Glimpsing the alternative: An anthropological exploration of the GAA as an alternative organisation

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Submitted for the degree of PhD to the

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INSTITIÚID TEICNEOLAÍOCHTA PHORT LÁIRGE

Dedication

You miss every one of the shots you do not take. My family inspire me to attempt every

single one.

Quotes

Several broken sticks, two broken heads, and two bruised fingers were part of the afternoon's play, for hurling, the Irish national game is the fastest and probably the most dangerous of sports. It is a combination of hockey, football, golf, baseball, battle and sudden death. It was a real Irish game.

Daily Mail - Reporting on a match held in London (1921)

The miracle of the GAA is that it works so well despite itself. Paranoia, self-doubt, trenchant conservatism, fear of outside sports and veneration of the past are all key parts of the GAA psyche. In order to love the GAA, you have to swallow these faults whole.

Keith Duggan - The Irish Times (2002)

Abstract

We are told *'There Is No Alternative'*. Yet in my life I cannot see the object of my business school education, the black hole from which we cannot seem to escape - the hard-nosed, ruthlessly commercial, amoral joint stock company. Perhaps that is because I am a GAA person, surrounded by an institution since birth that has inhabited my way of thinking about organised life. My thesis sets out to explore the organisation that I am a part of, tethered too, fêted in; and to reconcile this with what I have learned in the business school.

As a process I undertook storytelling interviews with club leaders, hired-hand professional experts and the organisations Presidents and leaders to enrich, denaturalise, substantiate my own deeply held convictions about the organisation. This process of journeying into my own organisation was inspired by a phenomenological ontology and an epistemology of social constructionism, which aspires to give an uninterrupted voice to the participants understanding of their time and experiences. It is from this lived experience of organisation life that I build out an understanding of the unique crags of being in the GAA.

This sets the scene for a discussion, a show down of sorts, between those from within the business school calling and scouring the earth for alternative ways of organising. This work aspires to contribute to that discourse with a report from strangers in a strange country of another way of doing things, one with a unique approach to kith, kin, blood, care, harmony, leadership and conflict. In this way, I build up a vision of another way of doing things, one that is hopefully of normative and inspiration use to those seeking alternatives.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that, except where duly acknowledged and referenced, this work is entirely

my own and has not been submitted for any other degree or qualification at Waterford

Institute of Technology, or any other Institution.

Noel Connors

Acknowledgements

Mother Teresa once said "I alone cannot change the world, but I can cast a stone across the water to create many ripples". A pertinent reality of community driven organisations, some take on the role of the stone thrower. Others absorb the positive effects. I sense, we exist as a tightly interwoven piece of fabric, otherwise known as social realities. These connections hold the fabric as one, and are representative of our lived collective experiences. Comparable to the PhD process, never achieved alone, nor is it possible without the ripples of direction, support and advice. However, I, the stone, or creator of thus ripples takes on the sole responsibility of leading the research in the form of this thesis. To mention all of these ripples, or more suitable influencers would be merely impossible. Yet there are some whose input requires an acknowledgement for their contribution. Nonetheless, this somewhat superficial gesture does not come close to repay their generosity or timely effort afforded to me throughout this research process.

To my family first, who have been the foundation and scaffolding through each phase of my development, to my parents Noel and Susan and brother Thomas you have made all things possible. Your continued encouragement and sacrifices have inspired and shaped me into the individual I have grown into. For this I am eternally grateful.

To Dr Ray Griffin, your supervision has been nothing short of exceptional. A relentless source of direction, professionalism and friendship, for this I am deeply and sincerely indebted. Indeed, I count myself extremely fortunate to have had the opportunity to work closely with, and firmly believe without your presents this process would have been close to impossible.

To end with the person who has been there since my earliest steps in academia is possibly the most fitting. Through our undergraduate and postgraduate years together we generated a bond that was inseparable. You soon became the most important person in my life. I am grateful for your selflessness and constant empathy year on year. Further your continuous ability to generate an endless flow of energy that created plans outside of this research bubble. I sense your competitiveness and drive inspired me to become the person I have developed into. Siobhan you are my inspiration and I thank you.

With thanks

Acknowledgements Image: I was asked to represent Waterford for the 2017 championship launch

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Glossary of Terms

Alternative organisation - organisations are understood in opposition to the familiar, traditional, mainstream, predominant, or hegemonic institutional arrangements. Frequently, this means organisations that are less hierarchical, less bureaucratic, and more attuned to human and environmental needs than the well-known players in any of the three major sectors: private, public and non-profit (Cheney, 2014).

Bureaucracy - a system for controlling or managing a country, company, or organisation that is operated by a large number of officials employed to follow rules carefully (Cambridge Dictionary).

Bureaucratic - relating to a system of controlling or managing a country, company, or organisation that is operated by a large number of officials (Cambridge Dictionary).

Care - the provision of what is necessary for the health, welfare, maintenance, and protection of someone or something (Oxford Dictionaries).

Deconstruction - a philosophical or critical method which asserts that meanings, metaphysical constructs, and hierarchical oppositions (as between key terms in a philosophical or literary work) are always rendered unstable by their dependence on ultimately arbitrary signifiers; also: an instance of the use of this method (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

Emotion - a feeling such as happiness, love, fear, anger, or hatred, which can be caused by the situation that you are in or the people you are with (Collins English Dictionary).

Favouritism - the practice of giving unfair preferential treatment to one person or group at the expense of another (Oxford Dictionaries).

Husbandry - the control or judicious use of resources (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

Isomorphism - similarity in organisms of different ancestry resulting from convergence (Merriam-Webster Dictionary).

Modern - designed and made using the most recent ideas and methods (Cambridge Dictionary).

Narrative - a story that connects and explains a carefully selected set of supposedly true events, experiences, or the like, intended to support a particular viewpoint (Collins English Dictionary).

Nepotism - the act of using your power or influence to get good jobs or unfair advantages for members of your own family (Cambridge Dictionary).

Organisation - a social unit of people that is structured and managed to meet a need or to pursue collective goals. Organisations have a management structure that determines relationships between the different activities and the members, and subdivides and assigns roles, responsibilities, and authority to carry out different tasks (Business Dictionary).

Premodern - of the period before the modern era, or in other words pre-industrial society; which refers to social attributes and forms of political and cultural organisation that were prevalent before the advent of the Industrial Revolution, which occurred from 1750 to 1850 (UK Essays).

Purpose - the reason for which something is done or created or for which something exists (Oxford Dictionaries).

Story - a description, either true or imagined, of a connected series of events (Cambridge Dictionary).

Storytelling - the act and skills of presenting stories and tales (Oxford Dictionaries).

Telos - an ultimate object or aim (Oxford Dictionaries).

The GAA - is an Irish and international amateur sporting and cultural organisation, focused primarily on promoting Gaelic games, which include the traditional Irish sports of Hurling, Camogie, Gaelic Football, Handball and Rounders'. The association also promotes Irish music and dance, and the Irish language (The GAA).

A Religious Occasion

Brendan Kennelly (describing All-Ireland Final day)

I was there for a purpose, not a lark.

I shall long remember.

That Sunday afternoon, one mild September,

Standing with 89,374 Catholics in Croke Park.

Hearing the Artane Boys' Band play with verve and spark.

The National Anthem and *Faith of Our Fathers*.

The Christian faces of the spectators.

Were proof of the nard spiritual work.

That goes to make true lovers of sport.

I was part of that crowd, one with electric feeling.

That turns a rigid stranger into an instant brother.

It was, dare I say it, a religious occasion.

The ball was thrown in and those two great teams.

Proceeded to kick the shit out of each other.

A Religious Occasion Image: Sean Purcell the Galway Team parade before the 1958 All-Ireland Football Final

Part one

Chapter One
Introduction

Image 1: Hayes Hotel Thurles where the GAA was founded

1.0 Introduction to the study

As an organisation the Gaelic Athletic Association or better known as the GAA is an organisation like no other. An organisation that is inconsistent with our times as it dances to a different rhythm to the well-established system of contemporary organisations, which for the most part are built on rationale thought and 'capitalocentric' ideals. Indeed, further supported by the ever-increasing demands of legitimacy and bureaucracy. Instead, the GAA is assembled on the ethos of family principles, care for place and community; and love for all things GAA. Despite its difference, it contains similar principles to other organisations, like Mondragon Cooperative Corporation, The Green Bay Packers, The AA before demutualisation, John Lewis Partnership, Barcelona Football club, Juventus Football Club - all of which are deeply rooted in culture and clan like rituals. So, as an organisation, the GAA may seem mythological or folkloric – but the GAA is real, it is operating – in fact it is thriving.

The GAA is a volunteer, community led sports organisation of great social, educational, commercial, sporting and symbolic significance to Irish life. The story the organisation tells of its own establishment in Established in 1884, against a backdrop to the decrease in standards of indigenous Irish sports (Hurling, Camogie, Gaelic Football, Handball and Rounder's), primarily a result of British rule. The origins of the GAA lie in a political desire to substantiating a distinct identity from Britain, to offer a native, indigenous Irish sporting alternative to the empire sports of rugby, hockey, cricket and soccer. In this way, the GAA is meshed in the project of creating Ireland, perhaps this is no different to way sport and nationhood mix- from the ping-pong diplomacy of Nixon and Mao, the Velvet revolution starting in Sparta Prague's grounds, to Hitler's crafting of the 1936 Olympics, the murky competition to host Olympics and World Cups, to the sport boycott of Apartheid South Africa, the black power salute and contemporary sporting excellence funding. Organised sport is always political, and the GAA is rooted in creating Ireland and Irishness; and since its foundation the organisation has followed and at times led the contours of the national project. So it is a storied organisational form, with a long institutional memory, which bolsters a unique intra-organisation, hierarchical-heterarchical structure, with multiple levels of integration and connections.

Across the 2,500 affiliated clubs, which constitutes the GAA, there is a wide and intriguing set of organisational forms. The uniformity of the overall organisation belies a huge amount

of innovation and diversity. What's more, these clubs are innately thrifty, low-resourced, which operate in low resourced environments. Yet they tend to succeed in building tremendous commitment, motivation, capability, passion and sustainability as part of on-going operations. In doing so, the GAA as an organisation maintains huge organisational flexibility and the people that make this all possible are offered little material rewards for their implausible obligation to club and community.

And so as an organisation, the GAA is of tremendous interest to organisation studies due to its autodidactic organisational and leadership practices; practices that have generated robust, sustained and successful organisational practices outside of traditional organisational principles. Despite the organisational uniqueness and the integral role the organisation plays in everyday life for many Irish people (98,906 registered members aged 8-12 in 2015), we know very little about the organisational happenings beyond the playing of games. Particularly, the GAA's organisational and leadership practices; and so, this work aspires to address this by listening and making sense of the people who play an integral role within the club through their own personal experiences.

Image 2 & 3: The GAA crests of Ireland, and the club crests in Tyrone

Whilst sporting organisations are a well-established field of business and sociology studies, surprisingly little work has been done on examining what the study of these organisations hold for mainstream organisation studies. It appears that volunteer sports clubs have

resolved many of the paradoxes that other organisations struggle with. So, sporting clubs often have an ebb-and-flow, collapsing and reviving over the course of time, whilst maintaining a stable and routine identity. Considering broader organisational discourses on flexibilisation and organisational precarity it appears we have much to learn from GAA club-level practices. Underpinning this are the organisational and leadership principles at club level.

Although the overarching aim of this research is to develop new and novel ideas, which will contribute to theory and practice - a broader aspiration of this work is to draw attention to the GAA as an organisation to study. So, this research wishes to shine light on the inner world of the GAA club and highlight its method to organisation, in this way understand how the organisation has become so central and embedded in Irish life.

1.1 Emergence of work

The research emerged from a five year assault from a business school, where everything and every organisation was born out of rationalised, legitimised, modernised, answerable and measurable thought. Perhaps these are the practices of our time, as the market has increasingly grasped most organisations. That been said, such talk of inhumanity and rationality does not chime with the organisation of the club. In fact, these modern practices seem to be in complete contrast to how the club works. One built on husbandry, nepotism and favouritism with little regard for contemporary processes. And it seems there is a tendency to think there is only one show in town, one correct way to organise and one purpose for organisations – creation on the basis of maximising the return for stakeholders. Indeed this is a single minded line of thought, which tends to disregards the social and human aspects of the organisation; and it is for that reason that this research looks at the people who are pivotal to the clubs survival (the club leaders), taking time to listen to their personal histories and experiences of club life. From their stories, it has led this research to explore the alternative organising nature of the GAA and how leadership here is communal and different.

A significant trawl through academic databases and journals suggest that the GAA is relatively unexplored by outsiders, unexplored by the academy. I was surprised that using the search term "GAA" or "Gaelic Athletic Association" in business, sports business, culture,

management and leadership with use of the key words turns up almost nothing, and nothing of note that explored its organisation. One notable exception is the work of John Connolly and Paddy Dolan was a series of papers in 2010-2013 who explored the GAA from a sociological and historical perspective in an Eliasian inspired figuration analysis. They note in their work that the GAA has not been explored despite its obvious attractions. However, the GAA itself is a considerably more reflective and there is significant on-going research work on sports issues of health, fitness, recovery, nutrition, there is also a rich steam of general writing and commentary on all aspects of GAA life- this work captures something of this vast tract of literature. Despite all this, the GAA has not been explored as an alternative organisations, nor have its organisational life been explored sociologically or anthropologically, and it is into this gap that this work fits.

Taking stock and listening to these club people offers a glimpse into the ways of the club given their years of devotion. Such people witness first-hand the highs and lows, its toils and how it operates through the ebb-and-flow of sporting life. These stories are based on their own personal narrative, of how they started in the club and where they find themselves today.

The interviews, twenty six in total, once deconstructed offered a glance at how the clubs organisation operates. How it has inspired nearly one million members – Ireland and beyond to fill in membership forms each year; and how the family and their close networks sustain clubs.

Image 4: Donegal Footballer and 2012 All-Ireland Champion Mark McHugh embraces his father Martin McHugh

In most research projects there are research concerns. And so, given this works aspirations; combined with the lack of previous material for support or guide this was the (obvious) preliminary concern. This carried through to the adoption of a method, and after some deliberation, storytelling was adopted and embraced for its ability to capture rich and thick description of the phenomenon being studied. To circle back to the lack of material on the GAA's organisation, a deeper concern was formed on potentially damaging the organisational image - particularly an organisational form that is so symbolic to who we are as Irish people. In an attempt to steer clear of these conversations, a single narrative

inducing question which was embraced, whilst the method also supports a mode of movement away from sensitive telling's if such did occur.

Finally, and perhaps the most understandable concern was my own place, and connection to the organisation. I am an insider, I am a GAA person, I am deeply involved in a playing capacity, yet my knowledge is relatively limited when it goes beyond the playing of games. With this 'insider' track in mind, perhaps it is best to offer the reader some detail of my history within the GAA in the succeeding section.

1.2 The researcher: Noel Connors as an insider (images of the timeline)

We are all born into something, for some that may be creative families who expose their children to the wonderful world of music and dance, for others they may be a well-travelled household; experiencing the four corners of the globe. But others are less fortunate and are born into a darker world of hostility, where warfare and violence are common, accepted and a daily toil, whilst others are brought into a world of poverty and struggle for survival. However, I was born into the GAA world, a place where family extended into the community, where doors were always open and the teapot was always warm. A place where the home phone was a constant background sound, generally someone looking to arrange a match or move a fixture, or perhaps more accurately a reminder of club meetings. And so the GAA field was my playground, the heartbeat of the family and the place I spent most of my youth; and indeed my adult life.

There is a saying in the GAA – '*he was born with a Hurley in his hand*', and today little has changed, the GAA world, my world, our communal world has not moved on. Perhaps the only significant change for me is the audience, by that I mean the childhood memories of playing hurling out the back with my brother and father. But now I find myself playing in top class stadia throughout the country in front of sixty thousand and up to eighty thousand GAA diehards. In this, I am fulfilling a personal dream of representing family, friends but more so the club that fostered my love for all things GAA.

Going further and back to my claim about the GAA not moving on; for me this desire to remain true to its footings is the organisational strength. In this, we have not lost our soul, our heartbeat in pursuit of the commercial world. As the club is a place where most,

including myself find comfort and self-actualisation in spite of the material-less of the organisation; maybe that is the result of its communal nature and its extension of family. But this is what makes the GAA club special.

Indeed, this is an authentic reflection of my time on this earth, going through the underage rankings from under 12 and now playing at adult level with Waterford. But it obviously started well in advance of this with Passage East, and possibly the best example of this is through imagery that illustrates my time within the organisation – from start to now.

Images 5-11: A timeline of my place within the GAA

Taking account of this extremely personal piece, the research will continue in a similar vein; an open honest approach, which is fundamentally important considering the GAA audience that this work, is targeted at. Going further, I believe this has also impacted the style of writing and the manner in how I position myself in the research. And so, complexity of writing and not referring to myself in the third person is self-explanatory, as I am an insider, a GAA person and not taking such into account would be unfair, perhaps even foolish.

In this section, I sense I have provided a straightforward account of my devotion and place within the organisation. In spite of my long tenure within the GAA, I have little understanding of the work at administration level within the clubs. Once again, this research was born out of five years of business school rationale thought and when I compared this to my distant understanding of the clubs operations they seemed to be vastly divided.

Therefore, I set out to explore this incredibly significant organisational form and how it succeeds in the world of capitalism and commodification.

Before introducing the data, the method and the limitations of this study, I believe the role of values within the research should be presented up front. The approach I employed within this work is based on value-affirmation – value driven research, in other words, what is important to you in life (things like "family", "religion", "art") and why you value them. Perhaps it is best described in this work as 'affirmative-theory', which shows a strong affiliation with the North American 'positive organisation scholarship' group – whose main figures include Kim Cameron, Jane Dutton and Robert Quinn. President John F. Kennedy first used this notion in 1961 in order to decrease, and ultimately stop discrimination amongst others. And so, the values that animate the inquiry discussed in this section follows the data and the method embraced in this study.

1.3 Introduction to data and method

The research was conducted with a phenomenological philosophy, and so, the aspiration of the study was to uncover novel and interesting stories of the lived experiences of people working in pivotal roles within the GAA club. The twenty six storytellers work at all registers of the organisation, from people who do the mundane club tasks of cutting the grass and painting the gates; all the way up to the President. And so, the stories are representative of the wide-ranging GAA happenings, different backgrounds and experiences of club life. The telling's are then deconstructed (Morningstar, 1993; Culler, 1982), with the aim of offering a useful glimpse into the organisational principles of the club. Through the act of deconstruction themes, or more accurately restories emerge, which are considered and analysed with respect to the aim of the study.

At the beginning of the research, numerous approaches to data collection were considered. However, once the concern for understanding the clubs method to organisation emerged, accompanied by the researchers status within the organisation, rich data with thick description was required. Consequently, the use of an ethnographically orientated method became necessary. In this way, ethnography calls for the researcher to become part of the phenomena they are studying (Macionis and Plummer, 2008). The methods and

methodologies embraced for data collection and analysis are discussed in more detail in chapter two and three.

As a value-affirmation inspired study, and given my life long deep association with the GAA, it is natural to consider the challenge of researching an organisation that I have in GAA speak "an grá for", a love for.

And so, one of the obvious challenges early on in this study (and given the purpose of section 1.2) was making sure the work achieved rigor and so negotiating a form of rough-hewn objectivity was a leading concern. I therefore understood the significance of being critically detached from the organisation in many ways, whilst also trading this with my experiences and familiarity of how things work. Yet I feel I have done my best in removing as much baggage as I could, questioning the text in many, many ways with the support of deconstruction, countless discussions with my supervisor, the construction of papers and their dissemination; and the slow and painful act of transcription. All of these, I believe, de-naturalised me from the organisation and therefore allowed me to present this work in this way.

1.4 Limitations of the study

Restrictions or limits are expected and inherent in phenomenological research. As the wide-ranging data collection produces a vast quantity of information. So, not all of this information is coherent and often the researcher cannot fully examine it, nor do they have the ability to question the entirety of the data. With this in mind, areas of interest that could not be fully developed and explored are outlined in the future research section. This is an aim of phenomenological research; that is, taking an area where there is limited information; and permit future researchers to probe it in more detail.

This particular research is restricted to an individual organisational form, which is broad ranging, and so this risks giving a tapered and singular interpretation of the data; which may not be reflective of all club types and its variations. However, over the time that I have presented this research, particularly to people who are involved within a club or the broader GAA community, such have confirmed that the overall method to organisation is aligned to

the claims of the study. As the GAA has developed and expanded over time, to hear the voices of all the clubs in the organisation would be time consuming but also difficult.

The research on the organisation from an organisational perspective is limited, so, there is little guide or support to assess the work, compare it to other findings but also examine what areas require attention. Therefore, it was envisaged at the beginning of the study that the stories told would be conservative (in line with the organisations nature) and possibly lack the thick data required to compel the study. Going further, the participants were never asked prior to this to recall their time within the club, certainly in as much detail as this engagement. And so, the stories were not specific in nature – more so happening after happening with no start or end point.

Moving beyond the studies limits, and onto the researches relevance to the academy, the subsequent sections deliver, broadly, some of the research contributions. Indeed a clear line has been followed, from an introduction to the organisation, onto the studies emergence, succeeded by the researcher, the data and method and now onto the theorisation.

1.5 Relevance of the research: organisations and leadership

The point of departure for this research is an organisation that has not conformed to the modern ways of organising despite its size, scale and impact. An organisation that has not tried to redefine or question its practices; the GAA has sustained its purpose; its ethos of care and doing all things right for the community. And so, the purpose of the research is to explore the organisation and draw out interesting findings that address the research concerns on its method to organisation; and its leadership practices that have guided it since its establishment in 1884. So, the data and deconstruction set the scene for theorisation around the organisations unorthodox organising principles. In this way, the work contributes to on-going discourses in organisation studies on alternative organisations, leadership and family in and around organisations - taken together; an overall contribution emerges from the various theorisations.

And so, in the subsequent sections, concepts and definitions of alternative organisations, leadership and family in organisations are discussed as a backdrop to the research and its contributions. More detailed usage of these concepts are discussed in relation to the findings in chapters four, five and six, where the stories and theories emerge and are brought together.

Image 12: Michael Collins throwing in the sliotar to start a hurling game at Croke Park in 1921

Before exploring the literature that supports the development of this work; perhaps it may be beneficial for the reader, if a summary was provided to demonstrate the role that each piece of literature plays throughout this thesis and how they come together.

At its nexus, the work lives within the alternative organisational literature, a relatively new area of interest within the broad field of critical management studies (CMS) and organisation studies (OS). As the leading debates, contributors and contributions have only occupied this space within the last decade. Nonetheless, their influence has offered rich thought and discussion, which goes a considerable distance in describing the clubs organisation. The thesis also calls on other literature for support in describing how things work within the club – the work on family firms allows one to understand the values that the club possesses. Finally the study calls on the leadership discourse, to examine further, but also describe the importance of such people – in this way, attempt to capture a glimpse of their success. So, as I mentioned in the opening of this paragraph, the thesis resides within the nexus of alternative organisations, therefore the subsequent section will discuss its leading concerns.

1.6 Alternative Organisations

It is suggested that we exist in a time where commodification and the pursuit of capitalism is the only method to organisation (Patel, 2009; Williams, 2005). It is therefore believed that we are occupying a space whereby all of our engagements and interactions are 'mediated' by the market; as we find ourselves in an endless cycle of selling our labour for resources, all of which fuels the economic system (Fournier, 2013). A method that is rational but also collectively understood and anything outside of this would be absurd, perhaps even foolish.

However this 'capitalocentric' mode of thinking is not a natural force, in fact it is fashioned from a social and political process (Polanyi, 1944). With this in mind, that is the isomorphic world view (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991), alternative methods to arranging are unthinkable, possibly even ignorant or regarded as rash (Harvey, 2011; Wright, 2010). And so, this has always been the common assertion used to oust any notions outside of the modern establishment, despite claims that even the mainstream calls for innovation (Atzeni, 2012).

In spite of this mainstream dominance, there has been an increased call for work on organisations that organise in a manner that is more humane, liberal and marginalises the chase of capitalism (Vadallet and Pezé, 2017). In simpler terms, organisations understood in opposition to the familiar, traditional, mainstream, predominant, or hegemonic institutional arrangements (Cheney, 2014). And so, alternative organisations can be defined in terms of less hierarchical, less bureaucratic, and more attuned to human according to Cheney (2014). Going further, the work of Parker et al. (2014) has encouraged and championed the notion of other possibilities, whilst also inspiring others to examine further the confines of capitalism. In this descriptive and much thought out work, it is suggested that alternative organisations contain three principles - *autonomy, solidarity and responsibility*.

Image 13: Paintings of Irish Life by Martin Driscoll

Therefore we challenge the GAA as an organisation against the three principles and in this way, render it up as an alternative. A place where its aspirations are bolstered firmly to survival over materialism and winning, as participation, leadership and care are reverberated through generations of family and the GAA's organisational life – chiming with existing work on alternatives as it emphasises the importance of the people, the social and the community (Charterina et al., 2007; Cheney et al., 2014; Cheney, 2006; Laville and Glémain, 2009).

An organisation that gives people space to flourish, to be both mind and meat, to connect family and place; without a purpose of progress, process and growth; and a further case

exemplar of activities that are not colonised by the market (Gibson-Graham, 2006; Williams, 2005).

1.7 Family in and around organisations

In examining contemporary bureaucratic organisations, families, for the most part are ignored. Despite the family possessing fundamental characteristics for success - collective identity, their common values, their continued commitment to organisation, family's emotional connection to work and their desire to endure across generations, bureaucratic organisations take little account of the family in organisational studies. Aside from the slight marginal fields of family-firms (Schulze and Gedajlovic, 2010), work-life balance (Bailyn, 1997) and home working (Zedeck, 1992); the family stands distant of organisation studies.

Indeed there is always natural angst surrounding such specialised fields, particularly when family is involved. And so the common questions generally appear - what constitutes a family firm, does a firm blossom from being an entrepreneurial start-up to a family firm?, when does a firm outgrow a family?, how much family is needed for it to be a family?, is family investment/ownership sufficient or does family business require hands-on-management? That being said, Chua et al. (1999: 25) offers a robust and serviceable definition of family in business as "*business governed and/or managed with the intention to shape and pursue the vision of the business held by a dominant coalition controlled by members of the same family or a small number of families in a manner that is potentially sustainable across generations of the family or families*".

