please see Asquith et al (2017).

opportunities enhanced their operational contribution and quality of service, and maintained interest and motivation:

In the last two years I've had so much training thrown at me and various other special constables as well that we couldn't complain... [police force] have been very, very good to me...They put me through my driving course...method of entry training...public order training (B1 career-special).

Whilst both forces made specialist training available, satisfaction at the speed with which requests were honored varied and opportunities were not limitless. Ranked special constables in particular, highlighted the importance of striking a balance between offering opportunities for professional development and ensuring volunteers meet the requirements of the role:

Everyone wants to get involved in traffic⁴, which is great, as long as you're doing your bread and butter things, you're coming out, you're meeting minimum standards, minimum hours then yes you can go and do traffic once in a blue moon (A5 career-special).

Keeping special constables interested is essential in encouraging motivation and improving retention. Whilst specialisation affords variation, the provision of opportunities was not automatically provided but subject to a judgement about the likely longevity of the volunteer and attached operational implications. Specials, particularly career-specials, expressed concern that too much investment and expansion of special constable duties distances the constabulary from

⁴ Whilst not corroborated by other Specials, Special A5 is alluding here that Specials aspire to engage in traffic enforcement and high-speed car chases associated with traffic duties.

their core common purpose, reduces their distinction with regular police officers, and advances expectations about the contribution special constables can make:

We have the same powers, but obviously we're not out as much as them so we can't do the same things because we haven't got that continuity (A8 career-special).

At the end of the day we're specials, we're not full-times. The experience, the knowledge base, isn't wholly there. There are some really good specials, but you're not a regular officer at the end of the day (B5 stepping-stone).

The desire for specialisation and engagement in crime control duties over mundane police work embedded within anticipatory expectations and motivations of police work, can support turning points and reorientations, and are conducive to encouraging longevity as a career-special. Yet the capacity to engage in work comparable to regular officers is inevitably reduced; special constables are not engaged in police work frequently enough to develop skills and local knowledge on par with regular officers, nor are they typically able to see a job through from start to finish. Expectations need to be managed carefully to avoid disillusionment and disengagement, particularly for career-specials whose motivations are not instrumental, where any specialisation of duties is considered as supplementary to, rather than a replacement for, core duties.

There are unavoidable limitations of the police volunteer due to the multiple demands on their time and limited capacity to volunteer, lack of continuity, and consequently, in some cases,

reduced policing knowledge and craft, that must be balanced with the desire to provide additional variation in training and deployment to support motivation. Ultimately a balance needs to be struck between encouraging professional development, heightening expectations of special constables, and increasing their parity with regular paid police officers, irrespective of whether this is to support future applications to become regular police officers, maintain motivation amongst career-specials, or support transitions between the two.

Discussion

The experience of work, the occupational environment, and factors external to the workplace, have long been recognised as influential in shaping workers' orientations to paid employment (Goldthorpe et al, 1968). This thinking has been used to explore ways in which workers reposition themselves within their respective organisations and has been applied to policing to reflect unfolding career paths and explore how and why police officers move between various stages of their career (Ramshaw, 2013). Adopting this approach to further understand reorientations amongst special constables is a useful framework that can ultimately aid retention. People do not drift into this volunteering role, they purposely seek it out to satisfy an inherent desire for involvement in policing and police work and embark upon their volunteering journey as a stepping-stone or career-special. Our data suggests that experiences from within the organisation have the greatest bearing on motivation, commitment, and longevity of the volunteer post recruitment.

Natural wastage from the special constabulary is inevitable, for instance when stepping-stone specials achieve their ambition to become police officers and leave to join the regulars. Yet not

all attain this goal and the vignettes outlined above suggest the police organisation can and do retain stepping-stone specials even when aspirations to become police officers are unrealised. Our data presents strong evidence to suggest forces have much to gain from developing consistent approaches to encouraging and supporting transitioning stepping-stone specials. Adopting a holistic and cohesive approach to leadership and management of specials that does not prioritise 'stepping-stone' specials over career-specials, but considers motivation as fluid and indistinct, has multiple potential benefits for the organisation. Approaching management in this way can better equip forces to support the different motivational paths of specials and retain valuable experience when turning points in motivation occur, thereby increasing retention and value for money.

The vignettes offer examples of turning points in the volunteer's journey, giving insight into how and why specials undergo reorientation phases that reinvigorate commitment to the role and reaffirm their desire to 'do' policing. The stepping-stone special enjoys the work so much that when channels for joining the regulars are blocked, motivation continues due to personal satisfaction derived from being a volunteer police officer. Their love of doing policing compensates for not getting into the regulars, they modify their aspirations accordingly and transition to volunteering as a career-special. The vignettes also illustrate how national policy changes can potentially reinvigorate the career-special's interest in joining the police service through new opportunities for direct entry at senior levels. Hence, direct entry routes into policing could exacerbate problems of retention, which also requires attention.

To encourage retention is to recognise that unpaid special constables want to enjoy their volunteering and do something interesting and challenging. Hence, their motives are not dissimilar to those of the police officer. Undertaking a variety of work in different departments is valued by police officers and regarded by some as more important than promotion (Cooper and Ingram, 2004). Lateral career moves have been found to reinvigorate a mid-career officers' enthusiasm for policing (Chan and Doran, 2009) as the opportunity for specialist work and fluidity of movement between departments can enhance job satisfaction and develop their policing careers (McElroy et al, 1999). Our findings similarly point towards the potential for volunteer commitment and motivation to be strengthened by situated experiences, demonstrating value and thanks, providing variation in deployment, and opportunities for professional development and specialist work. These extrinsic rewards are particularly important to the volunteer who gives their time for free as tangible gains including monetary benefits do not apply, and other egoistic rewards, including becoming a police officer, do not always materialise.