Despite this and in line with the GAA club, we negotiate the work from the opposite side; so rather than traversing organisations that are self-consciously family businesses, we investigate a mainstream organisation where the family role is mostly unrecognised. As the club is deeply connected to family and community, one that despite its vast scale stands aloof of managerialism. In this, the club is a site of family, which surrounds organisation, where strong family networks and the care for kith and kin in the and around the organisation are essential to understand its vibrancy. Going further, the families within the clubs enforce, inscribe and underwrite the organisations pursuit of perseverance, as participation, leadership, care and ethos reverberates through generations of family and the GAA's organisational life.

As noted, these sections are broad ranging; however such material provides a stable footing as we move into some of the more detailed sections. Nonetheless, to close this introductory chapter it is important to offer further clarity on the structure of this document (presented in section 1.9); and finally conclude with a concise telling in section 1.10 that ties this chapter together; which comes after the section on leadership.

Image 14: Mick Jacob, Mick Jacob Snr, and Rory Jacob in their Oulart The Ballagh club colour

1.8 Leadership

Leadership as a concept has become relatively disinteresting (Parry and Bryman, 2006), and perhaps this is a result of the lack of advancements in the academy. Yet this tired, but unsettled genre affects a world-weary style, knowingness about the lack of innovation and a certain disappointment at the ineffectuality of the taxa. And so, perhaps, Hansen, Ropo and Sauer put it best when they said, "*Leadership research has been watering down the rich phenomena of leadership*" (2007: 544).

In spite of this, it is traditional to start the study of leadership with attempts to define it. Closely followed by the claims of the concepts messiness, its variety and imprecision, the work of disassembling leadership into more manageable concepts begins. It is common, and usually noted as unsatisfactory to offer a taxa that disassembles leadership (Weber, 2009; Zaleznik, 1992; Dent et al., 2005; Rus et al., 2010) something akin to – trait approach, behavioural approach, contingency/situational, transformational and more recently post-heroic approaches (House and Aditya, 1997; Parry and Bryman, 2006; Alvesson and Spicer, 2012).

In short, despite a century long assault on disassembling leadership to incorporate its elements into the techno-rationalist management paradigm, it has not done so compellingly enough for practitioners to move on (a clear example is Joseph Rost's compilation of 221 definitions of leadership formulated during the 1900's to the late 1970's). So, it is

remarkable that we still find it useful to talk about leadership in classical terms (De Hoogh et al., 2015). And so, perhaps, there is still a space for enchantment in the shadows of leadership.

Image 15 & 16: The club's committee members announcing new developments

Therefore, the GAA clubs presents a site of leadership without much in the way of managerialism - an organisation with autodidactic practices, aloof from the contemporary, ordinary and mainstream, but one that has achieved impressive scale. A volunteer sports organisation with active members of approximately one million, in 2,500 clubs, with all the attendant international TV rights deals, star players, sponsorship, world class stadia that contemporary sports organisations have.

1.9 Structure of the document

The thesis is split into three parts. This part, part one, which contains the introduction and some scene setting; which comes before the phenomenological methodology chapter, chapter two and finally concluding part one with chapter three - on method – on stories.

Part two begins where part one ends with the vision of the GAA through its stories in chapter four. This is shadowed by the start of the works theorisation in chapter five, on alternative organisations; allowing for a deeper visit of the literature in chapter six.

Finally, part three aspires to tie the work on the previous six chapters together, and offer the works contributions to both theory and practice; whilst also discussing some future research aspirations. Figure 1 below is a concise outline of how the document is intended to be designed.
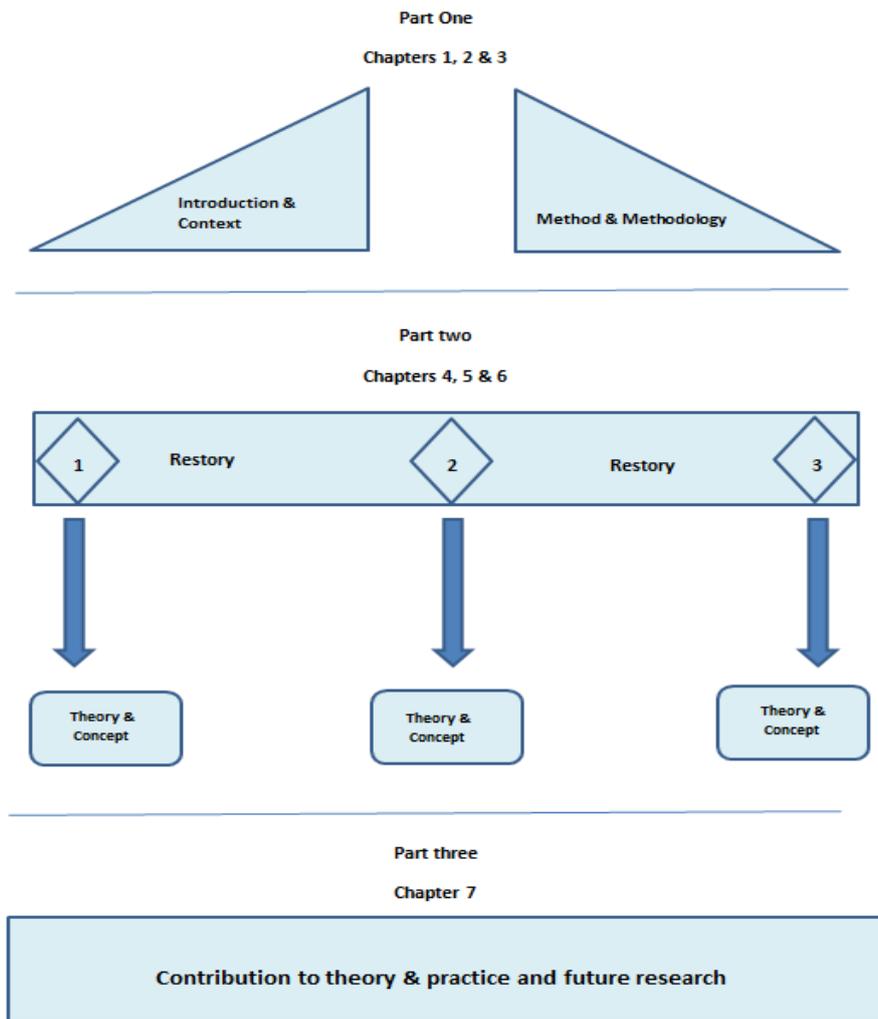
Figure 1: An outline of the research document

1.10 Conclusion

In summary the GAA as an organisation has had, and will continue to have a profound positive effect on the social, but also cultural way of life for so many people. And perhaps this is largely due to the alternativeness of club life through modes of care and love. So, it seems this way of organising is in total contradiction to what I was exposed to for five years of business school thought.

However as an organisation, the GAA appears to have been overlooked, as studies from an organisational perspective are relatively thin on the ground. In spite of this, there is much to

be gained from studying this large-scale volunteer, community led organisation, in that the clubs are innately thrifty as they operate with low resources in low resourced environments, building values that all organisations aspire to.

This chapter is designed to provide the reader with a contextual base on the organisation in which the stories in part two are told.

Chapter two
Methodology

Image 17: St Kieran's College Kilkenny celebrated its annual blessing of the hurls

2.0 How can we say we have seen an organisation?

This research is about a single organisation - the GAA. This chapter explains the research process in classical PhD terms, as part of a process of demonstrating that this work is worthy of the award, and in doing so it explores the philosophical thinking that girds the work. Organisations as a category are challenging to study, captured in Ryle's 1949 observation:

"A foreigner visiting Oxford or Cambridge for the first time is shown a number of colleges, libraries, playing fields, museums, scientific departments and administrative offices. He then asks 'But where is the University? I have seen where the members of the Colleges live, where the Registrar works, where the Scientists experiment and the rest. But I have not yet seen the University in which reside and work the members of your University.' It has then to be explained to him that the University is not another collateral institution, some ulterior counterpart to the Colleges, laboratories and offices, which he has seen. The University is just the way in which all that he has already seen is organized. When they are seen and when their co-ordination is understood, the University has been seen."

So the challenge of this chapter is to demonstrate the method by which this work is considered commanding and authoritative, and in some way gets to the essence of understanding what the GAA is. Ryle's question is essentially empirical - how can we know an organisation? He also ascribes two basis of knowing; first we can explore organisations from the ground up picking through the traces they leave behind; so looking at the socio-material practices of organising, the colleges, libraries and playing fields in Ryle's example. And secondly, by looking at the abstract level of organising, the structure and co-ordination; models that allow us to come to know an organisation. Rarely do these two ways of knowing - the practice level and the abstract level meet, nor does each capture the full essence of an organisation.

Image 18: Louis Le Brocquy

An Táin Hurling, 1969

In this line of thinking, how can we know an organisation that has close to one million members, practices four very distinctive sports (Hurling, Camogie, Gaelic Football, Handball and Rounder's), has over 2,500 clubs, is the sediment of 133 years of organising, claims a mythic and ancient heritage, has pitches and stadia in every town and city in Ireland, can fill a stadium of 82,300 people and creates its own unique eco-system of ideas, conflicts and performances. It is a deeply storied organisation, with a long institutional memory and a rich inner life, a unique hierarchical-heterarchical structure, with multiple levels of integration and connections. Its clubs are innately thrifty, and operate in low resourced environments; but assembled together the organisation commands enormous resources. It is much more than its touch points of stadia, pitches, museums and media; it is also much more than its structures of clubs, committees and administration. Going beyond Ryle, it is also much more than how these things are co-ordinated.

We profoundly experience organisations like the GAA; we just cannot adequately rationalise and talk about that experience. Missing in Ryle's insightful reflection on the challenge of seeing an organisation is that organisations have a spirit, ethos and essence that are irreducible and inexplicable, but are, in deep and profound ways experienced by people.

Image 19:Waterford manager Derek McGrath and selector Dan Shanahan after the 2017 All Ireland final defeat to Galway

The epistemological challenge is larger than the one Ryle set out. If you accept that organisations have a greater significance than their structure, the abstract set of coordination activities - how can we know an organisation, how can we say that the organisation has been seen? Many management researchers have struggled to get beyond

the practice or abstract divide in organisational research. An inspiring example is Sumantra Ghoshal's attempt to explain organisational culture and context using an idea from the olfactory imagination - the smell of the place (Ghoshal, 1948-2004; Rynes, 2007: 746).

This work rises or falls on whether readers feel that I have got to grips with understanding the GAA. It is unlikely that the epistemological challenge of organisation studies is going to be solved here, but this is the terrain in which this research project dwells.

2.1 On knowing my own organisation

Beyond the epistemological challenge of *seeing* an organisation, this work is further challenged by trying to see an organisation that I live in, that I have been involved in my whole life and that I have many attachments and entanglements with.

13 Noel Connors (Waterford)

What was it Mick Lyons said about being a full-back? "It's like being in the mafia - kill or be killed." It's much the same for corner-backs, who can play well for 65 minutes and be destroyed in five. Connors is the ultimate security man, always vigilant and tough on intruders. He restricted Alan Cadogan and Conor Whelan to three points between them in the All-Ireland semi-final and final, quite an achievement against two menacing corner boys.

Image 20: Cúl heroes trading card and Independents piece on the top 50 hurlers of 2017

"*There are these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, "Morning, boys, how's the water?" And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, "What the hell is water?"*" David Foster Wallace

I have been immersed in the GAA since before I can remember; it is a central thread of my life, the Water in Foster Wallace's allegory. I am known as a GAA man, it is who I am and it

may well be the case that my involvement in the GAA lives long after I no am longer. So unlike traditional organisational researchers who are challenged to become native in a foreign land, my challenge is bring my two worlds together, the world I live in - in the GAA and the world I have been taught in - in the business school. To achieve this, I have orchestrated an engagement with the organisation, an activity that aspires to de-naturalise my experience in the organisation, but also trades on my familiarity with it. The obvious de-naturalising act is through the gesture towards deconstruction, as a mode of analytical reflection on the data, which will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent paragraph; however there were other decisions embraced along the way to support this act. For instance, the decision to keep a distance from my own club, countless supervisory discussions, conversing with the academy both nationally and internationally; and even the simple exercise of transcription, as serve to transform this work into academic research.

As a process, the work starts with storytelling interviews with twenty six people from across the terrain of the organisation. From the voluntary person who cuts the pitches and sweeps the dressing rooms, to the paid professional administrators in Croke Park, to the Director General and the current and previous Presidents. To further de-naturalise, and attempt to detangle myself from the context, I used a formal and technical analytical method – deconstruction. This approach aspires to refuse the sense of the interviews, refuse what I find so familiar about GAA life and in that way raise questions about the ideologies, assumptions and alternatives that animate the organisation. This form of analysis unpicks the narrative impulse to impute sense, order and structure into these stories from within the GAA; and so the analysis resists the attempt to conceive of organisation as natural.

This work is not autoethnography because it is not my personal story within the GAA. I draw from storytelling interviews with people from across the GAA world to attempt to assemble an image of the whole organisation. To a greater or lesser extent, all organisational ethnographies bring the ethnographer into the organisational world, and so the concerns about autoethnographic approaches are worth exploring. Naturally enough I have a deep love for the GAA, a critical intimacy that comes from knowing an organisation all my life and spending vast amounts of my time within it. Taking a critical method like deconstruction to the text of other people's stories of GAA life is an attempt to approach the work with a

robust detachment. Usefully, this approach also overcomes the ethical challenge of consent and confidentiality that can arise in more autobiographical approaches. This work has the same challenge as any single organisation study where the researcher is entangled with the research - is this work a form of politics, activism or advocacy - what prior agenda might be at work? Having been passionate and interested enough to study the GAA for four years, will I be dispassionate and disinterested to follow the fieldwork and theory where it takes me? I have no answer for this, beyond announcing it as a live concern and hoping that sunlight is the best disinfectant.

In short, the data collection approach of talking to people from across organisational life and the analytical approach of breaking down the language that they use is an attempt to get to grips with an organisation I am immersed in. In this way, I hope to render visible the water I have been swimming in all my life.

2.2 Explaining the ontology of this work

I take the GAA for granted. The GAA exists. While many people have a different experience of the GAA, they broadly agree on what the GAA is and what it is not. The 82,300 people who came to see me (by this I mean Waterford) play in the All Ireland final on 3rd September 2017 understood that they were seeing the GAA; they recognised that they were being part of the GAA. Indeed the one million people who complete a GAA membership form each year implicitly accept the concept of what the GAA is. My point of departure for this work was epistemological - I wanted to understand the ways in which my organisational life in the GAA was so different from the one taught in the business school. So, the object of concern for this study is the GAA, an object that I can only experience from my point of view, and I expect that my viewpoint and experience share its essence with other people. This suggests the ontology of this research is best understood as phenomenology, the philosophy described by Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur amongst others.

Image 21: View from the Davin stand in Croke Park on All Ireland final day

Often forgotten in the rapid growth of empirical science is that all sciences are built on the lived world, rather than a set of objects that are distinct from a person's being. It is beyond the scope of this work to offer a genealogy of the concept of 'phenomenology' (cf. Spiegelberg, 2012 for a useful tracing of the method), suffice to say it emerges at the start of the twentieth century in response to the inadequacy of objective methods in capturing experience. Central to a phenomenological method is the focus on description and interpretation of lived experience - with an approach that is 'a rigorous science' (Bakker et al., 2012: 82). So, in the second half of this chapter the 'rigorous science' of collecting and analysing stories from across the GAA is offered in detail.

My work has the spirit and ethos of Husserl's phenomenology in that it aspires to be rigorously empirical in tracing the intentionality of consciousness, the descriptions of the structures of that consciousness and in undertaking a phenomenological reduction.

Drawing on a Platonic idea of universals and essences, and intentionality of consciousness, Husserl's phenomenology aims to establish the deeper meaning or essences of objects and idea-objects (which he termed logical principles). Drawing on Brentano's idea of intentionality as being 'directedness towards an object as a necessary feature of consciousness' (Matthews, 1996: 24-26; Spiegelberg, 2012: 107), Husserl's approach is built on the idea that we can explore human consciousness by studying its relationship to objects and ideas (Bakker et al., 2012). In rejecting internal introspective and psychological approaches, phenomenology is deeply sociological (Schütz, 1967). In taking an organisation like the GAA with such a deep meaning for people who live within it, we can use the object of the organisation, as it is conjured up in people's stories and their rich descriptions around the tropes of organised life to explore the essences of organising itself. Phenomenology is descriptive rather than explanatory, so in trying to study and describe the GAA, I attempt to

render an exact appearance (Husserl, [1970] 1999: 35), rather than offer a series of causal explanations that an introspective psychology approach would do (Husserl, [1970] 1999: 9). By bracketing and suspending the natural description (Matthews, 1996: 25), as part of a process that Husserl terms *suspension epochē* as part of the process of the *phenomenological reduction*, we glimpse the phenomenon exactly as it appears to our consciousness, we become aware of it and see it for its essences. Of course everyone sees things differently, each of us relates to objects differently (Husserl, [1970] 1999: 36-37, 45 15, 19), and so central to the phenomenological approach is sensitivity to other relations to objects. Given the epistemological challenge around 'seeing an organisation', I use phenomenology to cut this Gordian knot.

Going beyond the spirit of a Husserlian inspired phenomenological approach, as a double or further movement, I deconstructed these GAA stories. I do this to get away from my insiderness; deconstructing the stories is an attempt to see in the stories what I cannot already see, the obvious, the glossed over and the absent. So, in this convoluted way, I hope to surface other, richer ways of seeing the organisation in these stories, heightening the sensitivity to alterities, oppositions and schisms. I journeyed to deconstruction in two ways. Firstly it was a response to the first phase of interviews. They did not take on the form of neat narratives, with beginnings, middles and ends, woven with a purpose or moral; instead they were long, messy, endlessly meandering, wandering, incoherent telling of a rich, vivid world. They resisted classic sensemaking (after Weick, 1969) and were more fractured, and antenarrative (Boje, 2000). Boje, along with other storytelling/narrative researchers explores what happens before stories emerge, before the structure and coherence gets fixed, and he describes this speculation as antenarrative. The GAA stories are really a cascade of unprocessed happenings in GAA life, an impenetrable assault of factishness, devoid of time structure, conclusion and essentialisation.

So, I needed a method of considering the text of these encounters that embraced the texture of what happened in the interviews, rather than an attempt to place coherence on it. The second way I came to deconstruction is through reading - Chip Morningstar's wonderfully accessible "how to deconstruct anything", gave way to reading Boje (2001) and Culler (1982); and then ultimately Derrida (1981). While for a certain number of

phenomenology thinkers, such as Merleau-Ponty, deconstruction should be an anathema, as it refuses to back one's own intuition, and take on the world.

I feel we are always deconstructing what we sense, and that the act of deconstructing formally is similar to giving oneself time to think about opposites, fissured margins and performances - not too dissimilar to going for a long walk in the forest. This reading through up many of the attractions of the method, but suggesting them here would be disingenuous as deconstruction took hold of this work once its attractions at dealing with the bombastic assaults of story that emerged. The purpose of this deconstruction is not to surface the many voices and discords on what the GAA is, rather it is to take the universal experience of the GAA and try to essentialise it into language. In that way, I hope to say that I have seen the GAA.

2.3 The phenomenology of being a researcher

In the artifice of producing a PhD, I have to describe the ontology in such a way as to show I understand it. Whilst recognising that this document is produced as the work is nearing completion, in this section I attempt to live that ontological position by detailing how this research came into life as a social process. I have touched upon this in earlier sections, but this work lives at the nexus of my lived and embodied experience of being thrown into the GAA, being a GAA man, being a museum exhibit and the many other strange things that enmesh me with the organisation - the dance and the dancer and my academic formation in a business school. The risk with starting a description like this is the problems that emerge with synecdoche, a description of a description of a description that ultimately ends up at a one to one scale map of the world. I will try and be brief.

The work started with characters rather than concerns - I picked a supervisor and Institution and then attempted to develop a proposal. As a self-funded researcher I had an eye on producing a PhD that would launch my career, would weave the various threads of my experience, would work domestically and would finish. In dialog with my supervisor and leaders in the GAA, I generated a long-list of topics that ultimately worked up into five potential projects. All this activity and process did not change much of the original idea, and I wonder did I ever have a choice after deciding to do a PhD, one that brought my life and

my studies together, following on from a minor dissertation '*An investigation into leadership styles exhibited by inter-county managers of successful teams competing in the GAA's senior hurling championship*', and to do one with my supervisor.
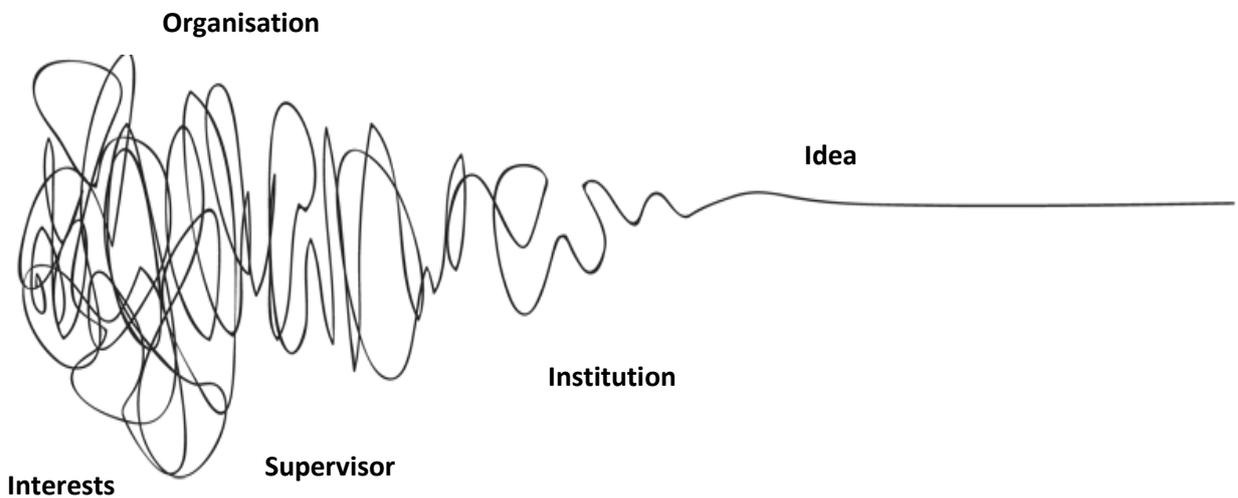
Figure 2: Assembling the research proposal
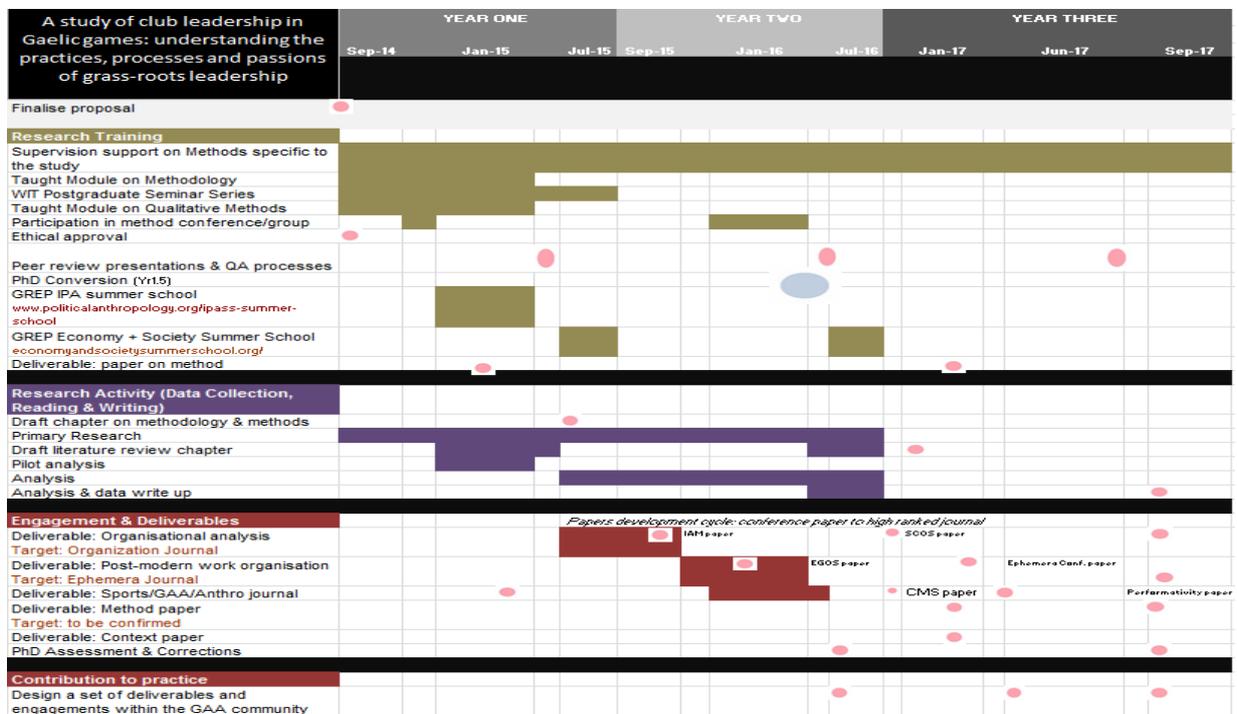
Figure 3: Gantt chart of the proposed timeline of this project

Beyond this process at the start, and in brief given that the method is presented in the subsequent sections, the majority of data through storytelling interviews was gathered over the first year. I was in the field early, which also offered me an early speculative attempt at explaining the organisation at the Anthropological Association of Ireland Conference (AAI) and also the Irish Academy of Management (IAM). As the study progressed, year two sought more advanced engagements and guide from international conferences, developing a deeper understanding of the GAA clubs organisation, which was achieved by dragging together papers. In this act of trying (and not fully succeeding) to bring together an understanding of the club into a coherent thesis, the following engagements occurred in year two and early into year three: Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism (SCOS), European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS), British Academy of Management (BAM) and Critical Management Studies (CMS).

In parallel with the academic development, the GAA has become increasingly aware and interested in my work and so there are places where I have had to account for it and find ways of explaining it before my own thoughts have coalesced. Beyond the huge numbers of informal meetings, chats and asides that I have in my everyday GAA life, some of which took on more significance than I expected, there have been a number of set-piece interactions and presentations.

Image 22: Online article

So for example, what I thought was a pithy aside with a journalist became the headline for a news story wondering would I ever finish my PhD. I include this line of activity with the aspiration of offering a full account of how the work developed. I have always had to account back to the GAA, almost as soon as I started the research, on my work. Whilst I aspired to keep these worlds separate, soon after commencing the project became reconciling my business education with my GAA life - both worlds have expected a form of accountability from me and to the other. I have spoken at the Croke Park: GAA Games

Development Conference (2015), Club Leadership Development Programme launch and the GAA Games Development Conference (2017); and from this, I was invited by the Director General to sit on a steering group to guide the formulation of a strategic plan for the GAA between 2018 and 2020.
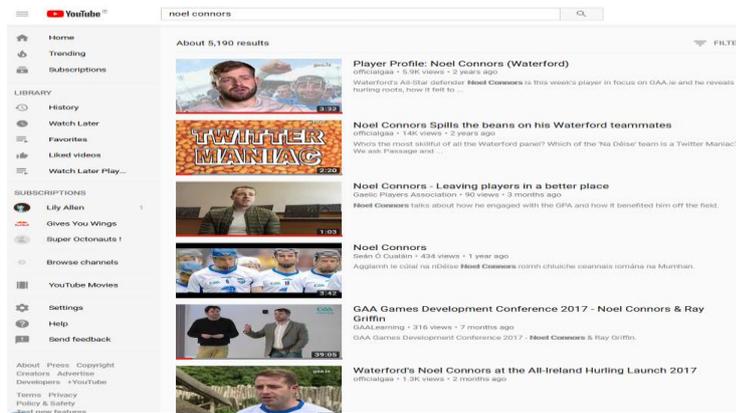
Image 23: YouTube search, which includes research outings

As this line of activity has continued, I have taken it more seriously, and in all likelihood as this work reaches towards the end I am starting to shake off my role as a watcher and describer as I move (not unproblematically) towards something akin to action learning.

Chapter three
On method - on stories

Image 24: Passage 1998 junior county champions

3.0 Introduction

It is against this backdrop that the work emerged. This section accounts for the practice of the method, and primary data collection through a set of interviews - storytelling events that are then formally deconstructed. I use story and narrative interchangeably before explaining the subtle difference that others see between these terms. Despite storytelling being mainstream in organisation studies for at least 20 years (Boje, 2000; Czarniawska, 1998; Gabriel 2000), and perhaps less fashionable now, to demonstrate the legitimacy and my command of the method, it is important to rehash some of the original debates. In doing this, I try not to lose sight of what I did and to be honest and faithful to what happened, rather than to dwell too much to the recipes that emerges from method discourses.

3.1 Why Stories

Revisiting Ryle's epistemological problem of how can we see an organisation, in this section I make a play for the idea that our organisations are visible in the stories told about them - and that this visibility goes beyond a glimpse to something approaching the whole. Indeed some have argued that we are homo narrans (Niles, 2010; Vasquez, 1993), and that a single individual is a fiction. According to Marx (1973: 83) "The individual and isolated hunter and fisherman, with whom Smith and Ricardo begin, belongs among the unimaginative conceits of the eighteenth-century", and going further argues "the human being is in the most literal sense a *Zoon Politikon* not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society". To blend Ryle and Marx's ideas - the university buildings of Ryle's thought experiment appear as individual buildings, atomised by our imagination, but they only exist in the social context of the university. They are built, repurposed or animated by university life, and exist in a stream of university activity local and global.

In this way of thinking, the only way of understanding the university building is to hear its story and that story carries the whole in every part. So the GAA is not its stadia, pitches, museums, media, clubs, committees and administration, it is the story of all these things, contained in each story told from the heart of the organisation.

Image 25: Photographers at Croke Park Dublin 1985

Storytelling is much more than just letting the voices of the people in the organisation be heard (as Soderberg, 2003 has argued), it conjures the organisation into being. In large and dispersed organisations like the GAA club, life inside is not viewed and experienced in the same way and at the same time by its dwellers, but the essence or worldview of the organisation must always be sufficiently coherent for the organisation to be said to exist. So for example, Ireland is not an unproblematic imagined community; and so the term has synonyms and adjacent terms that give colour to the refusal to accept the coherent existence of an organisation called Ireland – so for example Ireland is variously called the Republic, Eire, the 26 counties, Hibernia, Fenian and Mexico (South of the Border). Not to suggest that just because the name is not contested an organisation achieves coherence, but it does point to a centrality, an essence, a shared core, a centre that can hold.

Indeed, interest in the social element of organisational life has increased and become more of a concern. A move in the direction of social interactions, not just structures - as these interactions are viewed as an essential component to understand organisational life (Soderberg, 2003). As Leiblich, et al. (1988: 1) nicely puts it, story and narrative is "*the primary form by which human experience is made*". So, embracing storytelling, as a method is an acknowledgement to the storied lives we live and for that reason, we naturally tell our stories (Polkinghorne, 1988; Bruner, 1991; Sims, 2003). Therefore, the telling of stories highlights the human but also the organisational, giving rise to a discussion beyond the normal modes of detachment and lack of emotion (Gabriel, 2000).

It helps that the GAA and Irish culture is so rich in narrative (Foster, 2001); a Blarneyword as Terry Eagleton so richly suggested. The thick description (as described by Ryle, 1971; Geertz, 1973) comes naturally in Irish stories and surfaces the meanings, interpretations and sense of life in the GAA. Each story offers a deep pool of insight into the organisation. It is not the story the organisation fashions for its public persona, it is the story of the individuals' experiences, and so it is how they create meaning and make sense of events (Denzin, 1989; Boje, 1995; Weick, 1995; Fineman and Gabriel, 1996; Gabriel, 2000; Czarniawska, 2004). Weick (1995) suggests that stories are a kind of retrospective sensemaking device, which allows us to narrate the events in our lives. Given the bombastic quality of the stories, the sense that they have been rattled on over and over again, perhaps annoying or tiresome at times, to those who will listen and those who refused to listen; these stories are settled narrative accounts of GAA life. In their telling and retellings they become settled lore, and so are a form of communal knowledge, a method of storing and exchanging what has "*the right to be said and done in the culture in question, and since they are part of that culture, they are legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they do*" (Lyotard, 1979: 23).

For me as a GAA man, hearing the stories was so very natural and familiar to all my experience of the GAA that they can most usefully be used to define the field, the milieu or habitus of GAA life. More than anything else, those who are living it encode these stories with a social and organisational understanding of the GAA. The stories are told with incredible detail of scores and dates, of people and generations; but even more - they are filled with heart-felt emotion, deep, deep connections and pure pride of place. These narratives allow one to get lost in the stories, witnessing these events for oneself. From the other side, the stories are a natural telling, a self-reflection supported by prior knowledge of their club, community and the clan gone before them. The stories seemed endless, a product of ones time on this earth as some would question what else have they achieved in their lifetime.

3.2 The rise and mild fall of storytelling in organisation studies

Over a 20-year period, a body of work has emerged which has coaxed the use of story to understand organisational life (Boje, 1991, 2008; Czarniawska, 2004; Gabriel, 1991, 2000, 2004; Sims, 1999, 2003). The promise of this approach is to "capture organizational life in a

way that no compilation of facts ever could" (Czarniawska, 1999: 15). Within this body of work, each of the major contributors offers slight distinctions between narrative and story. For David Boje (2001: 5) story and narratives interact in interesting ways, "story is folksy" in comparison to the retrospective sense that comes after story which is narratives, adding a plot and coherence. Czarniawska (2004) makes little distinction between story and narrative. Calling for a better-formed distinction, Gabriel (2000: 5) suggests that story ought to be poetic, supporting that "factual or descriptive accounts of events that aspire at objectivity rather than emotional effect must not be treated as stories". Sims (2003) places his attention on the curious interaction between stories and narrative, predominately how the research participants subjectively construct the effect of story, particularly where experience and story cannot be separated. Going further Sims (2003: 1198) believes that our relationship with our stories is less under our control and less utilitarian on our part than the "sensemaking tag might suggest. There is always a tingle of uncertainty, which gives spice to our storied lives, an aleatoric element".

Reflecting on the cascade of story that emerges from the interviews, GAA speak is folksy, has a curious factishness of dates, matches, fixtures, times, but all with a symbolic, poetic, interpretative order that is far from assembled into coherent narrative, plot or sense. Listening carefully with an insider's ear for the cant, GAA logic, manners, shibboleths, and ways of being narrative could be imputed in a very general way - these interviews are about GAA people establishing their *mana*, respect, insiderness to the GAA. Beyond that it is the work of analysis rather than surface sense to find the hidden in plain sight meanings of these stories. Perhaps this is true for all of our stories, and what really separates story from narrative is how we attempt to fix interpretation.

3.3 Interviewing as story
What makes this work ethnographic rather than auto-ethnography is the formal approach to a distinctive act of engaging with other people from around the organisation. While they were literally interviews - as in an exchange of views, the term suggests something far less natural than what these meetings were. Interviews, like most meetings in Irish social life, invariably begin with an attempt to identify shared friends or acquaintances, attention inevitably shifted towards family and bloodlines as the conversation slowly edged its way

towards 'the better days' - of past glories and club honours. After brief banter, the interviews 'got down to business' and for the most part this transition happened seamlessly. Each storyteller was told about the project and the methods, I navigated the awkward imposition of ethical clearance as deftly as I could and then we tended to get going when I asked them to *'tell their story of their time in the GAA'*. From this standard point of departure onwards each interview took its own distinctive course, some scampered towards personal successes as they wrestled their way through the inevitability of retirement; whilst others took a scene setting approach and offered up the clubs history. Included in each telling were subjects and concerns, which arose through their line of thought; some themes gained more traction than others and became central to the conversation. I did my best to "allow respondents to continue in their own way until they indicate they have finished their answer" and that "if we cut them off . . . if we do not appear to be listening to their stories . . . then we are unlikely to find stories" (Mishler in Sarbin, 1986: 235). However on occasions to confirm utterances, other misunderstood terminology or when stories veered away from GAA life, I sallied forth with limited interjections. I was present and engaged in all of the twenty six interviews, with plenty of banter, chat, encouragements and guffaws to preserve the flow of the story, particularly when participants lost their way; and this was generally achieved through short direct prompts such as, 'what happened next or what was that like?' This attentive listening "draws the stories out of their hide-away . . . expectant listening seems to be an indigenous part of all stories or narratives" (Wyatt in Sarbin, 1986: 200).

As the process of data collection progressed, I became more comfortable with the method; in fact I became a feature of the process, willing participants in a dialogical manner. I felt this move demonstrated my essential interest in the study, encouraged by Denzin (2000) suggesting it is the shared "same-ness" of experience between the teller and listener or what Gabriel (2004) calls a 'fellow traveller'. In this way sharing such things as hopes and triumphs but also fears and failures, but within each interview this tone took its own character, reacting to the setting and context at the time. And so, the interviews did not follow a prescribed path of inquiry. Once the initial interview had taken place, a snowball technique was used whereby participants identified those who would fit into the wide-ranging demography of the GAA and tell their story. Often this handing over of information

occurred at the beginning of the interview as the informative piece of the work was taking place.

Once the story comes to an end, mainly announced by the storyteller, often claiming 'that's it really' or 'that's my story'; all the interviews took on a more conversational track. For the most part I doubled back into their story, and moved to the edges of their telling's for further questioning - hoping to set them off again. So, this gave rise to an opportunity to review some of the elements of the story, hardening up certain points and by the end of the interview the themes of the stories were elaborated upon and the story was virtually retold by the interviewer, using the same words that the participant, and, therefore, attempting to maintain the composition of the narrative established in the earlier session. Most interviews came to a natural end when people were literally talked out, some ranged as far as two hours, with one noticeable exception. After doubling and trebling back, storytellers typically cut it off when they felt they had trashed and rehashed about enough. We tended to wrap up with promises that things were not missed and could be followed up - but in the crackle of their voices they were ready to close it off.

All of the interviews were taped, but separate to this, I jotted notes in the interviews, which I filled out as soon as each session was complete; where initial feelings, responses, concerns and other topics raised offered a quick and simple analysis of the story told. I crossed the country over and again to do these interviews, meeting people in their offices, super clubs with executive suites, to humble simple barren rural sheds, pubs, hotel and kitchen tables.

Each exchange had its own contours of place and context, backdrops that gave colour and meaning to the exchange. I did my best to capture that unprocessable experience of meeting these people.

Image 26: Passage East GAA club

Initially these debriefing sessions were necessary and central to understanding the interview process, but as the study progressed; they became crucial in reflecting on the storytelling method.

3.4 Understanding stories

As hinted at earlier, the interviews supplemented by my notes produced a thicket of stories, full of the "*complexity and richness*" of human experience (Duff and Bell, 2002: 209). They were less about a common sense, a public performance of identity for others and more a clear demonstration of GAA identities, values and expectations (Pentland, 1999; Czarniawska, 1997; Sims, 2003). In line with this, it is believed that we perform our own existences and 'we become who we narrate ourselves – and others – to be' (Lincoln, 2005) and these stories are glimpses at a social order or movement. They are much more than their surface exchange of what matches were won, who came up with the idea to buy a new field, who were the great coaches, what were the best technical methods; the stories are not simple representations of a pre-existing reality. Rather they are "*legitimating devices*" that are often subjectively inspired, and therefore privileging the interest of one group over another (Mumby, 1987: 114). And so, the understandable questions we face in using stories - to what extent are these stories idealised, and how much of this privileging exists within these stories; therefore a number of questions must be answered in the pursuit of authenticity.

So the central two questions are around "*For whom was this story constructed, how was it made, and for what purpose? What cultural resources does it draw on – take for granted? What does it accomplish? Are there gaps and inconsistencies that might suggest alternative counter-narratives?*" (Riessman and Quinney, 2005: 393).

The notion of idealisation becomes even more of a challenge in this thesis given the space I occupy, my character as a player and GAA person; and my many achievements along the way. I have mentioned in the introduction some of the ways I have aspired to reduce such, and in return trade with authentic accounts from the club. Yet interviewing is the most commonly used qualitative way of gathering data, but caution is always advised when embarking on interviews; accounts may be romanticising and fantasising the real experience. I sense a reduction in such glamorising can also be supported by experiencing the technique previous to the collection phase of a study, understanding the literature, but also having a practical awareness of what makes an engagement a worthy one. Despite all of this, I would really question if the decision is in our hands (to privilege one method over

another), as it will almost always come back to the research question, or in this case the research concern.

The stories contain a worldview, a way that encourages the exploration of different and multiple realities of how to be - and in exploring this I am interested in what is a GAA worldview. It is in this way that I aspire to meet Ryle's challenge - to see the organisation, to see the image of its worldview.

3.5 Moving towards an analysis

Trudging through the unprocessed, dense and often structure-less stories of GAA life, I soon recognised the need for a method that considered the text of these encounters, a method that would respect the texture of the interviews, rather than a method that attempted to place coherence on the stories. As I traipsed through the eight methods of analysis put forward by Boje (2001), I came across the incredibly accessible work of Chip Morningstar (1993), whose work pointed my reading towards the more complex but detailed work of Culler (1982) and then onto one of the best known philosophers for developing semiotics - Jacques Derrida (1997). In spite of his influential work that saw him publish more than 40 books across many disciplines, Derrida's work is recognised for its notoriously vague nature both in discussion and accessibility of text. Derrida's imprecision in articulating (or perhaps our own inability to understand) his thoughts have led to much debate surrounding the legacy of his deconstructive readings. It is suggested that Derrida's work is often misinterpreted and so is practiced in a functionalist manner – a way that Derrida himself would have never condoned or engaged with (Rorty, 1995). To drag the debate even further into the darker edges of the academy, Ellis (1989) suggested that some people believe that his work does not represent any literary contribution; and the work is nothing more than destructive and negativistic criticism. It is however my view, and the manner in how I attempt to use it in this work, that deconstruction does not intend on damaging or disowning the text. Instead it provides a platform for establishing different meanings.

Perhaps Culler (1982: 133) offers a more comprehensive interpretation of the confusion when he suggests that deconstructed oppositions "are not destroyed or abandoned"; they are "reinscribed". Or to use my own less academic terms, when we engage in a sense making act we are always deconstructing, and in this act of familiarity we have time to think

about the opposites, fissured margins and performances. For deconstruction's aim is to take the universal experience of the GAA and try to essentialise it into language, not to surface the many voices and discords on what the GAA is. So in essence, I attempted to look beyond the surface of the club stories, and towards the collection of stories as a representation of one totalising account. In doing this I try to reveal a multiplicity of other readings of how reality is constructed instead of affirming storytelling functionality, such readings increasingly surface exploitative, privileged, and controlling practices within analysed stories.

In advance of what is to come, that is a more comprehensive section on the gesture towards deconstruction as a mode of analysis; maybe a more reflexive piece is required to provide further detail to why I privileged deconstruction over Boje's seven other methods of analysis. Of course these other forms of analysis have their own strengths, for instance *theme* – with a focus on time, place, plurality, and connectivity; *plot* - which allows for conditions of antenarrative or *story network* – offering an architectural display of the story and so on. However, the initial cycle of data collection influenced this decision greatly, whilst also supporting the aspiration of the work. Perhaps some may argue that grand narrative would align more favourably to the research concern, yet the stories with their messiness, meandering nature and structure-less shape altered what was a split decision in favour of deconstruction.

3.6 Deconstruction

Grasping the deconstructive process is understandably frustrating, aside from the obvious attack on Derrida's blurred contributions, because of the refusal by many practitioners to explicitly reveal 'the dark arts of deconstruction' (Morningstar, 1993). This lack of penetration and comprehension provides challengers with endless ammunition in calling it everything (Culler, 1982); but there is no mystery to the specific process of deconstruction – it is simply a form of critical reading of a piece of text. And it was this critical reading process that initially drew my attraction towards this form of analysis - I felt this would afford me some objectivity in the deeper analysis of the text.

As a process, deconstruction speculatively interrogates dualities and dichotomies within texts, aspiring to reveal meaning and insights. A principle goal of deconstructive readings is

to impair totalising accounts that strive for authority, and by placing instability of meaning based on such assumptions, it gives rise to a multiplicity of possible interpretations of a text (Culler, 1982; Boje, 2001). To explain, Derrida (1997) offers an accessible analogy by simply calling on the two sides of a coin, though the two sides are polar opposites, they never see each other. To conceptualise, and use my own interpretation, deconstruction is a method of unearthing narrative in an attempt to shape the meaning of story. This is achieved by sieving out the polar opposites with the aim of nullifying the effort at narrative. Yet this assault on the narrative is not an effort to destroy the story; instead the mode of deconstruction is the act of creating other, opposite readings of the story.

The fetchingly simple explanation of the process by Morningstar (1993) is perhaps less complex and more informative than my above attempt, as he suggests that deconstruction is nothing more than reading a text, unearthing divisions such as man/woman, good/evil, them/us; and converting these divisions by assuming that the text claims primacy, superiority and privilege over the hidden distinction. So, at the centre of deconstruction is the view that a text is not an enclosed totality, a single meaning or a comprehensive account; instead it is a network of meaning intertwined in uncertainty and inconsistency. So, the task is to engage with the text and all its difficulties, aspiring to unearth a narrative, which asserts meaning on us as readers. In this way, a new reading is formed, which may or may not undermine or contradict the original reading, but that's not to say this is complete, replicable or quantifiable as each deconstructive act is personal, subjective and emergent.

And so, deconstruction is not objective, nor can it be, and deconstruction is often criticised for not being rigorous enough (not aided by its limited explanation and vague understanding). But given my motivation for this work, I sense my perspective can enrich (and limit) the work, and rigour can be formed in such a subjectivist process from on-going identifications and reflections of this motivation. Throughout this work, all the stories were considered as one generic story – that is a universal narrative of the clubs happenings over time.

Deconstructing these stories and the voices within the stories reveals other less developed themes, in this way pointing to how one theme can dominate another, how one individual can direct or be directed by another, how one voice spoke instead of or indeed ahead of the

other voices. And it is Boje's (2001) claim that much about deconstruction has to do with noticing voice, whose voice is heard in the stories and who is silenced, concealed and marginalised. And so, the outcome of this deconstructive process on the life of the GAA, is to surface the crucial voices, marginalised or not, in a retelling of the story, essentially another narrative of the club.

3.7 Presenting as stories

Once collected, the stories were all transcribed; then sentence-by-sentence each story was separated to allow for the deconstructive process to begin. This structural separation provided what I felt to be the most simplistic way of reading the text in the pursuit of the previously discussed divisions. But the stories themselves are a form of analysis, as too is the act of transcription. Going further, the presentation of stories, like their telling's, is a naïve analysis in itself; they offer the textured speak that this work demands - thick description by both the participant and the interviewer. Again to revisit because of its significance, 'thick description', coined by Ryle (1971) "starts from a set of signifying signs and tries to put them into an intelligible structure" (Levi, 1990: 98). In a more accessible line, thick description attempts to interpret events in their own context, rather than trying to impose one theme or a single law on a series of observations. This process of telling and transcribing aspires to place coherence on the story – in this case, the wide-ranging comings and goings of the club.

Despite the labour intensive act of transcription, I felt it was a necessary engagement given the broad accounts that hiked through the generations - from the inevitable club funeral where all club operations were suspended, to tamer affairs (but just as important) of winning under six tournaments.

Image 27: Several generations of Roche Emmets GAA Club in County Louth help remove the goalposts from Treanor's field as the club prepares to move to new facilities in 1983

A more prominent motive for transcribing all twenty six interviews was my own experience and interpretation of the organisation. I was of the view that transcription would allow me to be among the data and draw out its richness, therefore taking on Ryle's challenge.

Within this process of telling and transcribing is a representation of a microstoria (Ginzburg, 1996), a depiction of the past on a very small, contained, intimate scale with an interest in the individuals of minor importance. These microstoria or otherwise known as microhistory focus on subaltern local knowledge (the little people's) as a reaction to macro narrative (the great GAA men) that are fashionable in organisation studies. Nonetheless microstoria, alike the approach to thick description, produces an explanation that is rich but also offers a method of teasing out some of the entwined threads of human life (Stanford, 1994). Even though they are at times historiographical telling's, they are an effort to create a history from a biographical account. And so, it is an attempt at navigating through the dominant narrative happenings or events to overcome the interpretative war. That is not to say that these stories are unblemished or reimagining; the best that I can do is attempt to maintain the essence and emotion of the original text as spoken.

3.8 The stories and the storytellers

For me and so many other Irish people, the GAA is an intriguing organisational form part ancient, part mythological and part ruthlessly modern (for instance the GAA encourages forms of patriarchy that are antithetical to more progressive values and forces in contemporary Ireland – the rise of feminism, gay sexuality, transgender, LGBT communities); but more importantly, an organisation that is incredibly powerful in shaping our communities. Some of the pre-existing work allows us to witness something of the exceptional way of life within the club (example such as Blake, 1900; O'Sullivan, 1916; Gallogly, 1984; McTernan, 1984; Mandle, 1987; Ó Riain, 1994; McMullan, 1995, De Búrca, 1999; Garnham, 2004a; Hunt, 2008), but whilst this material is insightful and serves a purpose, it only scratches the surface of organisational life. So the stories I chase are different, as this work attempts to address some of the neglected and perhaps less attractive actions of the GAA; the actions that are beyond rule changes, Presidential elections and policy introductions. I crave a richer, more explicit and deeper understanding of the clubs organisation by gathering the experiences of those who know best.

The work therefore searches for a historical thread of the club, meeting the people who can tell it all – its comings and goings, its great days of club glory and its struggles in fulfilling fixtures and administration positions; days of operational closures, to the new

developments that inspired the next generation, every cut, bruise, Hurley broken and ball lost. And it is in this pursuit of gathering these experiences that I believe goes a long way in meeting Ryle's challenge. Therefore, the only limitation for club participants is their own limited knowledge of the club and it's past.

The twenty six interviews that make up the carcass of this work draws on participants with vastly different roles and experiences. Given the GAA's relatively broad demographic, I strived to gain a requisite variety of the population - paying attention to the locations, gender, success, size, level of participation and their role. Perhaps my insiderness was instrumental in the extremely high acceptance rate (no participant had the heart to turn me down); each call, text or email was warmly welcomed with 'GAA speak' in some shape or form, as participants were highly accommodating as they all obliged to have their interviews recorded, transcribed and their names used for the purpose of the research. In their entirety, the stories yielded seventeen hours, four minutes and twenty seconds of incredibly detailed, personal and colourful accounts of life within the GAA.

3.9 Ethics – in theory and in practice

The research and the researcher have a definitive moral and ethical standpoint. This work obeys the ethical standards of the academic community and follows, in every movement the traditions of best practice. To demonstrate, in advance of the work commencing, I parsed this study to the Waterford Institute of Technology ethics committee where minor concerns loomed on two fronts. The first, which is perhaps the more obvious concern, was the voluntary nature of the organisation, suggesting organisational consent was necessary. On the other hand, the second was possibly more advisory than a concern, as the committee sought more detailed documentation on the participants consent form. To be more specific, such things a data collection, it's processing, the storage, the right to erase and rectify, sensitive personal data and fair usage of data needed to be more accessible for the reader (covered in the Irish legislation under the Data Protection Act 1998 and 2003).

Circling back, the organisational consent concern was resolved a head of the meeting concluding, while the initial scaffolding of the work was being formed with the organisation; Mr Pat Daly (Director for Games Development and Research) endorsed the work with an approval letter (see appendix A) and this satisfied the committee. To maintain momentum

as I was keen to get into the field, directly after the meeting I addressed the second concern by making the advised changes to the participant consent form – once received, the committee approved the work and I commenced the gathering of stories.

In any piece of research ethical considerations are presented, particularly when human interaction is involved. It may seem from my personal engagement with the ethics committee above that such concerns only occur when work is in its primitive stage, yet ethics is a concern that continues throughout the study – from the "*planning, analysis and onto publication*" (Miller et al., 2012: 12). If one keeps this ethical concern as bedrock to the study, the researcher can "*protect individuals, communities and environments*" (Israel and Hay, 2006). So to retain this ethical standard through the study, section 3.10 discusses the on-going and emerging concerns related to data collection and ethics.

3.10 Preliminary analysis, drawing out the restories and evolving matters

Despite my near thirty-year relationship with the organisation, it offered little guide in predicting what would appear in the raw data. Maybe there are a number of underlying reasons for this shortness - my lack of administratory knowledge, little support or guide from previous work, the structure-less approach to interviewing or more naïvely, perhaps I did not give as much thought to its organisation as I had assumed. Taken aback by the emotionally connected stories and their incredibly rich telling's I immediately recognised the true meaning of quality interviews. This sparked some reservations about hearing stories that were too close to home - hesitant that the stories may become restricted, less free flowing and open, as the tellers may feel confined to tell stories of harmony and success instead of the authentic happenings. I felt this was the right thing to do, so I remained conscious of this throughout the work.