The narratives captured in our research imply scope for wider involvement by police organisations to retain specials and invest in long-term special constable volunteering. While there is much opportunity to support and encourage transitions from stepping-stone to career-special, of equal significance is the importance of ensuring the career-special's motivation is not taken for granted. To avoid complacency, the pressure is upon the organisation to ensure career-specials feel valued, connected, and challenged, if their commitment is to be maintained. Thus, police organisations will benefit from a greater understanding of how and why volunteer orientations can change and the ways in which organisational factors can be detrimental on motivation and satisfaction. Adopting a holistic, individualist approach to support and

management that follows special constables on their volunteering journey and matches deployment to their unique skill set, motivations and aspirations not only demonstrates organisational investment and commitment to the volunteer but increased understanding of the individual can promote more effective deployment and added value. We recognise that organisational responses to the non-tangible, subjective goals that volunteers' value is a vastly complex process, and there will always be external factors outside the control of the police organisation that impact upon volunteers' decision making, for instance family demands and paid employment. However, the rich narratives presented in our research strongly suggest significant gains can be won evaluating internal factors including deployment, integration and opportunities for professional development; factors that are firmly within the organisations control and impact upon satisfaction, motivation, and ultimately, retention.

Special constables, particularly those involved in supervising deployment and shift management, recognise that volunteers who only work at the neighbourhood or response level risk boredom and feeling undervalued, factors that potentially lead to reduced hours and resignation. Their skill set can quickly disappear if not used regularly, and their motivation can wane doing prisoner or hospital watch three shifts in a row. Introducing variety and diversity of work can enhance their volunteering experience and strengthen commitment to the role. Added benefits include greater integration with a broader range of police colleagues and departments, promoting the constables' skill set and furthering an understanding of how their contribution benefits the wider organisation.

Yet, balancing professional development with special constable capacity is neither easy nor straightforward given the multiple commitments of volunteers, dualistic motives and reorientations, and disparity of deployment between police organisations. Managing motivation, commitment and retention, involves acknowledging the need to cater for two different groups, the career-special and the stepping-stone, and finding suitable middle ground in terms of managing balanced and realistic special constable expectations. Rotating shifts across neighbourhood, traffic, response, plain clothes duties could introduce diversity and flexibility, preventing the volunteer role becoming dull while simultaneously enhancing volunteer skill set and effectiveness. Nevertheless, it is overly simplistic to suggest that either stepping-stone specials or career-specials will be better or less amenable to specialisms or progression.

Opportunity to feed into areas of core policing may hold great appeal to the stepping-stone special keen to develop a sought-after skill set and strengthen an application to join regulars, however it may equally be less appealing when their volunteering is short-term, bound up in aspirations to join the regulars. Conversely, specialisms and rank can for some career-specials be very powerful tools in facilitating commitment and longevity, but equally career-specials may feel these opportunities distance them from the role and operational duties they value.

We recognise that police organisations face difficult decisions around training and deployment compounded by the reality that there are no steadfast guarantees forces will get a return on their investment if they offer an expensive training course to the special who leaves twelve months later. Whilst this paper provides evidence that opening avenues for specialisms, rotational deployment across core areas, and maintaining a special constabulary rank structure, support motivation, there is no guarantee that these efforts will retain Specials. While additional

investment may be a big ask of police organisations, particularly in an era of fiscal poverty, it brings discussion back to the role of the volunteer. To keep people volunteering is to keep them interested, engaged and feeling valued, because this is not something they have to do. The police officer at times may not enjoy their job, or feel valued by the organisation, but they must come to work. The volunteer special constable does not. In order to retain committed specials, it is important to understand initial motivations *and* understand motivation as adaptive over the lifetime of the special, if the ways in which internal factors including deployment, supervision and professional development, are to foster a sense of value, satisfaction, and long-term commitment.

Conclusion

While the traditional dichotomy of stepping-stone and careerist holds much relevance, our findings serve as reminder not to lose sight of special constables as a heterogeneous group (Bullock and Leeney, 2016), whose motivations are subject to change throughout their volunteering journey. Police organisations exploring the potential to achieve desirable outcomes related to retention amongst specials would benefit from the rich narratives qualitative research can provide to deepen their understanding of the individual volunteer, their motives, skills, policing goals, aspirations, and reorientations. Research of this kind could further knowledge of the complex relationship between reward and motivation, and the blend of intrinsic and extrinsic incentives volunteers' value and strive to experience from their unpaid labor. We suggest there is much value in police organisations engaging proactively in support and management strategies that appeal to and match individual goals and aspirations of special constable volunteers including, but not limited to, possibilities for rank progression, potential to engage in specialist

work, and opportunities to apply individuals' existing skill set in police settings. Even the most highly motivated volunteer will withdraw if factors in their personal life become too challenging or demanding. Police forces can however capitalise on factors within their control, that serve as powerful tools in encouraging commitment and longevity. Understanding motivations at the point of recruitment is important in terms of designing models of support, but motivation and commitment are fluid, shaped by in-post organisational experiences. Sustaining motivation, commitment, and encouraging retention, requires effective management and support from within the special constabulary, and the wider police force, at key stages throughout the volunteers' journey.

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