Funnily, the broad demographic that I was always mindful of, fell into place organically. However the storytellers did change as the project matured, initially I envisaged listening to the stories of the clubs history only; yet after thirteen interviews saturation point was reached as there were no new restories appearing. To be certain I conversed with three more as I began to debate the next move. Whilst always conscious of the researches purpose, to hear some different voices I decided to hear six separate stories from professionals working in Croke Park; this then snowballed to the Presidents stories (four in

total). In sum, the interviews were generally open and honest, but presented their own challenges. It became obvious that the professionals were more limited in their time and telling's, of what they could discuss and what would be a breach of their confidentiality agreements to the organisation. However the stories told by the clubs and the Presidents were indistinguishable, offering parallel experiences, similar events that happened along the way and comparable long-term dreams.

The skills and growth of the researcher is a crucial element of conducting PhD research. From this work it is my interpretation that the rich quality of the raw data picked from the tellers reflects the quality of the interviewing techniques in this type of work. And so, it demonstrates - recognising 'what is required' – as this type of inquiry essentially drives the growth of the researcher by recognising 'what is required' – as this type of inquiry by the data.

3.11 Emerging analysis

Lightly touched upon, the telling's were thought-provoking and different (given the three groups of participants); the stories at times resembled entirely different worlds. On the one hand you had the emotionally inspired stories, entangled with family and community, and on the other, the stories were more calculated, reserved and focused on 'getting the job done'. Indeed this offers an opportunity to expand on these conflicting worlds; however I am of the view that this is not the most appropriate place to offer a more comprehensive telling of these contrasting stories, as this would take away from the purpose of the following theoretical chapters. However I sense this provides a flavour of what is to come, and it delivers a platform to visually demonstrate how the stories are tied together, along with some notes on its outings that have shaped the work to this point.
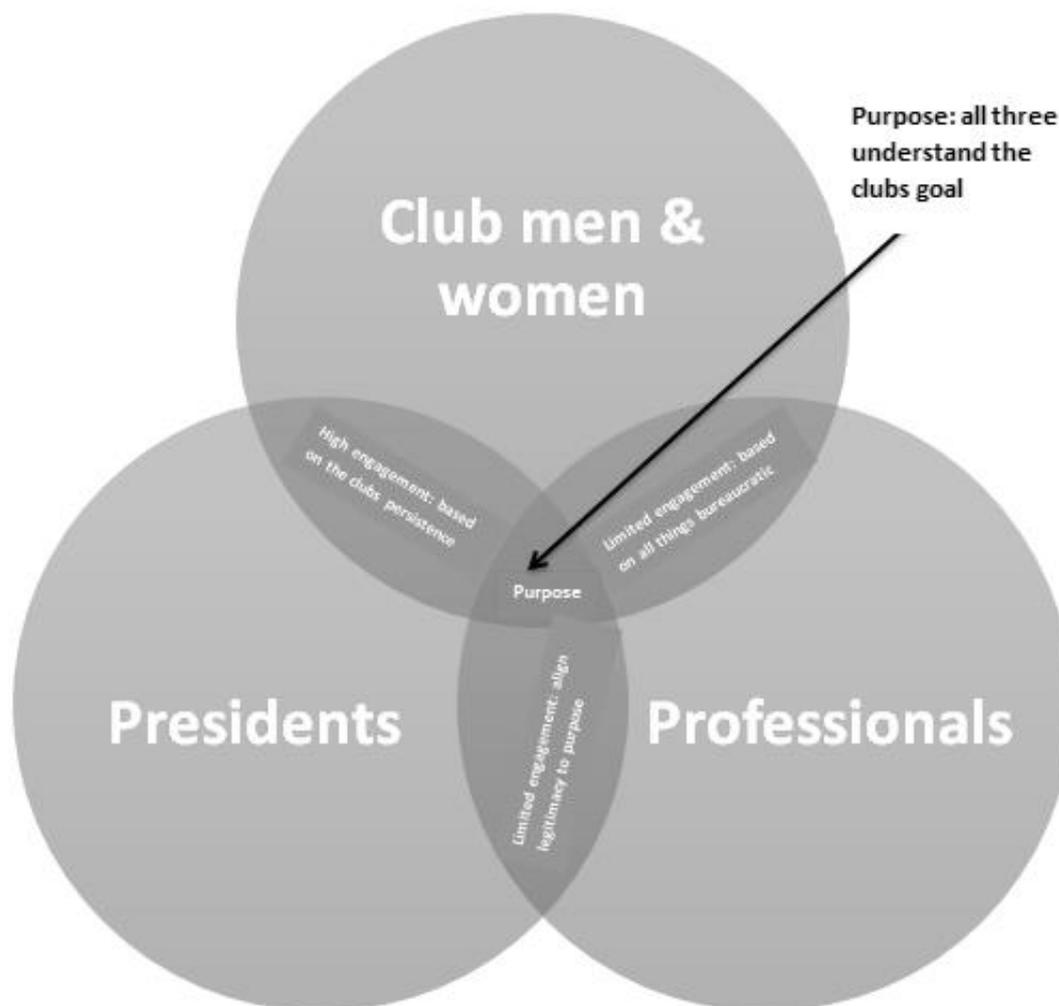
Figure 4: The three categories of participants

This work is well travelled; it has been circulated and presented in both academic and practitioner forms; all of which have had direct links with organisational experiences. An essential quality indicator for this type of interpretive work is whether it reverberates and feels innately accurate as sense giving, an explanatory method of understanding. Through the four years of this study, this work has been presented at numerous national and international conferences, below is a list of some of the works outings:

- Anthropological Association of Ireland Conference (AAI), University College Cork
- Irish Academy of Management (IAM), National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI Galway)
- Standing Conference on Organizational Symbolism (SCOS), Uppsala University, Sweden

- European Group for Organizational Studies (EGOS), University of Naples Federico II, Italy

- British Academy of Management (BAM), Newcastle University, Newcastle, United Kingdom

- Critical Management Studies (CMS), Think alternative organizations / Advancing knowledge of alternative organizations, Paris Est Créteil University

- GAA Games Development Conference, Dublin 2015

- Club Leadership Development Programme launch, Croke Park Dublin.

- GAA Games Development Conference, Dublin 2017

The shape and authentic nature of the thesis is largely influenced by these activities. The work is essentially driven by the stories of the organisation, as there was little support from secondary data sources that penetrate similar organisational concerns of this study. And so the storytellers, given their time and experiences are best placed to understand the organisation; but also best placed to try and make sense of it (Fineman et al., 2010; Czarniawska and Gagliardi, 2003).

3.12 Secondary sources

The GAA is studied; it is regularly inspected, prodded and scrutinized from the harvest of the practical games and their structures to the most pertinent and beneficial coaching methods. To display their on-going efforts the organisation regularly hosts knowledge sharing gatherings and debates to remain relevant, which have become some of the largest of their kind across Europe. But despite this draw and sizable output, the attraction to study the GAA beyond its functionality is relatively poor. In essence, the organisation and its examiners 'stick to its knitting', remaining dedicated to its purpose and perhaps this is one of their strengths. Yet the large body of work on the organisation offered little in supporting this study theoretically. However it did deliver some context in the prior studies of community life (Mandle, 1987; Blake, 1900; O'Sullivan, 1916; Gallogly, 1984; McTernan, 1984; Ó Riain, 1994; McMullan, 1995; De Búrca, 1999; Garnham, 2004a; Hunt, 2008), whilst the organisational uniqueness is writ large it is largely unaddressed other than by identification. And so, this research relied on minor contributions from secondary sources;

but to provide a flavour of the work on the organisation, justifying my point, I will offer some of the work that delivered support along the way.

The work by De Búrca (1980, 1989) was particularly kind in the beginning of my journey, offering a rich detailed account - the delivery of the GAA and a second movement that discussed the organisations place within society. Building on this, Connolly and Dolan's (2011: 15) material was also supportive, one of the more marginal contemporary studies on the GAA as it sits in a liminal space between the national image and the middle class societal audience (traditional work), but also enters into the change discourse as the work discusses organisational structures (new territory) - "a series of units in tension (cooperative and conflictual) in both an inter-organisational and intra-organisational context". Captivated by the findings, Connolly and Dolan (2013: 21) relocated their attention to agency, announcing the difficulties in amending the tensions as a result of "weaker social actors". Despite the work of Connolly and Dolan (2011, 2013) in particular tip toeing into the edges of the organisation, the work does not provide deep considerations that would benefit this work. And so, this organisational study is heavily dependent as noted on the storytellers and their stories.

3.13 The storytellers

Given the significance of the stories in directing this work, I have attempted to present, in the most accessible manner, some of the information that surface through the interviews in the tables below (tables 1, 2 and 3). This allows the reader an alternative way of viewing some of the points discussed throughout the chapter and ties the work together before moving to the theorisation of these stories.

Club leaders

ID/Name	Club County	Categorised	Duration of interview	Emerging restories
Ray O'Brien	Butlerstown Waterford	Amalgamation	45:36 minutes	Care for community Family Learning the rules young GAA lifestyle

Joey Carton	De La Salle Waterford	Urban	45:24 minutes	Charisma Passionate club people Mothers influence Hard decisions required to save the club
Philip Murphy	Roanmore Waterford	Urban	59:08 minutes	Father and grand father Born into a GAA world Love for club Home was the club
Shane Ahern	Ferrybank Waterford	Non-successful	56:12 minutes	Toils Poor decisions Fathers influence Father's death on the field
Phil Fanning	Mount Sion Waterford	Successful	1 hour 28:47 minutes	Paving the way for others Hard work but meaningful work Passion for the game
Jim O'Keeffe	Ballygunner Waterford	Large	37:22 minutes	Influential figure School fostered the traditional The coming together of families
Noel Doherty	Glenmore Kilkenny	Rural	50:19 minutes	The only world knew to the community Families drove success Community was the family Toils and division

Paddy Dunphy	Tramore Waterford	Non-successful	58:37 minutes	Disagreements Closeness of GAA people Inspiring new generations
Michael Walsh	Dicksboro Kilkenny	Large	35:15 minutes	The GAA is the community Family make it special Losses are people not matches
Luke O'Hanlon	St James Wexford	Small	49:11 minutes	Fostering through care Love for the Association Powerful place to be a part of
Tommy Lanigan	James Stephens Kilkenny	Successful	54:41 minutes	Funerals are the best place to experience the GAA in full swing Love for the club It builds people
Billy Knocktor	Kilmacud Crokes Dublin	Superclub	1 hour 7 minutes	Care for your place Leading through charisma Not viewed as work
Michael Barrett	Castlelyons Cork	Small	35:15 minutes	Inspiring the community The club is the community Children involvement is meaningful
Brendan Fennelly	Ballyhale Shamrocks Kilkenny	Rural	40:54 minutes	The club is the home It is all about representing your family and place

ID/Name				Passionate
Tomas Colton	Dungannon Tyrone	Newly founded	25:37 minutes	Enchantment of other Leading through love Care for the next generation
Sinead Day	Dunhill Waterford	Small	44: 44 minutes	Dislikes the increase in bureaucracy Father inspiring the community and club A place of satisfaction

Table 1: The club leaders

HQ professionals

ID/Name	Position	Duration of interview	Emerging restories
Diarmaid Murphy	Commercial & Sponsorship Manager at GAA & Croke Park	38:28 minutes	Passion because of the role Honour due to the significance Professional experience
Niamh McCoy	GAA Museum Director	28:10 minutes	Historic place to work Privileged More than just a sport
Rebecca Mulligan	Marketing Manager	13:02 minutes	Professional environment Opportunity Privilege
Peter McKenna	Stadium and commercial director	26:23 minutes	Experienced Unique opportunity

			Important role
Paraic Duffy	Director general	27:25 minutes	Purpose of the GAA Family and community Club focus Continued success
Pat Daly	Director of Games Development and Research	20:04 minutes	Family connection Involvement at all level Ireland needs the GAA Values and networks

Table 2: The professionals working within Croke Park

The Presidents

ID/Name	Position	Duration of interview	Emerging restories
Aogan O'Fearghail	President 38	41:21 minutes	Passion and honour Never an ambition Family focus Significance to Irish people
Liam O'Neill	President 37	1 hour 17:58 minutes	The strength of community Youth are the future Honoured Club is central
Christy Cooney	President 36	52:13 minutes	Family and father Passionate for club and county Love for all things GAA Emotional journey
Sean Kelly	President 34	27:07 minutes	Community driven

			Privileged position
			Forward thinking
			Powerful organisation

Table 3: The Presidents of the organisation

3.14 Conclusion

Before detailing the specifics of the research process, this chapter presents the epistemological challenges of the study with the aid of Ryle's (1949) observation on seeing and understanding an organisation. This gives way to the ontological explanation of the work before it moves to the defence of the preferred method, placing storytelling as the most suitable methodological fit to tackle the research concern. The chapter continues by offering up the unique research challenges of studying the GAA club.

Organisation studies, as a discourse, have always focused on understanding organisations, their actions, culture, efficacy, etc. However, it has become increasingly attracted to the bureaucratic methods to organisation, making it progressively difficult to examine organisations that do not conform to such actions. This is heightened in the context of alternative organisations, where the work calls for further case exemplars (to the small few) that break away from the commercial way of thinking. And so, the storytelling method is suggested as a novel method of overcoming these contextual problems. By focusing the research process on the outcome, one can more readily trace the role of the clubmen and clubwomen who have been crucial to the clubs' survival as sense makers, moral advocates and co-creators of the clubs' organisational direction.

As a method, storytelling has long been placed within the field as a method of choice, such as folklore for offering insight into how those marginalised discourses construct meaning. So, this work examines the stories of the club, its historic comings and goings that these clubmen and clubwomen use to enact their world (e.g. Weick, 1979, 1995; Geertz, 1993). In this way, I attempt to gain a deeper understanding of the GAA's manner of organising. As a method, it is becoming increasingly used in organisation studies, and so an extensive introduction was not necessary. But, in essence, storytelling draws on the centrality of the stories and languages to the human experience. Therefore, a defence of the selected method is formed, one that places storytelling as a means of listening to the clubs

happenings through the voices of those who know best. Once the defence is made, the practical method of data collection and analysis embraced is described in detail. This sets the scene for the introduction of the stories in the chapter that follows.

Part two

Chapter 4
Visions of the GAA in the stories

Image 28: The scoreboard in Croke Park after the final whistle in the All Ireland final 2008

4.0 Introduction to the stories

The work sets out to offer an understanding of the GAA. In the last chapter I detailed the methodological approach and methods used in my attempt to see the GAA anew. Beyond the ontological and epistemological exposition, the chapter detailed in practical terms how this work came about - introducing the approach to storytelling interviews and deconstruction.

In line with the spirit of the phenomenological tradition, the first section of analysis (or perhaps more appropriately exploration of the data) is to offer an interpretation of the stories - so detailing a surface reading of the dialogical exchange. In doing this, I draw upon literature that is useful to the act of understanding the organisation. And so, I try to avoid supplying theory, or explaining theory; rather I use theory therapeutically (as a support rather than an explanation), marshalling it - explain what I have found in the world. In the subsequent section, section 4.1, it takes the organisation at its words; in Schein's terminology 'exploring the espoused values' (1990) of GAA culture and practice.

After further contextual sections, I offer a consideration of what the GAA is by exploring the absences in the stories - what is not said and possibly what the GAA is by searching for the gaps. The chapter concludes with making the case of the GAA as another type of organisation, one that is not really commiserated with those presented in the business school curriculum.

The contribution of this chapter to the overall thesis is to establish and describe the GAA as an inspiring exemplar of an alternative organisation - putting meat on the bones of the current discourse in organisation studies, which seeks to move beyond the joint stock commercial company that tends to occupy our imagination.

4.1 Seeing the spirit and ethic of the GAA

While each of the three kinds of interviewees (club leaders, HQ Presidents and HQ professionals) were asked to tell the stories of their lives in the GAA, only two kinds of stories emerged. The sixteen club leaders retold their stories of their clubs, the President's, for the most part told stories of their clubs and the professionals although also asked to talk about their lives in the GAA they stubbornly talked exclusively about their lives in their professions. It would appear there is such a thing as a GAA person, a great binary

categoriser in Irish society. To be or not to be a GAA person is a marker all Irish people recognise. And perhaps this is influenced by its origins and links with violence, and the struggle to reconstitute the hierarchy of identities within Imperial British culture, and the channels that capital flowed in. As such, from its beginning it is focused on power and by extension exclusions, exemplified in Rule 42, but on a more micro level it is based on local forms of exclusions of them and us, ours and not theirs. So, the GAA is deeply embedded in the networks of local capitalism, and political fiefdoms, and affiliation with the GAA a legitimising device for Irish capitalists - in political dynasties, local cumanns, and practices of cute hoorism (O'Carroll, 1987).

Nonetheless, this work sets out to see the GAA through these people's stories, and in trying to assemble a vision, in line with the phenomenological bend of this work it is perhaps best to account for the organisation demographically, in terms of being, structure, history, resources and time before attempting the more imprecise ask of exploring it anthropologically.

Central to each story was a vision of the good life, telling's filled with passion and a consideration for the wider community. Without being asked, each storyteller addressed the issue - 'what can I do for the community', and so the stories are rich with soul, contribution to others as meaning and purpose in life. They explicitly reflected and spoke as guardians of their community, using synonyms for shepherds, stewards of their club, parish, village or town. Each storyteller spoke to me of the club being about more, more than hurling or football, more than sport, more than this, more than that. Essential to this more-ness, is that the clubs are a movement, a gesture of Irish community life, that is illustrative of people should be with each other, sharing being and time.

However some could argue that there is a place within the club that is more transactional, more materially focused; possessing an alternative motive to what I have encountered in the stories. Indeed, some could argue that the professionals working within Croke Park are an extension of this, but others may use the club for a place of political support or a transactional space to pick and drop their kids without too much engagement. And so these stories are possible, perhaps real, however I have not encountered these on my journey.

In this sense it is important to look for peer or similar organisations. With all the talk of how exceptional and unique the GAA is, there are similarities with organisations such as Mondragon Cooperative Corporation, Green Bay Packers, The AA before demutualisation, John Lewis Partnership, Barcelona Football club, Juventus Football Club, FC United of Manchester. It is thus not uncommon to have organisations describe themselves as being uncommon in how they are deeply rooted in culture and clan like rituals. Even if we compare sports with political influence, such as gymnastics in Prussia, parliamentary democracy in England, sport and Fascism, Zionism and youth organisations, boyscouts and militarism, which too have a different way of organisation.

These organisations (and sports), like the GAA, are often characterised by community and family values, commitment, emotional ownership, doing things right and for the most part remaining true to the organisational purpose (Kanter, 1972; Shenker, 1986). Where the GAA differs is its intention to tactfully navigate many of the contemporary actions that other organisations encounter daily. These decisions are richly acknowledged through colourful telling's and retellings of developmental decisions, committee elections, family involvement and 'strokes pulled'. In doing this, arranging itself from its traditions - a mode passed through the generations, acts such as husbandry, nepotism and favouritism. However, this is an integral part of the GAA's organisation, allowing it to sustain itself by doing anything that's required (e.g. Fuys et al., 2008; Goldman, 1998; Nonini, 2006; Scharper and Cunningham, 2006).

Castlegar (Gaillimh)
Dathanna: Glas is Bán

(1) TOMÁS Ó GRUAGÁIN
(Tom Grogan)

(2) SEÁN Ó CONCHÚIR (3) TADHG Ó MURCHÚ (4) PÁDRAIC Ó CONGHAILE
(John Connor) (Ted Murphy) (Padraic Connolly)

(5) TOMÁS MAC CORMAIC (6) SEAMUS Ó MURCHÚ (7) GEARÓID MAG FHLOINN
(Tom McCormick) (Seamus Murphy) (Gerry Glynn)

(8) TOMÁS Ó MURCHÚ (9) MICHEÁL Ó CONGHAILE (Capt.)
(Tom Murphy) (Michael Connolly)

(10) SEAMUS Ó FATHAIGH (11) MAIRTÍN Ó SÉ (12) SEÁN Ó CADHAIN
(Seamus Fahy) (Martin O'Shea) (John Coyne)

(13) MICHEÁL O MURCHÚ (14) SEÁN Ó CONGHAILE (15) GEARÓID Ó CONGHAILE
(Michael Murphy) (John Connolly) (Gerry Connolly)

Fir Ionaid: Deasún Ó hEidhin (Dessie Hynes); (16) Micheal Mag Fhloinn (Michael Glynn); (17) Micheál Mac Coisteala (Michael Costelloe); (18) Briain Ó Dathlaoich (Brian Dolly); (19) T. Mac Riallais (T. Grealish); (20) Seán Ó Scolaí (John Scully); (21) Seán Mac Óda (John Coady); (22) Tomás Ó Conghaile (Tom Connolly); (23) Pádraig Ó Nualláin (Pat Nolan).

Castlegar	Cúil	Cúilíní	Seachaí	65m	Saor-pucanna
1 adh Leath					
2 adh Leath					
Iomlán					

St. Martin's (Cill Chainnigh)
Dathanna: Dearg is Glas

(1) ROIBEARD Ó SEOIR
(Bobby Shore)

(2) SEAMUS Ó CEALLAIGH (3) ANTÓIN Ó MEACHAIR (4) S. S. Ó DUBHLAINN
(Jimmy Kelly) (Tony Maher) (J. J. Dowling)

(5) TOMÁS BREATHNACH (6) SEAMUS Ó MORÁIN (7) MICHEÁL Ó MEACHAIR
(Tom Walsh) (Jim Moran) (Michael Maher)

(8) PÁDRAIG Ó LEATHLOBHAIR (9) SEÁN Ó MORÁIN
(Pat Lawlor) (John Moran)

(10) SEÁN Ó MUIREASA (11) PADRAIG Ó MORÁIN (12) SEÁN Ó BRAONÁIN (Capt.)
(John Morrissey) (Patsy Moran) (Johnny Brennan)

(13) DÓNAL Ó CUANÁIN (14) TOMÁS Ó MORÁIN (15) RISTEARD Ó MAOLOMHNAIGH
(Danny Coonan) (Tom Moran) (Richard Moloney)

Fir Ionaid: (16) Eamonn Ó Muireasa (Eamon Morrissey); (17) Tomás Ó Cinnsealaigh (Tom Kinsella); (18) Seamus Ó Cinnsealaigh (Jimmy Kinsella); (19) Seosamh Ó Ceallaigh (Joe Kelly); (20) Seamus Ó Meachair (Jimmy Maher); (21) Reamoinn O Teacháin (Raymond Teehan); (22) Nioclás Ó Muireasa (Nicky Morrissey); (23) Mairtín O Muireasa (Martin Morrissey); (24) Eamonn Ó Braoin (Eamon Breen); (25) Seán Ó Muireasa (Jack Morrissey).

St. Martin's	Cúil	Cúilíní	Seachaí	65m.	Saor-pocanna
1 adh Leath					
2 adh Leath					
Iomlán					

Image 29: All Ireland club final 1984

It is this pursuit of sustainability that makes the organisation interesting to management and organisational studies, due to its autodidactic organisational and leadership practices. Practices that have emerged and are robustly sustained – a set of customs, rituals and norms of behaviour that are outside of the traditional administrative forms, but can achieve similar scale and impact to what we think of as modern organisations.

In this organisation volunteers, working at parish level, typically lead clubs; who through family and community networks bring their clubs into being, and sustain them over time. And so, people here are let roam, encouraged to carve their own pathway, find their own place of comfort; as this organisation provides social and economic resources, and membership is about maintaining and gaining access to forms of capital - social, cultural, sexual, political and economic - (Parker, 2002b; Parker et al., 2007) – from painter to President. The emotionally infused stories that emerged are told about men and women and their devotion to being, the club's endurance and resoluteness to remain through good

times and bad. A place where the only limits are self-inflicted, born out of a casual commitment to the club and the broader GAA community.

Across the 2,500 clubs that constitute the GAA at community level, there is a wide and intriguing set of organisational forms. The uniformity of the overall organisation belies a huge amount of creativity, innovation and diversity. It appears that volunteer sports clubs have resolved many of the paradoxes that other organisations struggle with. In this way, sporting clubs often have an ebb-and-flow, collapsing and reviving over the course of time, whilst maintaining a stable and routine identity.

These innately thrifty low-resourced organisations, which operate in low resourced environments, tend to succeed in building tremendous assurance, motivation, capability, passion and sustainability as part of on-going operations that maintain huge organisational flexibility with little material rewards for those involved. Considering broader organisational discourses on flexibilisation, organisational precarity and devotion to capitalism it appears we have much to learn from GAA club-level practices. Underpinning this standoffish approach to the "capitalocentric" norms, are the leadership practices at club level (Fisher, 2009; Gibson-Graham, 1996, 2006; Parker et al., 2014). Positions here are both inherited and imposed, generally by family and their close networks - the people that care most for the club and community; an animalistic like mode of unity where people have little regard for boundaries and regulations (Kavanagh et al., 2011), as their only concern is the clubs continued existence.

All the stories, as they circle experience within the GAA, are lives spent playing and organising; they relate and resonate with what it means to be a GAA person. It is hard to parse the cascade of happenings in the stories with a central essence, ethos or spirit of GAA life. Particularly as researchers tend to eschew methods that allow us to talk of the 'spirit and ethic' of things (inspired by Weber, but also used by Kuhling, 2004 and new 'spirits of capitalism' as explored by Boltanski and Chiapello, 2005). In this line, within the stories I explored the rationalities that inform GAA society - such as how they construct community.

"When you strip away a lot of things in most of our communities the GAA club is one of very few places that you can get comfort outside of the family. All you need to do is look at a GAA funeral; they are an extraordinary social phenomenon and they are in every parish

people come from all over… Like Liam O'Neil (Ex-President) would have talked about it a while back and he was looking back on his Presidency and he could never get over it. Arriving some place for a funeral of a prominent GAA person and the way in which the GAA community takes over in the best possible way, your hopeful support is your family, but when you go beyond your family you very rarely find a place of significant support. But within the community there is one organisation that delivers the business in terms of support and it's the GAA".

Image 30: GAA guard of honour at local man's funeral

"I remember back in 77 we were faced with a decision - give it one last shot or fold the club, it was that simple... Basically we had to take action, and a judgment was made because the club was been run into the ground by chasing after adult teams and that's not what the GAA is about… The club was totally disorganised, and ultimately we weren't looking after the future, the underage teams, young lads that would be the future of the club… So we made a decision, basically starting the club from scratch, forgetting the adult teams, a decision me, Davy Duggen and Sonny Walsh and people like Noel Dalton made one night at training, and of course it was difficult… But by 81 the club was competing, and even beating some of the teams that dominated the underage hurling, the likes of Mount Sion and Roanmore… but because we built a base it was effectively starting a new club, with hard core people and

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past players that would die for the club, put their lives on the line before it would fold and there the people that drive it…".

Assembled together these various rationalities derive a 'world image', which is a charismatic vision of the world. In many cases, the storytellers present this in unvarnished, robust and poetic terms; giving a sense that such a richly narrativistic organisation reproduces itself through this type of jingoistic of talk.

"My father founded the club with my grandfather and that's the history I come from… so for me not being involved in the club was never a non-runner… I was going to play and that is it. My home growing up was the club, that's where everyone met for a match, and that was my childhood… every problem in the club would have come through my father. I remember when they were in the county finals back in the late 80's all the neighbours on the street coming into my house and making flags and rosettes, that's how deep it was. And that's where I came from, so deep and entrenched in the club and nothing else existed, so by the time I grew up, I was a lunatic for Roanmore, and nothing else mattered… my nephew is 12, and is at a very impressionable age and he goes to all the matches with my father, he is like a carbon copy of me now when I was his age...".

Image 31 & 32: Nine-year-old daughter of Laois full-back Mark Timmons was supposed to be at her communion

"I'll start from the beginning - since I was a small child, I suppose the reason for my involvement is because my father, he would have been a GAA man to his core, a man with a strong belief in community activity, and that meant one thing; the club… I can remember being brought along to AGM's kicking and screaming at 16-17-18 years of age, thrown on committees while still playing… Obviously fostered a doing culture… so for me there was

always coaching or some kind of team management, the committee stuff was only a kind of add on if you want to call it that but it wasn't something that excited me… I would rather be and happiest up to my ankles in grass or muck or whatever the case may be… coaching 10 year olds or adults… but again it goes back to that philosophy or that outlook, that the club needs someone on the committee to help fundraising or to help organise, and I am going back to the same thing again you don't want to leave your club down, you want to help your club by doing anything you can… and so I have been on the committee over 30 years doing everything from Chair to Secretary and everything in between".
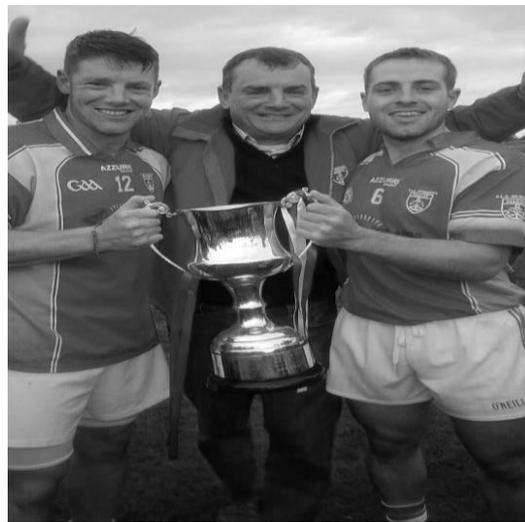
Image 33: Our first senior hurling title with Passage – alongside my brother and father

It is this image that proves the ethic for all decision-making and action, and so provides the spirit that animates GAA life. So if the GAA stands for anything it is a separate vision of Ireland as an alternative to other societies - particularly the colonial Anglo-sphere of Britain, America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, as an alternative to other sports that have lost their roots and thus their way. GAA stands apart from sports communities that have lost their grass roots - the connection from top to bottom.

"Some people would have been surprised that I am back involved as a former President, involved with the hurling team, it shouldn't of been a surprise because where we start we finish, and I think that is only right, its proper, we can bring expertise that we wouldn't of had when we were involved in the club the very first day but also we can open up doors for the club that we were never in a position to do in the past because our contacts in society".

"My father was Secretary for years, really the driving force behind hurling in the club so it was through him I got involved in the club… There are five boys and one girl in our family and we all played it one way or another… and so it was really through my father I got involved in administration; sadly he died when he was 52 so there was a progression process from there, he represented the club at the county board and East board and I just happened to follow in his footsteps after that. I was Chairman at the club here at 25, I played hurling until I was 37, so during that whole period I was involved as a player, a selector on senior and intermediate teams and over a period of time I was Treasurer, Secretary and Chairman of the club… For example I was Secretary of the juvenile club at 16, so my involvement in the club goes back to when I was knee high to a grasshopper and it's been always part of me… After my extensive involvement at club, county and interprovincial the pressure came on to stand for President… Presidency is something I never even thought about, I would never have been President of the association or got involved in administration at county level if my Dad was alive, but sometimes circumstances in your life cause you to get more heavily involved than you would of, I would have not been Chairman of the club if my father was alive at 25, because why would there be a need, he was there, look circumstances cause things like that, and I think when something like that happens comes a certain responsibility on you to carry on the legacy that's there".

Image 34: Galway manager Micheál Donoghue shows the Liam McCarthy to his father Miko Donoghue in Ballinasloe

So the stuff of GAA life is the people, how they relate to each other, its ethic of care for place and its values, its communal spirit and its long-standing traditions. This is what makes the GAA such a self-consciously different organisation to the ones I have encountered in my business schooling. Venturing deeper into the stories, what surfaces from these textured ethnographic accounts is an organisation marching to a different beat, one in which persistence of club life is valued over growth and cyclical time dominates the linear time of progress and modernity, a site where families thrive, leaders are given space and let lead

and a place where conflict is handled with care and respect (section 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6).

4.2 Scale and boundaries

The organisation is a set of micro-communities, clubs - 2,500 of these hugely important to those around them micro-enterprises. Each club sits at the heart of a community/parish, defined by invisible borders that sort every Irish citizen into being a potential member. To change club (it potentially) involves a two-year wait, a strange cooling off period to ensure that feudal territorial loyalty stands before the everyday interpersonal spats that are the stuff of club life. Beyond the club/parish unit, each club is a member of a county with a representative county board, which in turn is part of the central council. This straightforwardness of this normative hierarchy could delude the casual observer into thinking that they see the organisation; this simple way of seeing the GAA as levels, roles, function is a way of not seeing the tangled web of relationships, power and culture.
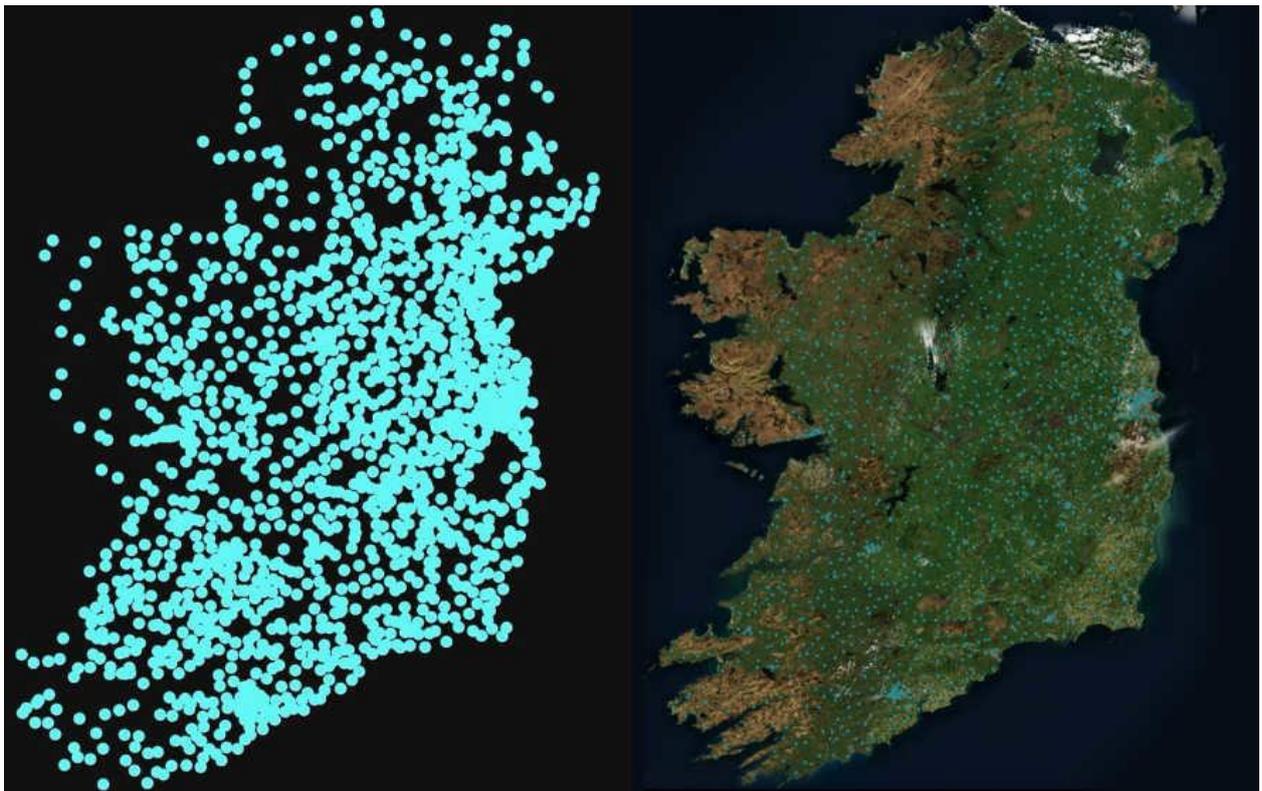
Image 35: Fermanagh man spent three years mapping out all 1745 GAA pitches in Ireland

A map of Ireland can be redrawn by simply marking out each club with obvious spaces for mountains, lakes and the tiny rump of heathen non-GAA territory - in more than one way

the GAA echoes what it means to be Irish. The organisation is central to Irish life; a key discriminator between Ireland and the other countries is the sport, and this both a mode of inclusion (for all the community) and exclusion (you are or you are not a member of the GAA family). Each year almost one million of the six and a half million people on the Island of Ireland pay their subscription and fill out their application form to join a GAA club, or more particularly their GAA club. At least five times a year, this community fills the third largest stadium in Europe, Croke Park, affectionately known as HQ. These various attempts at a demographic description of the GAA belies the huge variety of club, they are far from standard replications of each other - no two are alike but they are akin. So I encountered Kilmacud Crokes with over 2,500 members, fielding four teams at most levels, 120 teams in total with a club shop, café and bar facilities, attracting large corporate sponsorship and all the institutional practices of an enterprise of that scale. On the other end of the scale I talked to Butlerstown with less than 250 members, one field and scrapping to get one team together at each grade. And so Ireland has often split along a strong urban/rural divide, but club structure is more split between traditional communities and the new rapidly produced urban communities that have demanded a rapid generation of club life.

Each club is a charitable trust, holding all the resources and land of the club. And so clubs need to be organised in terms of administration, fundraising, coaching and games development. Each club has a board - Chair, Secretary, and Treasurer - in more recent years such roles as Health and Wellbeing Officer and Community Officer have been introduced. Similarly these roles run throughout the organisational structure from county boards, provincial, and into Croke Park. Croke Park is a separate corporate entity - split into two - the GAA as a charity which is the sole proprietor of the company, Croke Park which is the commercial arm organising TV rights, sponsorship and the owner of the main stadium.

The question that emerges as I assemble these distinct stories into a vision of the GAA - what hangs together as the organisation? Seeing an organisation of this scale is beyond the cognitive ability to any individual. The attempts that I have made in this section to account for the GAA demographically - to try to allow you to see the contours of the organisation fails to get the essence of what the GAA is - I still cannot see the GAA in it. I can however glimpse at the GAA in this quote:

Image 36: Mayo supporter watching game in London

"I won my first trophy with Ballygunner in 1958; strangely enough I won my last one in 1994, which is 36 years later. I was involved in administration since the 80's, including Secretary for 4/5 years, a board representative and a county board representative for the last 25 years, and I still find myself doing some work with teams".

"My father was the manager… and because we were a small village, we all played a few years above our age… so when I was 10 I was playing under 10's, 11's, 12's, 13's, and under 14's… my brother was 18 months older and he was the same. But my father was over all the teams, from under 10's to under 15 or 16… and funnily, we are now senior and he is still involved… not manager but a selector… that's nearly 20 years later".

Mapping the organisation is as impossible as the fabled map the size of the world; yet this is not just a question of 'full coverage' as there are always other issues and topics, rather it is a profoundly ontological question about the organising. Are the twenty six accounts of GAA life, filtered through my own GAA life world just a series of separate accounts; or taken together, do they share an image, a worldview, a shared conception of the GAA? If it is possible, as Blake's poetry suggests - *'To see a World in a Grain of Sand. / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower. / Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand. / And Eternity in an hour'*, then it is possible to assemble an imperfect vision of the essence of the GAA from these stories. So the question of whether these proximate stories around the experience of GAA life, speaks to how anthropology can conceptualise such an imagined community. Other disciplines have no such difficulty in making bold claims of seeing the organisation - for law it is a

simple matter of membership and constitution, for business it is a simple matter of income and expenditure, for sociology it is a about feeling of belonging and self-identification. And so, it is a responsibility of anthropology to find a way of talking about the collective experience of being in an organisation, as others are doing all the talking at the moment

"Obviously we have the field, there is a church, but no real shop or pub in the parish… so that is the size of what we are talking about… so when people emigrate it puts a huge strain on the club, so we are forced to amalgamate… and not something we want but there is no other options really… we all want to play, and represent who we are and where we are from, so if that's joining with another team or two so be it…".

So across the twenty stories from GAA people, a clear cadence of club life emerges that suggest clubs are typically run as a moral economies of community. Significant figures emerge from club life by staying the course, participating in major achievements and a dogged commitment to the mundane minutia life of maintaining pitches, training rooms, bars, dressing rooms, car parks, signs, programmes, bunting, St Patrick's day parade attendance, committee meetings, Garda vetting, training teams and running camps. Position is earned through long-term care. These GAA people are the individuals that hold GAA life in club, county and nationally together, move between all levels, where inherited loyalties are passed forward through the generations of like-minded people who will pull and scramble for their small territorial hinterland.

Rules and structures are a starting point as all can be magically bent or distorted when needs must, timidity is often strength, everyone watches the scene, change happens glacially, all that matters is a feral, feudal patronage to your ground, place, territory, property, time, language and ways. Club leaders live in a world of respect, mana, moving the chess pieces of teams, coaches, successors, kith, kin, navigating a stable community of settled opinions for no particular ends all but continuation.

Image 37 & 38: Andy Moran with daughter, and Dublin player Bernard Brogan after the All Ireland 2016

4.3 Perspectives on Time and Sport

"It wasn't that long ago, maybe 20 years or less that we struggled as a club… it seemed that we didn't have our priorities right. We were too interested in tearing and chasing after a few fellas and teams and neglected more important aspects of the club. So at training one night, I can remember because it was miserable; that some of us decided to refocus our attention to the juveniles… go back to basics, build a strong base and drive the club from there. Of course, some of the other teams struggled as a result but we spent too much time and efforts fighting the wrong fight… now we have that dedicated group driving the club and it is in a great position, we are competing with all the big teams, and it is down to that one decision that cold night at training. But without the support of the lads, who are the core of the club God only knows where we would be… possibly still running and chasing after the same few lads to play maybe even worse".

This common story form, in simple authentic, straightforward language highlights the strange rhythm of club life, one built around persistence and cyclicality.

Hurling, Camogie and Gaelic Football are seasonal sports and so GAA life has a rhythm around the various competitions, punctuated by ritual events and habitual activities like summer camps, collecting Hurley's, St Patrick's day club finals or the first and third Sunday in September. So, each has a season rhythm of birth or rebirth, growth and development, maturity and contribution and decline.

Image 39: Waterford fans, young and old gear up for the All Ireland 2017

"The first Sunday in September is what you dream of, what you think of as a child… every ball lost and Hurley broken… it is where every GAA person wants to be… it's a special day not just for the teams taking part and their fans but it's a larger societal thing…".

"It's all about next year… next year is the most important year for us… this year's final is over, the lads will enjoy the next few days together, but we look forward to next year… it's not going to be easy, but it's something we look forward to".

This is far from the linear time of modernity, which has witnessed the change in tempo of modern social life with the assistance of technological acceleration, acceleration of social change and acceleration in the pace of life (Rosa, 2013). Club life follows the cyclical time of nature – renewal, growth, taper and decline; allowing for time off and time for rest. The club at rest is profoundly about being with people in the time you share. And so, the club is not really accelerating (despite some examples of it - intensity of training, nutrition, strength and conditioning etc.); as the core of GAA life has no concept of progress.

"We formed the juvenile club and went with under 11 and 12 City leagues… that was around 81… we started in 'B' and found ourselves in the 'A' after a few years. But I would say it would have taking 25 years from that time to the time we won our first senior championship… we got to a senior final in 2005, so say from 1981 that's what you're looking at... You were building a base, like effectively we were starting a new club, slow going but very enjoyable".

"We got relegated from senior… but we knew in 10 years' time we would have a great team, competing for senior titles… the juvenile teams were very strong… and there was some dark days… but we are back now, and in the top two or three teams in the senior championship…".

Time within the organisation also moves in generations - a generation of players, a generation of administrators, a generation of leaders and perhaps the most significant generation of all - the next generation. But time is also frozen within the organisation - it does not move, as people hold down positions in club life forever, as a form of perpetual family offices.

"My father was the club, he had a few comings and goings as Chairman… he was the fella that was putting 10-12 fellas in the car and getting one other parent to help… probably training every underage team in Ferrybank... even when he retired he use to go up to the school 2-3 times a week for hurling…. Now I am the Vice Chairman and have been for 3-4 years… and I actually got the Camogie club up and running three years ago because my daughter was involved, so I am Chairman of the Camogie club and Vice Chairman of the GAA club".

"My house or my home was the club… that's where everyone met for a match and that's what I grew up with. If there is a problem in Roanmore, number 3 Roanmore Park that's where you go, everything filtered through there… and now nearly 40 years on he is still seen as Mr Roanmore… the go to man".

Story after story demonstrates a different organisational time within GAA life. In the thicket of talk about progressing, there is no progressing to make. This is not the Olympic aspiration of *Citius, Altius, Fortius*, which is Latin for *Faster, Higher, Stronger*. Clubs are about being the best you can be for a while, before the obvious decline. It is about reaching your peak, getting the best from your body while it still works, and following the cyclical pattern of the seasons. Administrative life has more sense of permanency, of the slow flow of treacle, of an unchanging community. There are rich stories of ferocious battles, but all against the backdrop of small communities stuck with each other forever. Long tenures, gentle change, settled views, handing over, preserving bubble out of the stories. Commitment and long tenures convey an appreciation for what matters in the organisation.

Image 40: Celebrations in the community, for the community after winning the county final

"… Most GAA children are brought into the world with a Hurley in their hand… I think it's because it's one of the first gifts the child receives… it soon becomes an extension of their arm; and it is hard to know where the child's arm ends and the Hurley begins… as a child its brought everywhere, to mass, school, birthdays… actually, I can remember when I was in primary school my Teacher often gave me a clip behind the ear for leaving it at home…".

"Buying a new Hurl was always exciting for the kids… to the point a Hurl was one of the first things on Santa's list each year… but it's the care for the Hurl, like a child, that's what I always found interesting… to the point of not wanting it to get dirty… ".

Time in a GAA life is a metronome, constantly moving forth and back in a familiar rhythm, never speeding up or slowing down, just moving cyclically. This alternative vision of organisation time carries natural frustrations – people cling to office, traditions cannot be violated, new smarter ways of doing this are not possible, old trumps new; with many bruised casualties of this slow organising.

"I'm involved in administration for years, and it is not onerous at all, writing up minutes, fixtures, booking tickets for groups to go to places, letters of support… I don't find it difficult… but now they have asked me to be this Health and Wellbeing Officer… I am not as

comfortable with that… what do I know about suicide prevention… it does not fit me, I am into fitness…".

The stories offer a relatively direct narrative when it discusses the slow, often motionless approach to time in what is an increasingly accelerated world. The GAA somehow grasps it with both hands, pinning it to a pace that it wants, and so controls the organisations growth and progress.

"Decisions are made in the right spirit… you don't just make decisions for the sake of it or because the club down the road are doing it… you have to think is it right for the club… always asking the question why…"

The clubs go beyond acknowledging the limits to participation, limited by parish boundaries, age, demographics, migration - they actively enforce a de-growth ontology - the rules enforce limited geographic scope of participation. In doing so, the clubs recognise the potential of being non-expansionary in favour of being sustainable, and being more about community stewardship, cohesion, sharing in locally.

"At 34, when my playing days were almost behind me and I got cornered for the under 6's… One of the older clubmen pulled me aside… I needed to start thinking about the club and its future… this meant starting at the bottom, and these kids would be with me for the next 20 years… targeting a championship in 2023, and that other parishes had the same mind-set - that was what I was up against… losing a few along the way was tough but I knocked on doors to hunt them into training for 12 years, I bullied parents who did not know, care or understand how good their kids were with a jersey on. Only another few years and I will find out what kind of Bainisteoir of I am".

4.4 The greater kinship of GAA life

Emerging from the colourful stories were tales of a richly developed sense of family fealty to the GAA, to their organisation. Overwhelming all the fine-grained narrative detail was the not unsurprising notion that families with significant inter-generational links in and around an organisation hold an irrational care for their club.

"Going down through my family, my father was steeped, heavily involved - seen as the key personality around that time; seen really as the leader of the club, maybe he was the club… but we didn't have to go outside of our door to understand what the GAA meant, or what it was, because some people would have described our home when we were young as the club rooms of the GAA club because my father was Secretary of the club so everything happened around the Secretary, so our home would be a familiar meeting place for club officials, players or drop in situations and discussions of the GAA… but that's what it was, so the GAA was number one in our family and family life was probably number two, it meant so much, but we were reared on the GAA and that was it, there was nothing else".

"My father was the club, he spent his life on the field and in the dressing rooms… if people were looking for him they would try the field before going to the house… to the point he died on the field with a heart attack… we got him home alright but he died in his boots…".

Image 41: Donegal's oldest supporter at 106 years of age

The passionate, enchanting language of the storytellers conveys their animalistic care for the club, like offspring as they note; 'the club comes before family in some instances, and we know that'. These emotionally filled commitments have travelled down family lines for generations with knowledge, béaloideas (folklore) and enthusiasm. Emotions that will remain long after the actual games, playing and competitions are over; in the ebb and flow of club life is a long-term commitment. And so, the family remains long after everything else, enduring the darker moments of the club and seeks pleasure in pulling it back together. The family often sits in wait, experienced and conservative but ready to take on positions when required, and does so in a humble manner using words like 'dragged into', 'there was no one else' or 'I was cornered' when asked how they were appointed.

"In 94 I can recall hearing of the clubs AGM, for some strange reason I wasn't there, but I was aware there was a difficulty in filling the Chair, I believe it was passed around the room as the committee asked who will take on the role… I then heard that he, my father, was going back in as Chairman, after having a few comings and goings before so I went straight down to the house and asked him is it true… He replied by saying there was no one else to do it so I had to, I knew he had a love of it, and at the time there was only a hand full of people doing work in the club… whereas today you could have 20-30 people helping out at different age groups…. in those days there was a small amount of people doing a lot of work, doing everything really… but it is funny because now I am the Chairman, and also sit on a number of committees in the club…".

"I was asked to come back in… to be honest I didn't want to, I felt it was time for others to take it on and drive the club, bring different ideas and so on… but they said there was no one else… so I couldn't leave them down…".

This particular telling demonstrates how families sally forth when the club is vulnerable and receding from power and this is considered an accomplishment. It characterises leadership through family as a selfless, wholly unwanted task of carrying the baton onwards - devoid of the pleasures of playing, and rich in dull interminable meetings about 'finance, risk registers, administration, fixtures and other issues that were not of much relevance'. Imbued in this gentile realisation in the investment and husbandry that parents put into the children - the mentoring, coaching and briefing that goes in over many years about organisational life - literally preparing children to take over the reins. There is a deep acculturation into organisational life, a process that requires upkeep, upkeep to sustain the organisational ethos.

"To be honest, I learnt a lot, if not all from my father, and I still do today… if I have to make a decision as Chair or if I know something needs doing, I ring him or call to the house… he has been a part of the club all his life so he has years and years of experience… he just knows how to run the club really…".

This implausible care that family shares with the club takes on somewhat of an early set of recruitment hurdles - hurdles that remain in place through their time at the club. The initial

steps are often unstable as they question the significance of the early initiation, commitments 'of long meetings with middle-aged men'.

"God, I remember when the club was small, struggling for numbers and seeing my father and one more parent driving to matches - literally putting a team in two cars, but that was a different time... so that kind of thing to me is normal... I was exposed to it early on but also going to committee meetings at a young age, possibly too young. Thinking back, I spent my childhood in the club; at meetings and matches, but I loved it, I didn't know anything else... I got great enjoyment listening to the committee talk about the club issues and fixtures and at that time I was only 14 or maybe even 15 at most… don't get me wrong, I did question why I was at the meetings because it was not a place for children…".

"I think it is nature in the GAA, like I took over from my family's tradition, mainly my father… he looked after all the underage teams in the club, I think he was more comfortable there… and I am no different… yeah I have kids and its easier when their involved but I love doing it… and I know, know different…".

Early steps into leadership by the family are watched over closely, edges are knocked off, and mistakes are re-storied as learning, put down to youth and enthusiasm. Guile is grown through exposure to the ordinary, routine or mundane practices. If a family member does not have the right temperament for the club leadership, others will have been cultivated; useful roles are found, no one goes to waste. Deep commitment, the thankless work of club life (cutting of grass, the painting of gates or cleaning of dressing rooms) and work rate are always acknowledged; casualness or failed intentions mean marginalisation - but the door is always open for people to come right. In all this, balance is struck between the family and the organisation; but on issues of substance the organisation usually comes first.

"Most clubs are the same and have a lot of retired players that still maintain an interest, and we are lucky that an awful lot of those players are now juvenile coaches… we treat the coaches right, everyone goes down the same path, so no matter who you are… you start at the bottom, starting at under 11 or maybe under 8's and you could be under 9's the following year or two… it doesn't matter who you are you work your way up to minor at least under 21 and senior is a kind of different kettle of fish, you need to be a real club man for that…".

Image 42: Celebrating the 2013 county final

The GAA is a site where family has a profound influence on how the club operates. It is a place where their strong links and implausible care for kith and kin in the and around the organisation are essential to understand its vibrancy.

For the GAA is an organisation where families enforce, inscribe and underwrite the organisations pursuit of perseverance, as participation, leadership, care and ethos reverberated through generations of family and the GAA's organisational life.

4.5 On community leadership

Iconic club leaders are remembered in club lore.

"Mr. McGinn was Mr. Ballygunner, and at the time he kept hurling going in the community… and this became more apparent when he left, well retired and moved on, as there was no hurling in the club, around the late 70's - early 80's… With Mr. McGinn it was quite simple - you brought your Hurley to school, and it was as important as your school bag… We played hurling at break, in fact we played at every minute possible, and we trained every evening after school. He fuelled the community with passion for the GAA. And with Mr. McGinn you were playing with fellas you grew up with, your friends, so it was a way of life. It wasn't just something you took on as a fad…. And what was interesting, when that group revived hurling in Ballygunner, we took the best bunch of clubmen that you want to meet, which was Mr. McGinn's legacy…".

In these fast moving narratives, beyond the storyteller assumes a remarkable a prioria knowledge of their club; and so they get on with the business of offering rich insights into how the complex feats of survival and success were achieved, offering little to guide the listener.

Image 43: Hurley's outside church in Kilkenny

"Look, you know… I am not saying anything, but everyone does know… and it feels old saying it. You cannot miss the bloody stadium... Ceausescu's palace, the field of dreams, call it what you want but it is ridiculous that a club with a hand full of teams in a village that has a church, graveyard and a pub but it has a 350 seater stadium and top class dressing rooms… but that's just the Boss… basically, he owned the land 40 years ago, he has built four housing estates, gone bust twice, no one knows who is behind him… He is 81 now and no one knows what happens after he goes... if he ever goes... ha ha…that fucker will see us all out. He will be running this club from a cryogenic tomb".

All stories point at the need for leaders to operate at all registers of the organisations activities - from taking out the bins to meeting Presidents. All stories lay it on thick the importance of remaining humble, caring and always are aware of the club's needs. These asides go beyond symbolism, leaders are obliged to do everything that is needed, anything that others will not do, and in this way they are probably best understood as being the people underwriting the organisations activities by ensuring that things happen. In this sense leadership positions are not awarded - they are simply taken by the people who care too much.

Image 44: Club members maintaining the facilities

"Alex Ferguson was United, as my father was Roanmore, every problem in the club would have come through him back in the day, I mean every problem - big or small, fellas coming up to him, Danny - I am stuck for a few pound, any chance you would have a loan, that kind of stuff or Danny - I am up in court next week is there any chance you would go up as a character witness for me, people knew him as Mr. Roanmore, a type of local councillor without been a councillor".

"…He was the club, he called the shots, but did so with the club at heart… he spent hours and hours cleaning, cutting the grass, painting, doing anything really… but to me he was great for advice, if it was playing, family or work; he was the go to man".

The character of many of the stories was to pass on learning about club leadership; so many of the stories had the cadence of morality plays, where the essence of good action was

strongly demonstrated. Many of the stories deal with how to lead community life at pivotal moments, when much is at stake for the club.

Image 45 & 46: Inspiring a community

"Lows - lows are few and far between – the real lows are losing key people in the club not games or finals, but we have an old tradition in Kilkenny particularly our club that a key member would get; a guard of honour, through the town, from the county hospital, up the high street and then up the Church, but the old legends of the club wanted to be buried in the club tie, a fitting way to go out... ".

Image 47: Visiting the grave of a GAA man – a figure of the community

The attention of the stories about how to lead grieving are especially interesting as they focus on the suspension of the organisations ordinary purpose, a recognition that the institution have to be perceived as caring and humane, and most of all that these moments are opportunities to demonstrate the depth of meaning in club life. The stories are imbued with moments of discernment and good judgement about a broader ethos of the organisations purpose.

"I was asked to carry the coffin, by the mother of a young GAA man that was killed, it was absolutely remarkable; representing the Association at that was historic in the sense that he was a PNSI officer. In some respects it wasn't because I was carrying the coffin but it was historic and I think it, in some respects it changed the view of the GAA among the society in the North, it was just truly phenomenal - we are all a GAA family….".

Beyond stories of grieving, the storytellers save their best, most sinuously delicious language to convey the emotions they and others feel for their club - a world full of "lunatics", with "immense love" for the sport, for the community and for the broader GAA family. And so they will protect the club at all costs.

"There are three grey men in this place, they walk around like a team of factory owners, nothing is ever good enough, they will not let us spend a shilling, our under 10's jerseys are from a company that went bust 20 years ago…".

4.6 Conflict

Where this idealised vision of care is tested is in the natural disputes, disagreements, fallouts and bust ups that arise in club life. Combustible issues in organisational life have the additional complexities of family, contested loyalties and the legacy of long-lived relationships to contend with. Many stories were told of club politics and interpersonal rivalries; as well as more externally prompted crises; but joining all these stories was a marked refusal to allow breaches to take hold. In more reflective passages the stories told of the importance of getting everyone back in the boat, back on to the same page, noting that whilst they might fight, everyone has the same interest at heart. And so, no one is ever cast aside, things get smoothed over; issues of contention are held back so as not to provoke.

"About 6 years ago a big issue arose in the club, they were talking about selling our field at the height of the Celtic Tiger maybe 8-10 years ago and moving to new premises… at the time my brother Ronan would have been the Chairman and the dispute split the club in a lot of ways. A lot of nasty stuff surfaced and a divide split families that would have been friends for years, fell out and still relations wouldn't be great, but we are all still involved in the club. The move never actually happened… and I am not sure if was the right decision, maybe we were lucky…".

And mistakes are quickly put in the past, and ethos of moving on, letting bygones be bygones. Although resentments can last:

"Losing Cathal to Teemore (the parish/team next door) was heart breaking… He was starting with the under 9's, 10's, 11's, 12's, 13's… so we rested him once for not turning up to training and he leaves the club... he who trains plays… and that led to world war iii… and it's still not over… He is serving out his two years... but we lost the two brothers as well, although not much of a loss. None of us are ever coming back from the bad blood over this. Things were said…".

"A number of years back money was easy to access and because the community was expanding and club membership was increasing quite fast; some of the committee members decided to start developing a new field and an new indoor facility… obviously to cope with the increase in numbers. At the time it was probably the right thing to do, but the economy collapsed and there was less access to funding and money; anyway the development is not entirely complete yet, but to be honest and at the time the committee had the best intentions at heart…".

These organisations that are surrounded by family behave like families in crisis - they pull together, fix things up, and move on. But in some cases, like families arguments; some are irreparable as they cut the family too deep to move on.

Image 48: The resources of the club

"Similar to others, as a club we made a decision to develop the club… money was easy come by, so we decided to build bigger dressing rooms, buy more land beside the field, have a walk way for the community and put up lights… we got going but unfortunately the economy collapsed and we were short money… we didn't get all what we wanted but we have better facilities… at the time it was the right thing to do… we will benefit from this in the future and it's great to see more activity around the field…".

"There is a good lad in charge John Ryan, the vision or strategy when they bought Gracedieu was due to the explosion of population density, a new demography. But the property

bubble bust, that vision or strategy hasn't been seen to fruition, they have a second field that while it is been used, but only for the senior team, it is not the Centre or the hub of community life because there is no community up there. That's what Roanmore had envisioned, De La Salle to a certain extent thought that as well. But Roanmore has developed a new strategy or a new vision in terms of consolidating their core membership bases around the home area. Developing the pitch over there and tidying it up, so people see development and say the place is moving forward…".

What strikes in this quote is his superficial use of managerial language; but not managerial logic - so he uses terms like vision, consolidating, moving forward; but the core telling of a happening is to offer a positive narration of a wild misjudgement, an investment in new pitches that was misguided, cost the club dearly; but his story offers empathy for the 'good lad' behind the initiative, and heals up the error as something that will come right, ahead of its time, with the best of intentions. In this way, one can see the ethos of care and persistence in operation. The above story, like so many told, reflects a concern for legitimacy, reputation and good effort; over absolute success; and in doing so demonstrates the concept of noblesse oblige, wherein to be noble and hold on to leadership, one must be seen to act with nobility.

In spite of what seems to be a winner's account of the GAA - all people who have passed through the various levels of social filtering, competition and have succeeded; there is however a dark side. This section allows us to witness some of the more turbulent moments within club life. The stories of people who have exerted an incredible amount of time and energy to see their ideas rejected, witness the team they have coached from under sixes given to someone else, felt the bitter taste of defeat in club elections and heard the criticism of their decisions across the parish. But when we consider the size and scale of the organisation, but more so its place within each of our communities; the dark side of the club is perhaps darker than we think as it's formed by our peers, our friends and our families.

4.7 Seeing the GAA as something else

This chapter attempts to share the vision I encountered of the GAA in the stories told to me. Naturally it falls short to fully convey the richness of the spirit and ethic of GAA life, club, community, but I hope that it offers a useful glimpse into the curious world of the GAA. This

contextual point of departure comes before the richly textured stories of organisational life; stories of people and communities that fully understand the organisational limits. The stories speak of an organisation that has little ethos for time-as-progress and yet has sustained its footing in a dramatically growing, radically changing and modernising economy and society. In its own tin-pot way, the organisation has encountered modernity by negotiating TV rights, MNC sponsorship, Garda vetting, the necessity for the snowflake generation to have warm showers; and somehow not been bettered by it. The GAA is not an organisation frozen in aspic, but it is also not succumbed to the mimetic impulse that has taken other sporting communities, the coercive and normative pressures that surround contemporary institutions (after Powell and DiMaggio, 1991) that make commercialisation, excellence and scale the only show in town.

Perhaps the GAA offers a vision of an alternative organisation.

Chapter 5
On alternative organisations

Image 49: Some interesting prizes at the clubs raffle

5.0 Circling the difference, alternativeness and alterity of the GAA

It is striking how across the GAA there is an awareness of how special and unique the GAA is:

"The miracle of the GAA is that it works so well despite itself. Paranoia, self-doubt, trenchant conservatism, fear of outside sports and veneration of the past are all key parts of the GAA psyche. In order to love the GAA, you have to swallow these faults whole" (Keith Duggan - The Irish Times 2002).
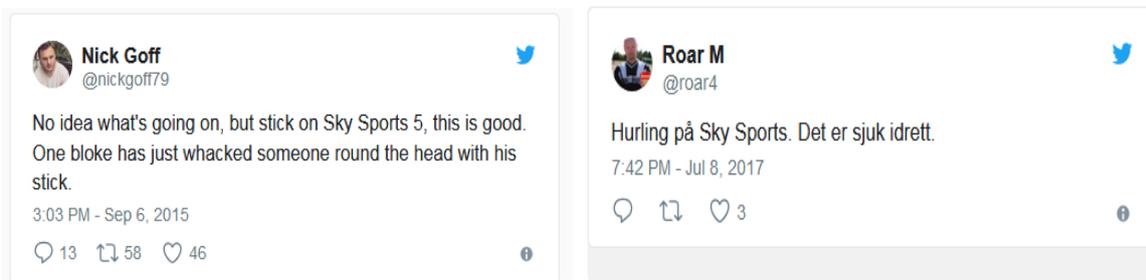
Image 50 & 51: The first impressions of the GAA to new comers

"You won't find the GAA anywhere else, although you will like - it's in Beijing, Boston and even Bandon (a famously Protestant enclave of West Cork)…".

And there has been more than one storyteller that has delivered the ultimate GAA one liner about Seán Og O'Halpin - "His father is from Fermanagh and his mother is from Fiji, neither a Hurling stronghold".

But it is easy to think of the GAA as being between things, in a post-peace process Ireland between Catholic and Protestant, between urban and rural, the old and the new, between public and private, between plain sport and a political-social movement, between excellence and participation, between Ireland and its various global outposts of kin. Beyond this, it is also easy to see the GAA as a sporting representation, effect or manifestation of Irish culture - a local flavour of two essential elements - nation and sport. But these ways of thinking miss out on seeing the GAA as something very different, a monad that is entirely a simple substance distinct from the things around it.

And so, it is an entire rejection of the fictional character Ross O'Carroll Kelly's reflection that "eventually all sports will evolve to look like rugby". In a world of increasing sport sameness and cultural levelling, the GAA stands out as being something different. Its alterity, its sense of its own otherness is present in almost all the text of all the stories.

"The GAA is special; there is nothing on earth like it".

Image 52: The GAA wedding ritual

"It's amateur status in a world gone mad with money is what makes it unique, but it's also the connection to place, where you're from, where you're family has lived for years… but it's hard to describe what the GAA means to people".

As we circle its otherness, the question emerges; if the GAA is different - in what way. As I consider the imprecision in describing the organisation I then come from the other side, and try to see what the GAA is not. And so, I was drawn to Derrida as the master of looking to see what is not there. Going beyond the dialectic or comparative work between sports, Derrida allows or encourages an exploration of difference within. Certainly the GAA is in conflict, tension and living with paradox in an aporia that is its own politics. So while the organisation and its members carry a great sense of its uniqueness, betwixt and between the stories are the unresolved, permanently worked over issues of being just like other sports. So talk of amateur status, concerns about paying coaches, getting sponsorship (especially from Sky), sourcing Ash from abroad for Hurleys, allowing 'foreign sports' on sacred territory narratively and politically create la differnance.

These issues live discursively within the GAA always offering a sense of encroaching modernity, selling out, losing the soul of the organisation; but in their speech performance they speak of an absolute and irrecuperable alterity of a permanently deferred future to come. As GAA people worry obsessively and publically about these various potential hurts and losses of soul, they are simultaneously insisting on the alternativeness of the

organisation. In all their soul searching, they create the ethos that the organisation has a soul, one worth fighting over, where the stakes are so big, and loss is always possible.

"The GAA is an idealistic organisation. Go back to the 1950s and look at the Gaelic Weekly magazine - the Irish language and song and culture were central to the aims of the association. That has slipped to the extent that the 'G' is disappearing and we are in danger of becoming a mere Athletic Association. When that happens, then the GAA is dead" (in response to Rule 42).

"If someone came in with €10bn to fund payment to our players for the next 100 years, we'd refuse it. Pay for play would destroy our association. We are an amateur organisation, rooted in our community. That's the core principle, the vision we have to keep to remain rock solid," (GAA President Aogán Ó Fearghaíl on pay for play).

Image 53 & 54: The ecstasy and the agony of the games

So, this chapter aspires to describe in more detail the alternativeness of the club by drawing on literature that is useful in understanding its organisation. I will try to present, as best I can, an image of the GAA by searching for what is not there - the absences, ellipses, gaps, spaces where the alterity of the GAA resides. By calling on the thinking of Chip Morningstar and Johnathan Culler, but not dogmatically following their approach as precise a recipe as I think Derrida might appreciate; this chapter makes the claim that the GAA does things differently; it cares for different things and pursues different goals. Essentially, the GAA does not chime with other organisations of our time.

5.1 The alternative within the GAA

In thinking through Derrida in the GAA, what emerges is the different vernacular of organisation life. One with a distinctive purpose of care and perseverance; which in turn infuses the organisation with a profound instinct for its own survival over growth. The vision of the GAA that surrounds its internal moral panic over losing its soul is an organisation with a distinctive ethos of responsibility for every person who encounters the organisation. Laid on thick is an ardent language when called on to describe the alternative nature of these organisations, and maybe there is much to be gained from this. Despite the leading pursuit of Parker et al.'s (2014) work - one that aspires to distinguish the alternative from the ordinary; lightly hidden is the increasing emphasis on the human, and their place within organisations (Charterina et al., 2007; Cheney et al., 2014; Cheney, 2006; Laville and Glémain, 2009). And so, the cries for alternatives are oft flat, inverted, self-organising, autonomous, fluid, empowered, informal, relaxed, anti-authoritarian, meaning in/of work and humanistic – the GAA.

Image 55: Repairing the damages

"The club is run by a hand full of very committed people… some have very busy jobs, and I have always wondered how they make time to put in the hours they do… but talking to them recently they said that this is not work, this is pleasure, enjoyable… and they can physically see the impact of their labour…".

As I searched to unearth the GAA's opposition; I followed the general guide in solving most problems - start from the beginning. And so, taking such advice, but also considering the nature of the question; we find ourselves back possibly at the beginning of organisation with Frederic Taylor's scientific management (1911). A hierarchical way of doing things by establishing superiority over subordinates and a second move that naturally dehumanises the nature of work. In fact Taylor (1911:59) refers to workers as "stupid" and without emotion that he bears a resemblance to the "mental make-up the ox".

Applying a performativity lens to work (after Austin, 1963) Taylor is taught in most business schools in a mode best described as 'sneaking regard' (O'Carroll, 1987); where instructors simultaneously walking away from its appalling vision of humanity, whilst still substantiating it as a cardinal mode of managing. And it was in this very act of control and command, a one way system of communication - call it what you want, that this work was conceived. Spending five years in a school of business where the foundation of organisation was build out from, sold as a stable way of doing things; yet my practical experiences within club life was in complete contrast to this stiff and unemotional method to organising. And so, perhaps, the GAA's opposition is the birth of organisation, a commercial hold that has not lost its grip on work.

"Every decision in the club is made by the members… the people that turn up for meetings, put themselves forward for committees, help in fundraising… the club is the heart of the community so the decisions have to reflect that…".

Since then much of the more operational management side of the business academy has been variously sugar coating Taylor; Lean Manufacturing, Six Sigma and others reside. Hand-in-glove with Taylorism is Weber's (2009) theory of bureaucracy, supporting further the confines on workers through the increased presence of control and command; social structures all which pursue efficiency in spite of its dehumanising nature. Alike the sugar coating of Taylorism - organisations hierarchies followed suit, introducing such things as multi-divisional hierarchies, network organisation, professional organisation and representative democratic organisation (Drucker, 1988; Sloan, 1964; Diefenbach and Sillince, 2011). Yet they all remain infatuated with the bottom line - the shareholders divvy (Harvey, 2003; Wright, 2010).

GAA, as a charitable organisation does not use the term profit, nor does it take any pride in retained income. That is not to say that the GAA is disinterested in what it calls revenues - these are totemically important and reported on, but seen as a flow inwards that facilitates a flow outwards - and is a core metric of what GAA people call 'vibrancy'. Essentially it is considered a measure of how much of the world is GAA.

Like a scoreline, it gets wiped for the next contest. But great years are remembered - many GAA people quote the minute of the funding model that supported the development of the €1bn 'world-class' stadium. So an increase in the GAA's bottom line is essentially a representation of increased participation – feeding into its ethos. A further move to distance it from others is the organisations approach to distributing this rather sizable revenue. The GAA's shareholders are not your common holders of shares; these shareholders hold their communities together and so (approximately) 82 percent of all income generated goes back to grassroots. Back to clubs, where it came from, facilitating increased membership, build more communal amenities; finance the day to day running of organisational life within the club.

"Our sponsors and partners also know that around 82 percent of all income that the GAA earns - gate receipts, sponsorship, media rights, and merchandising - is redistributed throughout the organisation and into the counties and clubs".

At the core of current GAA politics is the equable distribution of the revenue - a deeply ideological discourse within GAA life on player welfare, the time elite players give up and forgo to be equivalent to other professional sports communities, the balance of income from sponsorship with ethics, access and participation (so TV rights to subscription broadcasters, the cost of jerseys, Irish production of sportswear), how the GAA relates to politics (issues such as homelessness, charity, or former Presidents in politics), all of these bitterly fought out contentious issues cut to the quik of GAA alternativeness.

Image 56: The heat of battle on All Ireland final day

Yet there has been an assortment of attempts to substantiate the new organisational forms (see Griffin and O'Toole, 2010 for a detailed account), associated with the lack of control (Berlin, 1992) - a range of differing terms for very similar concepts are employed, yet none of which have become dominant.

Notwithstanding the subtle differences between these similar concepts, it is fair to say that together they represent a distinct and reasonably homogenous reconceptualisation of structure of organisations; a reconceptualisation based on the idea that organisational structures are becoming less hierarchical and more heterarchical.

In spite of such claims, for the most part, these organisations still remain bureaucratic, capitalocentric and modern, smothered by the control and command principles in spite of the progressively pervasive and nuanced form. Perhaps they bolster an increasingly horizontal and possibly more self-directed way of organising; yet struggle to remove the bureaucratic noose from around their neck. In fact, this unpopulated space between control and the uncontrolled can often lead to additional complexities, such as employees co-opting (Baldry and Hallier, 2009); bringing with it further levels of uncertainty and unpredictability producing tensions in the workplace (Walker and Marchau, 2010) mainly in line with a reduction in command, in turn creating resistive practices by employees (Fleming, 2005). And maybe Parker et al.'s (2014: 38) claim is applicable here, "one in isolation is insufficient", in other words you abide by the rules of bureaucracy or you do not, again back with the dualism; an alternative or a bureaucratic form.

If this is the case, the question now appears, how does the GAA remain alternative in the face of increased pressures on the organisation? But before we try to answer this, maybe it is best to test the GAA against Parker et al.'s (2014) three principles that go a long way in determining if an organisation is alternative or not.

5.2 Defining the alternative

Up to now I have tried to demonstrate to the best of my ability the different worlds I occupy. The business school that pushes the capitalistic, mainstream and contemporary ideology and my applied life that promotes care and harmony. To compel further my claim, I have called on the descriptive and much thought out work of Parker et al. (2014). Work that encourages and champions the notion of other possibilities (the recent call for more work on 'alternative' organisations Vadallet and Pezé, 2017), whilst seeking to find further case exemplars of organisations that adopt a divergent system to arranging. Essentially, the work by Parker et al. (2007, 2014) aspires to demonstrate that there are other ways of doing

things, and so there is not just one method to organisation (Cheney et al., 2014; Parker et al., 2007, 2014). Parker et al. also inspires others to examine further the confines of the current system, particularly our ties with capitalism; so it is an extension to the theoretical work of critical performativity (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Huault et al., 2014; Heller et al., 2013; Roscoe and Chillas, 2014); work that aspires to combat the notion that 'there is no alternative' to the capital enterprise.

However, this call does not open up the flood gates, suggesting that 'anything goes' (p.36), it is not advocating the likes of fascism, feudalism and slavery despite their unconventional practices. More so the work promotes the central point of rationality, visions of a better form of social order (Ostrom, 1990, 2002, 2010), and thoughts about utopia (Parker, 2002b; Parker et al., 2007). It is for that reason that we call specifically on Parker et al.'s (2014) three broad orientations or principles that are believed to tie together much of their work and establishes something as an alternative - *autonomy, solidarity and responsibility*.

5.3 Autonomy – free choice

What appeared in these narratives is an organisation unconcerned with growth; inhabiting the space in Ireland it always has occupied (Ostrom, 1990, 2002, 2010). It demonstrates little appetite for capitalism, material developments and claiming territory (after Eldon, 2010). So, it has a profoundly different concept of time and progress, bolstering a reserved maybe even premodern way of thinking. This line of thought is possibly best evidenced through their leading concern - one of nurture, as clubs place incredible emphasis on sustaining its emotion and sporting footprint in every town and village. This is achieved through individual's passion, built on respect and enchantment as these club people are let lead and those with little care vote with their feet. These people find themselves pulling people together as a moral community (Thompson, 1971; Federici, 2009; De Angelis and Harvie, 2014; Polanyi, 2015), pulling and scrambling for their small hinterland - pulling for their place, territory, property, time and language. And so, this is a vague offering into the club liberty - free of the market, its confines and its increasing hold on humanity and organisation direction and decision. Magically these individuals can play with the rules,

distort reality in order to get what they want; and what they want is aligned with what the club wants.

Images 57-59: Head groundsman at Semple Stadium - David Hanley

5.4 Solidarity – reliance on others

In spite of this point being somewhat at odds with the former (cf. Parker et al., 2014 for a more detailed account) and possibly it is more of a strain rather than an outright contradiction, based on individualism and independence this, the second principle which is underpinned by the social, the collective and so this ultimately means a communal reliance on others. To be more specific, this principle centres on the manner in which we humans make each other, deliver meaning and support, or what Berger and Luckmann (1967) call 'social construction'. In simpler terms – "the making of the human through and with other humans in such a way it becomes impossible to imagine even being human without some conception of a society to be oriented to" (Parker et al., 2014: 37). Or in GAA speak "this is a windswept island on the West coast of Europe and the Romans were right, this is Hibernia, the land of eternal winter and if we didn't have GAA, this would be a dull enough spot, there is not an awful lot more going on in communities" [GAA President]. Nowhere is this mode of comfort and support more powerful than the unit of care found within family. Family, perhaps the sturdiest organising principle has seen families and their close networks bring clubs into being and sustain them through the generations - the clubs have become an extension of family, taking on many of its values. And maybe this is a good example of how the individual and the collective come together, as in family there is generally a decision maker, a dominant person, be it a mother or a father, yet relies on the family for support, comfort and compassion, the scaffolding if you like.

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Image 60: The next generation of Passage players and club administrators

5.5 Responsibility – long term sustainability

Finally, and in my opinion the most simplistic principle (of the three of Parker's test) to discuss and convey its relevance to the GAA; built on a long term sustainable commitment and ethic of care for the organisation and the individuals who inhabit it (Kanter and Eccles, 1992). The values significance is certainly strengthened by previously contested principles, indeed a relentless undercurrent all through; but more importantly, one that resonates with the GAA's telos (Fuys et al., 2008; Scharper and Cunningham, 2006). As people are boundary-less, spurred on, encouraged to make their own impact on the club, and so if that's painting gates or becoming President people are let flourish – rooting their own way into the clubs history. In doing so, demonstrating the strong link between top and bottom through an ingrained shared responsibility of the GAA's future; a concise vision that the organisation has embraced since 1884, which in turn creates and preserves alike minded people. A value also admired by society (De Angelis and Harvie, 2014), so if that sustainability means a gentle word in the local Principles ear to spare a thought for the club person who is recently graduated; so be it. An action that endeavours to enthuse a new generation by keeping the ever present cycle alive, but also one which fortifies against profiteering, becoming ordinary and similar to others and their organising systems.

Image 61: Davy Fitz shadowed by son Colm

So, when we review Parker et al.'s (2014) test, it clearly resonates with the organising principles of the GAA; and these responsibilities are well understood by those in and around the organisation. The leading form of negotiation for the organisation is its wrestle with the ever increasing bureaucratic demands of the modern world. It carefully toes the line, yet always finds itself marginalising its restrictions, and again this is possibly supported by its manifestation in the individual, the collective and the future. It is believed anything less would be insufficient, and therefore not alternative. And it is for that reason I aspire for this organisation to be rendered up as an alternative form in that it meets Parker et al.'s (2014) test. To further support this claim; maybe there is much to be gained from a deeper examination of the families place within organisation studies.

5.6 Family - The GAA's alternative treatment of family

Beyond Martin Parker's test of alternativeness, I can identify within the GAA some strong organising principles that further distance it from ordinary contemporary ways of organising. Families, for the most part are overlooked in organisation studies despite their characteristics - collective identity, their common values, their continued commitment to organisation, family's emotional connection to work and their desire to endure across generations. And so, modern organisational forms take little account of the family in organisational studies; notwithstanding the narrow, slightly marginal fields of family-firms (Schulze and Gedajlovic, 2010), work-life balance (Bailyn, 1997) and home-working (Zedeck, 1992). Therefore, the family stands remote of organisation studies, and seldom take on families in organisations, favouring the main stream domains of ownership or interactions.

Family is central to GAA life. The literature on family firms is useful in trying to parse between what it means to be a mainstream contemporary organisation with family.

Even though family firms are still viewed as a dedicated field of scholarship, with their own specialised language, audience and journals. This body of research highlights the different organisational telos of families in business; particularly the huge efforts that these firms go to sustain themselves rather than grow and less ruthless, more caring, less profligate more thrift ethos that has been identified in many family firms (Berrone et al., 2012; Brundin et al., 2014; Chirico and Salvato, 2014; Miller and Le Breton-Miller, 2005). It is keenly felt in the family firm discourse the relative inattention paid to the significance of family enterprises in global commerce; particularly their skills at wizening through economic recessions and depressions (Aronoff, 2004).

The GAA is not formally a family organisation, although each storyteller laid it on thick how the GAA was entangled with their own family, and that club they were involved in was equally part of their family. This echoes the tension in the family firm discourse on what constitutes a family business - do firms outgrow their founding families, do families echo through the ages of publically owned firms, wither hybrid family-firms with mixtures of public/family investment and public/family are still family firms? (Handler, 1989) and successor-ship (Churchill and Hatten, 1987).

Despite the GAA being led and governed by volunteers, participation is generally formed by family and parent influences in pursuit of the family's tradition (Fischer and Schaffer, 1993; Midlarsky and Kahana, 1994), bringing with them the family selfless work ethic (Cnaan et al., 1996) and the families desire to improve the community by doing anything that's required (Flanagan et al., 1999). However the GAA also consists of paid, non-volunteer members who operate a significant head office, members that negotiate the modern acts of bureaucracy and legitimacy - the actions of policymaking, financial activities and all acts scientific. Yet all are conscious of the organisations governance and function. And so, these non-voluntary members do not just view this as labour in a system of contracts (Berle and Means, 1932) and obligations, but more of passion, a privilege, a service to community with an ethos of humility and connection with other volunteers. Those at the very top of the organisation (such as Central Council, Executive or Provincial Councils) are invariably part of clubs and county level (Connelly and Dolan, 2012).
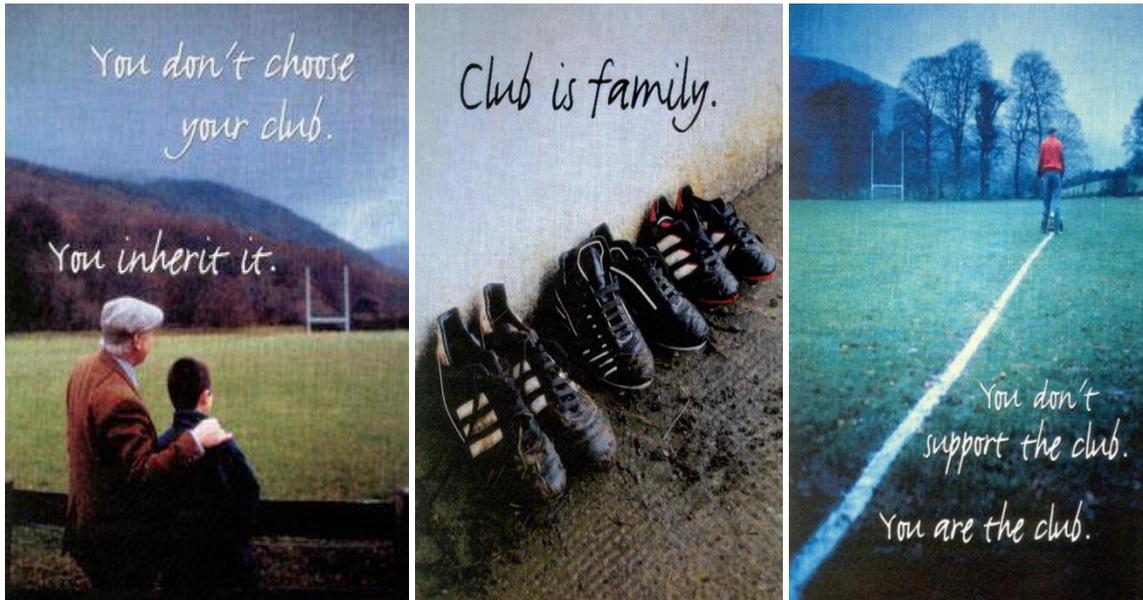
Images 62-65: Slogans used to promote Gaelic games

So, to really understand the GAA's vibrancy we must look at the GAA club as a site of family, which surrounds organisation, where strong family networks and the animalistic care for kith and kin in the and around the organisation which does not exist in modern organisations. For the GAA is an organisation where families enforce, inscribe and underwrite the organisations pursuit of perseverance, as participation, leadership, care and ethos reverberated through generations of family and the GAA's organisational life. The alternativeness of the GAA is further reflected in absence (or lack of attention) on family in organisation studies, as it is viewed as a marginal space within organisations – theorising this further as a 'white space' (after Kavanagh, 2013); in organisational studies.

Establishing that something is not there is always risky (Taleb, 2007), and so it is my claim that family in organisation studies constitutes a 'white space' an overlooked, uninhabited, unexplored and disregarded issue. This is supported by a broad search, using the key word 'family' in the Organization Studies database (at the time of writing, February 2018) yielding 837 papers, but very few of these focus empirically or theoretically on the family in organisation, or studied interactions between family as a way of understanding organisational processes. Where 'family' was used it was around very context specific ethnographic work such as Chow and Ng (2004) on Guanxi, or Venkataraman et al. (2016) on community development work in India. Similarly, and even more apparent, when using

an advanced search in cognate journals - Human Relations, Organisation! and Journal of Culture and Organisation families fail to surface beyond the specialist themes of family-firms, work-life balance and home-working; which gives a rising comfort that family in organisation is a 'white space'.

Within the GAA family, progeny and reproduction are considered mere objects or problems to negotiate inorganisational life; they are the very stuff of organisational life and so have a subjective equivalency to other organisational forms.

From here I attempt to unpick the ways in which this alternative organising principle - that of kith and kin manifest themselves in curious ways around the GAA.

5.7 Care - a feudal and feral kinship

What emerged from the stories goes beyond ownership or interaction, as I excavate two distinctions - around survival and care in the weaving of family and organisational life in these clubs. These distinctions go beyond the responsibility of ownership (Zellweger and Astrachan, 2008), or suggest a more holistic concept of ownership that goes beyond law. The stories also stand in stark contrast to how we think about contemporary organisations, which can be associated with a lack of compassion or sympathy (Thompson, 1976, 2007), or affection and enthusiasm (du Gay, 2008). In particular, the biopower (after Foucault, 1975/6) and production of the organisational subject by families with close connections to an organisation is intriguing - particularly the sophisticated language and folklore on the human in administration. In practice these stories offer a different view of leading and following in the organisation - one that eschews the high turnover, formally educated and succession drawn on large pool (Muntean, 2009; Oswald et al., 2009; Jorissen et al., 2005 and Pérez-González, 2006) of the modernist bureaucracy. Instead in the GAA the focus is on entrenched, long-tenured, trained-on-the-job, succession; drawn from a pool of our people - kith and kin with the right temperament, blooded and with the right sort of values.

The demonstrable care and telos of survival is commonly identified as a weakness of professionalist modernist organisations (Avolio and Gardner, 2005; Frost et al., 2006; Rynes et al., 2012). Going further, the renewed emphasis on care is accompanied with its related

concept of compassion (Lilius et al., 2012), as a mode of improving productivity (Kroth and Keeler, 2009), performance (Cameron et al., 2003) and work place self-esteem (McAllister and Bigley, 2002); and perhaps this goes a long way in explaining the clubs persistence. These are a set of concerns alien to the GAA.

The ethic of care demonstrated in the stories is a particularly rich exemplar of caring leadership (as described by Tompkins and Simpsons, 2015, paper that draws on Heidegger's philosophy of care), where family members leap in to leadership roles, a caring intervention to seize responsibility for a difficult situation - take control. The stories have an in-the-world quality that particularly resonated with a Heideggerian worldview - there is a visceral sense that family members get thrown into organised GAA life and are then immersed into organisation with little chance of escape. You can keep a child out of the GAA, but you cannot keep the GAA out of the child.

The stories here convey the moral responsibility that families take upon themselves to preserve and sustain the organisation. And so, if they are stories of family in and around organisation, similar to that of the leading person, they speak of family with a sacred duty of care to preserve the organisation, and do so in whatever manner is required. This reveals itself in many stories of inspiring, engaging, building up resources for the club, remaining aligned to the broader organisational ethos, helping others and getting help, and ultimately, when things fall apart, staying together, fixing things up and staying the course.

Therefore leading is often viewed as a communal way of life, a social process, a view of leadership that is becoming increasingly recognised within the discourse (Van De Valk, 2008). The stories come across as parables - oft told stories of club leadership, encoded with the concept of what is good (persistence) and what is necessary (commitment); as families enact burdens, duties and responsibilities.

Image 66: The generations painting the community in its local colours

So, maybe this is an early attempt into the theoretical gap of why family in and around organisation sense it is important to remain private and place emphasis on the less rationale benefits. The action in each story goes far beyond a transactional view of exchange, or some form of reciprocal gift relations (Mauss, 1954); it is not captured in the term volunteerism - it is more closely associated with irrational, inexplicable love, enchantment or magic for all things GAA (Spencer, 1973).

5.8 Paternal leadership against management

That spirit of care is perhaps most visible in how the GAA is led. The GAA is led without much in the way of management, and as I set out on this study to reconcile my business education with my lived-life in the GAA this is the space where my experience diverges most from my formal learning. Parsing between management and leadership is a common, perpetual and seemingly intractable trope in business studies (Hecke et al., 2010; Kotter, 1996; Kouzes and Posner, 2012; McKee et al., 2008). The definitional debates on management are a tame affair compared with those in leadership. Watson (2001) usefully suggests that across the field, management is used to mean three things - a function, as an activity or a people; but even as one writes them - they collapse into a well hewn, bounded concept. On the other hand, leadership resists all such definitional civility, as Stogdill (1974: 7) put it- "there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept". Alvesson and Sveningson (2003) go further, in unhelpfully suggesting that leadership may be beyond discourse. With that unhelpful injunction, I will attempt (and largely fail) to share what I see as the GAA's distinctive way of leading things.

For many, leadership and management are considered opposites. In this line of parsing of senior organisational actors activities and modes of being; leadership is generally valorised and glamorised as something extraordinary (Alvesson, 2010); and management is commonly rendered as mundane, diligent and bureaucratic (Zaleznik, 1977; Kotterman, 2006). The pithy Bennis and Nanus line that "managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing" (1985: 21) is oft quoted in the genre. So not only is leadership racier than management, it is also more ethical, and has the more ordinal

qualities of trustworthy, vision and inventiveness (Ancona et al., 2011). In this sense the romance of leadership (to use Meindl, Ehrlich and Dukerich, 1985, sinewy depiction) may just be a symbolic term used depict aspects of management that are less rationalisable, less functional and subject to statistical control - a place where of scholarly floundering (to use Stogdill fetching term). Much of what constitutes leadership research just adds to the opaque and ambiguity of the discourse (Palmer and Hardy, 2000).

Within the GAA universe management activities are entirely subordinate to leadership. Scheduling games, sorting out health and safety, police vetting of those who work with minors are all seen as administration in the service of the ultimate goals of leading the community, the team and the organisation. Perhaps it is the bloody-minded refusal to make complicated these simple administrative tasks, that were pithily described as being a "pain in the hole", rather than being dignified and sanctified as being strategic. People only wake up when the planning, budgeting, project management, processes and systems, organising and controlling becomes important; and then they become political issues of leadership. Anything that is complex, but with work, effort, data and processing power it is ultimately knowable is reduced to administrative management. This ordered, predictable activity is traduced to mere administration in which everyone must pull their weight, symbolically stoop to lead as an act of public humility (as in the President's talking about painting lines and cleaning dressing rooms after the under sixes). The actual running of the organisation is distinctly human, analogue and tacit. In the stories told, this category of activity is the stuff of leadership - a type of chaos in which the more work, effort, data and thought, the more unknowable and unpredictable it becomes.

So the more talk about buying a field, the more professional reports submitted, the more people party to the discussion, the more time added to the decision making - the bigger and more unpredictable the whole venture becomes. In this line of thinking it is no surprise that the thousands of studies that has searched for some robust defining or unifying characteristic of leaders, have yet to find anything consistent (George et al., 2011).

As such, leadership in its refusal of definition, in its shapeshifting looseness, when positioned against the starkly knowable administrative management; looks more like a catchall term for the part of running organisations that we have not come to grips with. This

chimes with GAA life that holds no truck for making small jobs big. So even when coherently gathered into a common definition - visionary' (Bennis and Nanus, 1985), 'charismatic' (House, 1977), 'transformational' (Bass, 1985a) and, more recently, 'authentic' qualities (Luthans and Avolio, 2003); it is done in terms that are distinctly nebulous. For this reason, some have called it a dominant social myth of our times (Gemmill and Oakley, 1992), a catchall term (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012) for something beyond management.

5.9 GAA's economy of charisma

Despite the obvious links with political science, organisation studies and sociology, the seminal work of Weber on charisma (Weber and Eisenstadt, 1968) has not played a huge role in the business discourse on leadership (Wilson, 2013). Perhaps because of the psychological influence on leadership studies, with a broad preference for positivistic studies; Weber and charisma has not had much of an airing in leadership studies (Alvesson, 1996; Sinclair, 2007; Western, 2007).

Or maybe it is his alternative vision of charisma, which speaks of threat, despair and suffering, which it is a response to, and promises to end; a reversal of what we all come to understand (Bendix, 1968; Friedrich, 196I; Tucker, 1968). This genre of leadership theory is understood in such a way that transforms the needs, values, preferences and aspirations of followers from self-interests to collective interests (Shamir et al., 1993). In return for higher performance ratings, have more satisfied and more highly motivated followers - viewed as more effective leaders by their superiors and followers than others in positions of leadership (House, 1976).

Despite all this academic cogitating, leadership is of considerable interest to practitioners - simple and compelling evidence of this is to be found in book sales charts where 'how to' self-help books, mystical oeuvres on the secrets of management and more simple biographies sell remarkably well. Whilst it is easy to dismiss the quality, analysis or rigour of many of these books, positioning them as anecdotal, idiosyncratic or hagiographic - it is hard to dismiss them as a social phenomenon. Yet the GAA has always captivated the Irish public, books ranging from historical and momentous events to its societal impacts. Yet the increasing presents of autobiographical books from managers and players has charmed

people to try and understand such people beyond the surface. So despite the growing academic disinterest in leadership studies as a cold field; practitioner interest is likely to continue to spark some vitality into the subject.

And it was from the stories, beyond the obvious telling's of influential figures that exist within most organisations that this line of thought was conceived. Inspired primarily by the telling's of a raw, effortless but well-practiced leadership; one with little executive speak, but with executive influence. I therefore aspire to give expression to these club men and club women, as they seem to lead and safeguard the GAA long into the future. It appears these men and women have resisted the influence of the rising bureaucratic organisational design; as the stories present a site of an organisation that is pre-modern in its happenings.

The stories surface the practices of rendering up leaders (these men and women) as special, othering them in a privileged way, often earning themselves the nickname of the club or towns land. Such privileging invests in the identity of the leader as an uncontested visionary; someone to follow unthinkingly, however lightly hidden is the ambition of the fiefdom, where leaders can exert their authority and influence on the community. As leadership is so contextual, and requires such a nuanced light but firm touch, it is not surprising that those who thrive in club organisations tend to learn the unique practices from their applied exposure to club life. As club leaders grow they take on the emotional labour of sustaining the club by extraordinary commitment and effort. For many it is the vibrant rituals of club life, constantly seeking out new people to join the club, and expanding what it means to join a club in that people are brought in and brought up in the ways of club life. In this way, the telos of persistence is sustained; new underwriters of club life are anointed - the passion to sustain the club is transmitted.

Usefully, Spencer (1973) suggests why this might be the case in drawing attention to the unsympathetic way that Weber's concept of charisma is used - wherein charisma is considered to be a supernatural gift, one that has become routinised, institutionalised and commoditised. Within contemporary organisations the significance of charisma is uncertain, and generally confused. This aspect of Weber's insight explains much of the efforts to explore the cognitive and the psychological dimensions of leadership. However, Weber also explored, with equal effort the persistence of close networks (gentil charisma) and

bloodlines (erb's charisma), concepts almost universally ignored in contemporary leadership studies.

And so, perhaps, leadership within the club is somewhat bound through an element of social capital, a term that does not fully do justice to the economy of influence that governs the long-term commitment for club life, and creates the strong telos of persistence.

Leadership here is very much a social process, a view of leadership that is become increasingly recognised within the discourse (Van De Valk, 2008). This communal way of leading and life, features essential and durable components that facilitates social trust within the clubs, community and in a broad sense - the GAA globally. This is flanked by the creation of networks and norms that result in, or positively impact on the organisations thriftiness and of course, the clubs preservation. The networks and norms that emerge in the storied life of clubs become a touchstone for all decisions. Whilst the scale of the issue may vary, from the grass cutting to appointing captains, to large capital projects, the networks and norms stay the same.

Image 67: Christy Cooney and Nickey Brennan GAA Presidents with Director General Pauric Duffy

In essence, the GAA club leaders aspire to remain true to its beliefs and protect their ethos; pulling together as a moral community where inherited loyalties are shared with those pulling and scrambling for their small hinterland - pulling for their place, territory, property, time and language.

They can magically play with the rules, distort reality in order to get what they want; and what they want is aligned with what the club wants. Some around them are too timid to get involved themselves, but who admire the strokes being pulled on their behalf. So, leadership here is about enchanting others with passion and connection to both the club and community. As the organisation is voluntary led, high levels of followership is a vague insight into the successful work of the club leader - fundamentally the leader steers the club. In all clubs storied lives, there are times they are challenged, battered by bad fortune or have erred; and in these moments of existential doubt, club life is galvanised as a

community and somewhat contradictorily metabolises blame by relying on what in other circumstances would be called failed leaders to solve their woes. Certainly this presents a unique vision of leadership, one that does not chime with our times.

Emerging from these stories is the sense that there is little in management scholarship that offers explanatory power in understanding the practice of leadership in the club. So, from my interpretation of the stories three significant things appear. Leaders convey a profound care, survival and persistence of the organisation without a Neo-Kantian sense of rationale purpose. They underwrite organisational life by doing anything that they cannot unburden to others, and that they have an intuitive understanding of the cardinal power of community and care. In short, the notion of leadership that they project in club life is a very different beast to managerialism.

More particularly, the core diet of a management syllabus on leadership - the taxa that parses trait approach, behavioural approach, contingency/ situational, transformational and more recently post-heroic approaches (House and Aditya, 1997; Parry and Bryman, 2006; Alvesson and Spicer, 2012); whilst neither right nor wrong; is not all-together useful in extracting something meaningful from these stories of leadership.

The bland standardisation that is contemporary business school teaching on leadership is well criticised ground, but in the absence of something better to teach, it appears to be here to stay. Such presentations of the theories of leadership are distinctly Neo-Kantian, but rarely explicitly stated as so, and, as all taxa tend to, plays for a totalising and universalising getting-to-grips with a field. Neo-Kantianism is a rejection of the irrationalism, romance and speculations of leadership on one hand; and of the narrow reductionism on the other; instead allowing for a cautious, calculating conquering of the mysticism that surrounds the topic. But in doing so leadership studies is largely abstracted from its context; becoming an ahistorical project that divorces the social, cultural, political and economic treads, fetchingly explained as an 'immaculate conception' of an idea by Trethewey and Goodall (2007). So perhaps the broader Neo-Kantian instinct to parse, disassemble and differentiate, so as to understand leadership, and in turn commoditise it; is not of much use here - as the club is about the people, its relationships, its purpose and its impact.

Image 68: Kilkenny fan Jennifer Malone comforting Waterford player Pauric Mahony at the end of the match

The stories of leadership speak about the moral bond that individuals take on themselves to preserve and sustain the organisation; and so, if they are stories of leadership, they speak of leadership as being a profound and sacred duty of care to preserve institutions; in whatever way is needed. This manifests itself in the many stories about growing the club's membership, engagement, participation, inspiring others, investing in winning, building up the useful resources, in staying in with the broader organisation, learning useful things from others, getting help, being an example to others; and ultimately, when things fall apart, staying together, fixing things up and staying the course. In many, many ways, these stories are applied lessons of a platonic vision of the statesman – power beyond the laws (Horvath and O'Brien, 2013).

The stories were told by club leaders as parables of how to lead, and all stories are encoded with a telos of persistence. And so, a reductionist instinct to analyse and subdivide the complexity of leadership into constituents, which is the primary methodology of management studies, only ever seems to take apart leadership, as it never seems to be able to re-establish it from its constituents. It might be the case that management has yet, not offered a positive and compelling vision of leadership; one that surpasses the classical vision.

In simpler terms - the sheer caustic impulse to critique and disassemble - cuts down a leaders ability to lead, creates a perpetual entitlement for transparency, communication and accountability; appetites that can never be satisfied. These entitlements come without

responsibilities to ensure the persistence of the organisation. In these clubs, as participation is voluntary, leaders are let lead and those with a problem can vote with their feet with little impact on their lives, incomes or well-being. As we become more tightly bound to the organisations and institutions we inhabit; individuals are unwilling to accept subaltern statuses on offer in the leader-follower structure; and perhaps express a preference for more limited legitimacy offered to the powerful in manager-managed relationships.

Image 69: The passion to represent your community

In these clubs, leaders have tremendous agency, and are not "blocked" by the bureaucratic accountability (Argyris, 1957). And so, the dissembling of leadership into teachable constituents, fails to capture the "magic or charis" (Spencer, 1973), the true essence of leadership - ultimately the unknowable trust. To support this claim, I have drawn on Mintzberg's five components of organisation (1979: 24) and adapted it to the GAA.

The four basic parts of the GAA club

Participation & survival

Guiding & leading

Croke Park

Volunteers & administrators

Day to day operations
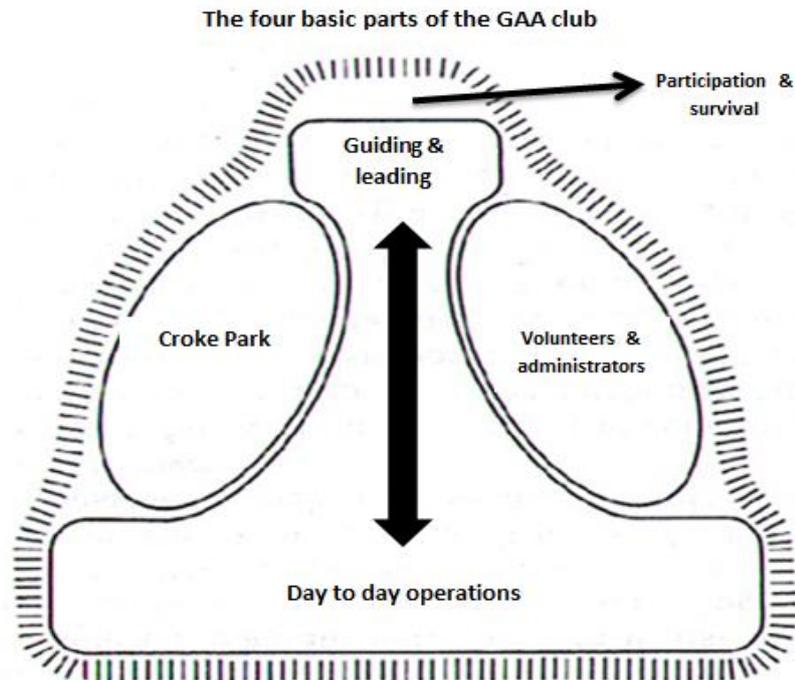
Figure 5: My interpretation of the GAA club's structure

5.10 There is an alternative

This chapter, along with the last is an attempt to show a vision of the GAA, one that springs from my life lived in the organisation, through the lens of multiple stories and reports from GAA life. The scale, vista, history, multiple conflicts and contestations of what the organisation is makes this a difficult task to achieve with any sense of command or completeness - the best I can aspire to is to share glimpses of the essences of the organisation. These glimpses hopefully tell something of the great binary categoriser in Irish society – the divide of being or not being a GAA person. It offers a vision of the spirit and ethic of the GAA life as being something separate, perhaps more harmonious and more meaningful to those immersed within it. And so, what I have seen is an inspiring example of an alternative organisation, one that beyond the joint stock commercial company that tends to occupy our business school's imagination of the organisation. So the spirit and ethic of the GAA does not commiserate with that found in the business school curriculum. So, if you agree that the GAA has now been seen, the question then emerges; what has been seen and how is it different?

Chapter Six
Theorising the alternative
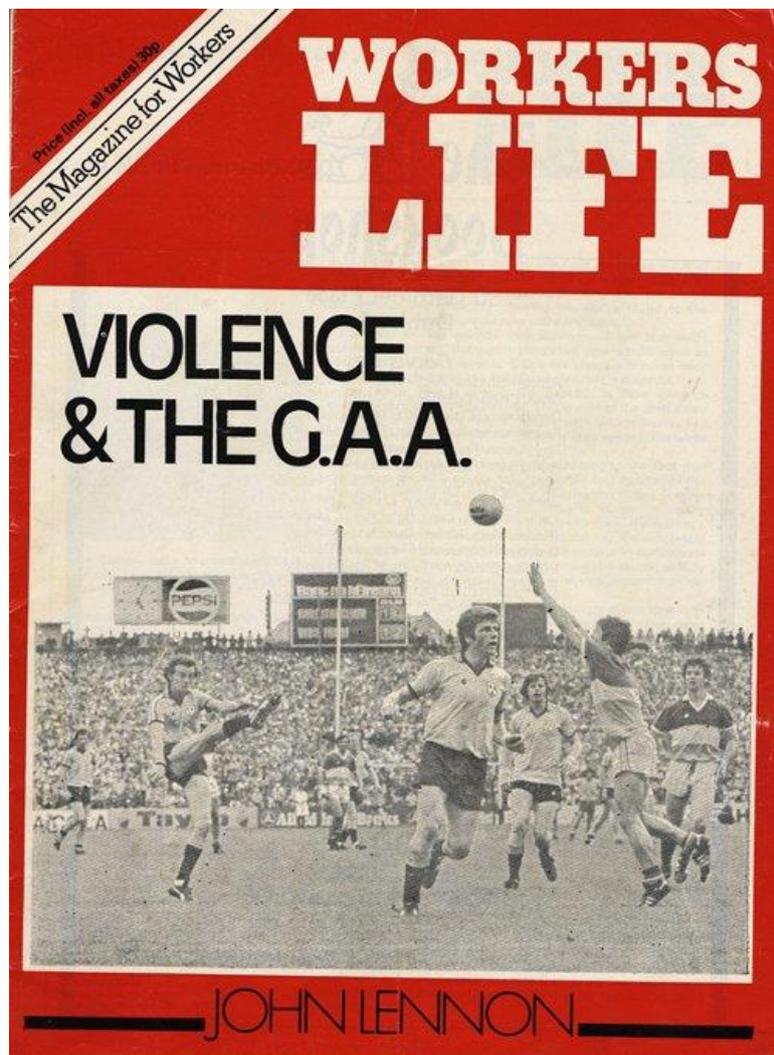
Image 70: The workers life magazine

6.0 Introduction

The previous two chapters have offered a glimpse into the alternative organising world of the GAA through its stories. And so, it allows this chapter to explore the alternatives found in the field with reference to the current discourses around alternative ways of organising. Naturally, it is important to start with what we currently know or perhaps think we know about contemporary organisations. This work on mainstream organisation studies sets the scene for a detailed review of the alternative organisation, the tests these organisations must meet, the attraction of organising in a different way, and the utopian vision of alternatives organising. Finally the chapter concludes with an attempt to bring both the literature and the GAA together, by carefully placing the GAA into the alternative organising discussion.

6.1 On organising studies as a field

As a large, heterogeneous field involving numerous beliefs, orientations and distinct styles, it is beyond the scope of this work to offer a comprehensive history of organisation studies (c.f. March, 2007 for an interesting account of the field's history). As a field it has gained its coherence in reverse - drawing in scholarship and ideas from diverse disciplines such as political economy, economics, engineering, politics, sociology, philosophy, and relying on seminal ideas of Adam Smith, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Fritz Machlup, Vilfredo Pareto, Joseph Schumpeter, John Dewey, Ludwig von Mises, Friedrich Hayek, Kurt Lewin, amongst many, many others. It takes a closer genealogical line from business or Para-business scholars such as Mary Parker Follett, Henri Fayol, Frederick Taylor and Elton Mayo.

Strands of the field emerged in the post-WW2 era, with the founding of the Human Relations journal in 1947 by the Tavistock Institute and the Research Centre for Group Dynamics at MIT. Formed on the belief that 'social scientists should work together to combine their disciplinary knowledge in an attempt to understand the character and complexity of human problems'. This was followed by James March's 1965 Handbook of Organisation Studies which attempted to survey the field for the first time with thirty contributors and then a flourishing of centres, scholars, events and contributions from them on. Significant scholars who self-describe as organisation studies focused emerge from then on - with leading names such as Michel Crozier, David Hickson, Edith Penrose, Derek Pugh, Mats Alvesson, Nils Brunsson, John Child, Stewart Clegg, Barbara Czarniawska, Andrew

Pettigrew, Richard M. Cyert, Robert Dubin, John Meyer, Philip Selznick, Martin Shubik, Herbert Simon, James Thompson, Karl E. Weick and William F. Whyte - amongst many others.

And it's from this scholastic ancestry that this work on the GAA emerges from, where I attempt to combine my opposing worlds. The business school and its commercialisation on the one hand; and my lived life in the GAA and its communal, voluntary telos on the other, yet within this line of scholarship, these worlds come closer together. These nuanced and insightful contributors to organisation studies had something to say about my experience in the GAA, but I was just not sure what. This explains why this is not a finance, economics, management, leadership, human resources, business law study of the GAA - but is instead an organisation studies one.

What draws the field together is an interest in organising process and institutions, organisations and the more brittle and temporary versions of human collective endeavour. So the field has tended to work on organisation demographics, collective decision-making, information process, learning, structure, networks, change, culture, social construction and power. Neither the lists of scholars, pivotal moments nor the set of concerns of the discipline are neither complete nor commanding, but they represent my attempt to set off the terrain.

On safer ground, what unites the field of organisation studies most is that it has a patron and a client in the business school, with the vast majority of scholars being located there. Perhaps with the decline in funding for mother disciplines in recent years (such as sociology and philosophy), organisation studies has been notable for its critical edge as March pithily describes "Adam Smith and Max Weber were displaced by Michel Foucault and Anthony Giddens" (2007: 14). In this line, organisation studies has increasingly been concerned with the search for alternative ways of organising - ways that are less implicated with capitalism, with the market, with neo-liberalism and with traditional bureaucracy. It is in this space that the contribution of this study lays.

6.2 Testing in the school of alternative organising

Alternative organisations are a relatively new area of interest. So, unlike the extensive and wide ranging work on mainstream organisations, there is not yet a comprehensive line of historical thought to follow. A pretty simple example of this is a quick scan through the publications on alternatives; it becomes obvious that the vast majority of its contributions have come within the last 15 years (generally less). And so, it may seem that this piece is less developed, less thorough or maybe lacking a deeper investigation on my behalf. So, to try and offer as much of my understanding on alternatives - the focus of this section is to provide an understanding of the alternative organising world by investigating why alternatives have attracted some recognisable scholars, what the main challenges are in studying alternatives, who the key contributors are and some of the learning's that have been formed over this short assault on main stream organisations.

The term 'alternative organisation' is understood in opposition to the traditional, mainstream, familiar, predominant or hegemonic institutional arrangements (Cheney, 2014). And like the adjective suggests, the organisational practices can take on many forms - creative, untried, untested or novel; perhaps even 'radically different from those to which a group or part of society is accustomed' (Parker, Fournier and Reedy, 2007).

So when we think and talk about alternatives, we tend to think about organisations that are less bureaucratic, less hierarchical, less controlled and more attuned to the human and the environmental needs; rather than the orthodoxy in the private, public and non-profit sectors.

Image 71: The club offer the community a place to come, meet and keep active

Alternative organisations are increasingly coming into view as a distinct field or school, with established contributions from Alvesson and Willmott, 1992; Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Cheney et al., 2014; Huault et al., 2014; Heller et al., 2013; Roscoe and Chillas, 2014. Many of these, through their engagements with the theoretical work on transformation and critical performativity have established the field of alternative organising within organisation studies. Such scholars' work has focused on a variety of organisational

structures, forms (cooperatives, mutual organisations, associations, foundations, credit unions, heterarchy, polycentric etc.) and practices (such as autonomy, autonomist, democratic, flat, etc.). In doing so, it has offered a potential path that paves the way for an egalitarian and democratic society (Parker et al., 2007, 2014). As we move beyond the works organisational diversity, the studies central aim is focused on deconstructing the capitalocentric or highly-marketised approach that is orthodoxy in mainstream, organisation studies; with the aspiration of offering up other forms of organisation (Fisher, 2009; Gibson-Graham, 1996, 2006; Parker et al., 2014). Yet one of the main challenges surrounding alternatives is the articulation (or perhaps re-articulation) that there is more than one way to organise. Indeed it is no surprise that this field has blossomed in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2007, a period in time when many were told there was no alternative.

In this line, the field of alternative organising has drawn attention to the heterogeneity of organisational and economic practices; and re-conceptualise the economy as an intrinsically heterogeneous space (Healy, 2009). Where different or new legal structures can be put in place to pursue other objectives than shareholder value (Segrestin and Hatchuel, 2012); and 'what emerges is a variety of methods of exchange, of forms of funding and decision making, of work and design, of ownership structures and forms of use and more commonly – practices that do not follow the logic of capitalist accumulation, profit maximisation and private appropriation' (Cheney, 2014). But studying and theorising alternatives is not an easy task; as alternatives may have some ambiguous engagement with capitalism. Going further some of the principles that are used to differentiate alternatives (autonomy, freedom, sharing) are also those that distinguish the New Spirit of Capitalism (Boltanski and Chiapello, 1999), and many of these alternative organisations experience similar contradictions and tensions. Capitalism also has the capacity to incorporate its critiques and some organisations or practices that started as 'alternatives' have quickly been recuperated. According to Cheney (2014) 'the real challenge lies in the ability to maintain a critical stance on these alternatives, whilst being open to their emancipatory potential'.

Scholarship on alternative organising tends to have both a campaigning activists practice - based orientation as well as a descriptive, analytical and theoretical character. A number of studies, events and theorists have taken on the work binding these two orientations together, to assemble a vision of the field and project of the alternative organisations school

around being (1) democratic, (2) social and (3) human-centred (Charterina et al., 2007; Cheney et al., 2014; Cheney, 2006; Laville and Glémain, 2009). These undergirding principles of alternative organising have got significant traction and acceptance (De Angelis and Harvie, 2014; Fournier, 2013; Netting, 1997; Ostrom, 1990; Blomley, 2008; Carlsson, 2008).

That minimalist scheme designed to hold the field together creates considerable space for the maximalist work of Martin Parker, Valerie Fournier, Patrick Reedy, George Cheney, Chris Land and many others; attempts to who channelling Samuel Johnson have produced a dictionary of alternative organisations (2007, 2014) captures the spirit of multiple alternatives, and the multiple baseis for generating alternatives. In this work, Parker et al. (2014) establish a further three principles (autonomy, solidarity and responsibility) that are believed to go a long way in distinguishing an alternative from traditional enterprises. Organisations can therefore test their own organisational practices and determine if they meet the test and have the right to call themselves an alternative. Acknowledging the complexity at parsing between these three principles or tests of alternativeness, for Parker et al. (2014) all three tests must be passed to yield a simple determination on whether the organisation is or is not an alternative.

Even more recently, further strides have been made in the assessment of alternatives; as scholarly discussions are continuously adding more to the conversation (Vidaillet and Pezé, 2017). Indeed, this exchange uses and extends into the previously discussed work, yet these particular conversations hinge on two specific areas of interest. The first discusses or seeks to discuss further case exemplars of alternative organising, offering such things as new forms of ownership, funding, decision-making, distribution of 'wealth', etc. While the second, draws attention to the experiences of the human that surround these alternatives. In this line of thinking, leading questions are - to what extent are alternative practices and organisations really emancipatory? How do we avoid dismissing the experiences of alternative forms or, conversely, how do we avoid mystifying them? It therefore aspires to understand the experiences of these people in and around the alternative, their attractions, their contributions and their attempts to maintain their alternativeness despite the ever-increasing pressures from the mainstream.

6.3 Antecedents to alternatives

The discourse on alternative organising in organisation studies is recent, ongoing and still emerging, but there is a long genealogy to this relatively contemporary conversation. It would be misguided to attempt a comprehensive exploration of the foundations of the contemporary discourse beyond the reflection that our contemporary age appears to be unusually settled. Although much maligned in the wake of the emergence of radical Islam, terrorism and the terror wars, the global financial crisis, Francis Fukuyama's thesis on the End of History and the Last Man (1992) indicates the poverty of thinking and vision beyond what is described as liberal capitalism, neoliberalism, late capitalism, culture capitalism as totalising accounts of these times. Perhaps in these times, we are thinking less critically about organising, and alternatives to our system.

Parker et al. (2014) explicitly identifies the inspiration of anarchists, progressive politics and political theorists in forming the field. The origin of organisation studies is in management; the development of factories, the economy and cities that emerged after the industrial revolution deeply implicates the project in modernity and modernising. It is beyond me to tackle this with any authority or comprehensiveness, producing a history of social theory that somehow yokes Adam Smith, the emergence of the nation state-leviathan of Hobbes, with Marx's critique, acts of resistance such as the Luddites and Arts and Crafts movement and onwards. But such are the plot points of any genealogy of the school.

Parker et al. traces his own developments more modestly, suggesting that he is trying to extend the work of Ward (1966: 387) on anarchist organisations. Ward suggests that such "organisations should be voluntary, functional, temporary and small", which unhelpfully resonates with the community scale of GAA clubs. But misses the larger significance of the totalising nature of GAA life, and perhaps this is an element of the GAA's beauty. However, Ward's grounding was a rich stream of thought that stimulated the idea of alternatives - since the first form of organisation theory assumed organisation as an open term. So, for anarchism one of the initial concerns was how systems of governance might be arranged in the absence of the State, a King or the coercions of capital. And it was in this line of thought that Parker et al. (2014) sought to explore the principles that might be deployed in producing alternatives.

Image 72: Dublin celebrate the All Ireland with family, friends and the GAA community

Despite the relatively stable landscape that Parker et al. (2007, 2014) has formed, Parker et al. himself is the first to acknowledge that the work 'is not a worked out manifesto for a new world, which could be inaugurated tomorrow, the world is more complex than that'.

Going further Parker et al. suggests that he does not believe there will be another world in the future, where all the problems are solved; instead he claims that all organising forms are 'political', a way of saying they are all contested (but this is not all negative - it simply isn't possible to say that there are some arrangements which are unambiguously good, and others that are unambiguously bad).

Nonetheless, writing a manifesto for an alternative world was never really Parker et al.'s ambition. Instead the purpose of his work was to make us aware of the consequences of particular forms; and to recognise that there are other possibilities and other ways of doing things. In simpler, less organisational focused terms, we all have choices, individually, collectively. Therefore we must not assume that 'there is no alternative' because of certain unchangeable laws of the market or organising (Fisher, 2007; Clegg, 1990). It is in this line of thought that Parker et al. (2014) formed - autonomy, solidarity and responsibility to assist in the articulation of the alternative argument.

6.4 Utopian visions of alternatives: Glimpsing, glimmers and glances

One could argue that what really binds the alternative organisation field together is a desire to see alternatives. Certainly the Dictionary of Alternatives of Parker et al. (2007, 2014) is more a Victorian case of curiosities than a grammar of organising- relishing rich exemplars, visions from the practice of alternative organising. It draws on inspiring examples as a political project of inducement - highlighting celebrated examples such as, the AA before demutualisation, Mondragon Cooperative Corporation, John Lewis Partnership, including some notable sporting teams (rather than sporting authorities) such as Green Bay Packers,

Barcelona Football Club and Juventus Football Club. If anything the sports clubs are examples that demonstrate the hopelessness and lack of ambition of alternatives - in that they are moments of almost futile resistance in a game that is already lost. For me, they demonstrate the willingness of orthodox organising to incorporate critique (after Zizek, 2003) without much in the way of a change of course or heart.

Image 73: Dubs hero Jimmy Keaveney inducted into Hall of Fame

In seeking to see alternatives, there is a strong desire to go beyond critique of capitalism, market economy, financialisation, reduction of humans to mechanical Turks, authoritarianism and the might of capital and its agents, and the anomie on the souls of those subject to it.

The late Mark Fisher captured this desire best in his call for 'glimmers of hope', 'gaps' or 'ruptures' that crack the authoritarian and totalising image of the economy and society produced in capitalism, in his book "Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative" (2009).

It is into this space that this thesis rushes. It does so principally by establishing the GAA as an alternative - meeting the various tests of those who have established the field. But it goes further than just identifying the GAA as an alternative, another entry in the dictionary of alternatives. It does this in two ways. First, the GAA is more *Meta* than just an alternative organisation - it is an alternative universe of organising in its operating scale and in its totalising impact on those who live within it. So in many ways it blows the alternatives in the dictionary or alternatives out of the water in its purchase on those who live within it - you do not deal with this organisation as part of your life suspended in a capitalist economy, for most GAA people it is the dominant, elemental economy. Unlike many of the alternative exemplars from the discourse, the GAA is no one hewn in a rejectionist or evangelical mode. The GAA is a contented universe in the main, and does not attempt to convert, set itself forth as some illustrative example for others to learn from. So in that sense it is an alternative unlike those proposed in the field. The GAA really only contests for meaning in people's lives with religion, political religions and economy. The second contribution of this work that is beyond identifying an alternative is to offer a deeper analysis, built out from

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inductive engagement with the organisation on what is the character of the organisation - highlighting family, care, community, love, passion, harmony and leadership.

6.5 Between the real and utopian of alternatives

It is no surprise that organisation studies have become gripped with an interest in alternatives since the global financial crisis of 2007. Perhaps this evidences the Heiddeggerian truism that we only tend to notice things when they break. As critical management scholars lead the movement - it is no surprise that this is how they have reacted to the injunction that 'There Is No Alternative' (TINA). Just at the time when the condition of capitalism and the organisations produced in its image seem chronic, terminal and finished off by libidinous risk taking and climatic doom, alternatives present themselves. That presentation is usually in the form of resistance, or magical, unrealistic thinking such as the luddites, the arts and crafts movement, survivalists, Jonestown massacre, occupy, Black Lives Matter etc. The dictionary of alternatives, for me, more than anything else collects up ineffectual projects of resistance announcing the impending and implied failure of these acts of futile gestures. Their real value is that they present a vision of the future, the future being the contemporary space where we talk about our hopes and fears.

It is perhaps worth thinking a little about utopia in the context of alternative organising. Marcuse, the philosopher most associated with the term considered it a historical concept mainly because for him the kernel of a utopian idea was its impossibility - when he eventually defined the term at the end of the book "The End of Utopia" (1967) as "In the usual discussion of utopia the impossibility of realising the project of a new society exists when the subjective and objective factors of a given social situation stand in the way of the transformation – the so-called immaturity of the social situation. Communistic projects during the French Revolution and, perhaps, socialism in the most highly developed capitalist countries are both examples of a real or alleged absence of the subjective and objective factors that seem to make realisation impossible. The project of a social transformation, however, can also be considered unfeasible because it contradicts certain scientifically established laws, biological laws, physical laws; for example, such projects as the age-old idea of eternal youth or the idea of a return to an alleged golden age".

Central to utopian visions, visions of heaven is what Eric Voeglin called the immantisation of the eschaton, a complex expression for the simple idea of man's desire to make heaven on earth. For Voeglin what made a religion, and by extension of a political religion such as National Socialism, Communism, Fascism, Capitalism and Neo-liberalism was the desire to make the work perfect, in the image of God or heaven, often through brutal non-humanistic means. Much of economic thinking, sociology, performative critical management contains the ethos of immantisation of the eschaton.

Going further Ernst Bloch insists, that the function of utopia, impossible visions of the future is in fact "a critique of what is present", what Marc Augé explains as the present wrestling with its own imagination. In this sense, the dictionary of alternatives is a utopian project that is both hopeless and a classic criticism of contemporary organisation studies. Central to contemporary thinking on alternative organising is – autonomy, responsibility and solidarity as the principal characters of alternatives. Yet, each of these three tumble into the Pollyanna-ism of utopian values, what Jameson decried as "shaking of the bars". What is needed is practical, real, naive and uncontrived examples that we can hang a future on.

Image 74: A clothesline filled with club jerseys

GAA people often relay how they cannot believe there is something as good as the GAA left in the world. They know how lucky they are to have it, how special and unique it is, how it needs to be maintained and renewed for the next generation, and how all could be lost in one big sell out. At a minor register, their stories contain these fears, and they are writ large in GAA politics. But the stuff of the stories and GAA life rarely acknowledges these dystopian visions of the GAA becoming like other sporting organisations, much more of it relishes GAA life as it is lived. In this way, the alternativeness is both always present and rarely

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acknowledged or fussed over. In short the GAA is an alternative, but not a utopian one, so neither a critical vision of the present, nor a hopelessly impractical image of the future.

Image 75: All ages play in the sun at half time in Wexford Park

6.6 Pressing differences of alternatives

I circle back to the challenge of joining my business school education with my life in the GAA. As an organisation, the GAA does not resemble a mainstream organisation, even an NGO or a sporting organisation. Instead the GAA speaks to the alternative organising world as an inspiring exemplar of an alternative organisation, one that's beyond the joint stock commercial company that tends to occupy our imagination. The spirit and ethic of the GAA is not commiserating with those presented in the business school curriculum.

Although increasingly in the business school we encounter bureaucracy in tandem or after we encounter its criticism - bureaucracy is central to how organisations work, behave and are understood, and is not quiet the 'zombie category' that Beck (2005) claims it has become.

Indeed, even the harshest critics of Weberian bureaucracy believe that no organisation of scale can function effectively with being a bureaucracy (Friedrich, 1950), so there is no alternative in the many minds. The standard criticism of bureaucracy, that it produces organisations that are impersonal, controlling, uniform and hierarchical - conceived without an alternative, and without a sense of humanity; and so would be lost without bureaucracy (Holmes and Sunstein, 1999: 14). In an effort to treat people consistently and fairly individuals autonomy and humanity can be trampled over; a Faustian pact that an individual

must subsume themselves into the higher purpose and order of the organisation - best encapsulated in Holmes pithy injunction "statelessness means rightlessness; as stateless people, in practice have no rights" (Holmes, 1994: 605) - the implied non-choice of being either inside or outside.

Weber in describing bureaucracy was acutely aware of its shortcomings. Weber was very sympathetic to the harshness of uniform, monolithic treatment of the historical development of rationalisation (c.f. Mommsen, 1987; Hennis, 1988), and instrumental rationality (Bauman, 1989; Ritzer, 2004). For Weber (1978: 954) his preliminary remarks about bureaucracy as the typical expression of "rationally regulated association with a structure of domination" and that "legal authority rests on the acceptance of the validity of the following mutually interdependent ideas" (217). In his work, Weber details the five ideas that animate bureaucratic life:

1. *Norms* "established by agreement or by imposition" on the rational grounds with a "claim to obedience" which extends to members of the organisation and sometimes to others "within the sphere of power in question".

2. *Laws* as the systems of abstract rules that once intentionally established are applied by administration to concrete cases in ways consistent with the rational mandate established for the organisation.

3. *Leadership* appointments and job placement depend upon the technical qualification; it is itself subject to these impersonal rules in the very way it exercises its authority.

4. Individuals' *subordination* to authority within the confines of their relationship to the organisation and so is limited the specific capacity they hold as "members" of the organisation.

5. *Obedience* to the impersonal order, rather than the individual holding an authoritative position (217-218).

On rationalisation - it is Weber that demonstrated rationalisation (c.f. The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism) in which the aspiration of certain theologies (mainly Calvinist sects) are shown to have shifted towards rational means of economic gain as a way of dealing with their 'salvation anxiety'. Presciently, Weber predicted that rational

consequences would grow ever more incompatible with its religious roots, and so would eventually lead to secularism. It was his continued investigation into this matter that led to his work on bureaucracy and on the classifications of authority.

It may be useful to try and define the GAA's ethic using Weber's work on the Protestant Ethic as an inspiration. If Weber, in this book, argues that the religious ideas of groups such as the Calvinists played a role in creating the capitalistic spirit. GAA club life is neither rational nor self-interested, and so is animated by an alternative set of ideas and rituals. In this work, Weber speaks of an egalitarian society, a world of equality and a hierarchical complementarity. Whereas it seems the GAA is based on status and duty, intergenerational status and obligations – essentially a form of competitive aristocracy. Similarly, within the club, management activities are entirely subordinate to leadership - a "pain in the hole", rather than being dignified and sanctified as being strategic - the actual running of the organisation is distinctly human, analogue and tacit. And so, laws here are up for negotiation; rules can be compromised if it is justifiably correct.

At a broader level, there is also a recognisable difference; the Protestant Ethic speaks of a Universalist orientation where boundary maintenance is challenging and difficult. Yet the stories of club life place emphasis on inclusion (and also on exclusion) as people establish their mana, respect and insiderness to the GAA. So, it is a tacit embodied worldview, which belies understanding unless you are an insider. Therefore it is an insular rather than mimetic and outward looking place - incomprehensible to outsiders. It lacks notions of process, it rejects mobility and prioritises place. Equally absences can be found in the formal mechanisms to process conflict, perhaps not important to the club - hemmed in by the rootedness of people to place and each other, and an ethic of reticence.

Nonetheless, writing in the late 19th century, Weber's rich description of bureaucracy has proved remarkably durable in understanding contemporary organisations (Hilbert, 2001: 144). Contemporary organisation studies scholars have a renewed interest in bureaucracy since Paul du Gay's (2000) book 'In praise of bureaucracy', in which he contemplates the enduring importance of bureaucracy, the limits of its critique and its achievement of social order, good government in liberal democratic societies.

The criticism of Weber's bureaucracy comes from many disciplines - sociology, social theory, organisation studies and Boltanski and Chiapello's (2007: 57-102) term neo-management discourse. However, their interpretations of Weber's views on bureaucracy differ significantly. For example, some sociologists believe that Weber is represented as one of the main critics of bureaucracy; and that the work is referenced with respect to what is considered to be Weber's own perceptive (even vision) analysis of this organisational form's inherent 'dark side'. Bauman (1989) critic of modernity highlights the instrumentalising, rationalising logic of bureaucratic action, suggesting that it is undermining forms of morality (see Ritzer, 2004 also). Within the contemporary management discourse a rather different picture of Weber appears. On the one hand we find celebrants of bureaucracy as the most efficient form of organisation recognised to humanity. But on the other, Weber has got it all wrong because "he pooh-poohed charismatic leadership and doted on bureaucracy; its rule driven, impersonal form, he said, was the only way to ensure long term survival" (Peters and Waterman, 1982: 5).

In these readings, Weber is viewed as a well intentional scholar, but ultimately a misguided celebrant of bureaucracy; misguided in the sense he is too considerate to formal rationality, and not enough to its inherent dysfunctions (du Gay, 2009). Particularly the latter more than the former for managerialists, as they eventually begin to disable and paralyse the organisation, making it unable to fulfil its organisational purpose, except at great cost both socially and emotionally. For instance, those operating within what are conceived of as its hyper-rational 'frame', or what Boltanski and Chiapello (2007: 85 and 98; see du Gay, 1991; 1994 and 1996 also) points out in their claims on the neo-managerial concept:

Bureaucracy "connotes authoritarianism and arbitrariness, the impersonal blind violence of cold monsters, but also inefficiency and squandering of resources. Not only are bureaucracies inhuman, they are also unviable…[T]he discrediting of bureaucracy and its project of eliminating everything that is not 'rational' - that is formalisable and calculable – we are told, facilitate a return to a 'more human' modus operandi, in which people can give full vent to their emotions, intuition and creativity".

6.7 The GAA as an alternative

The work by Boltanski and Chiapello (2007) on the neo-managerial discourse chimes with the humane system of organising created by the club. And perhaps it is easier for the club to be less bureaucratic, less ruthless, less focused on capitalism because it is voluntary. However, the exposure to this way of thinking seems to exist in most other engagements we have – work, home, education and so on.

Martin Parker makes much of the sentiment that the business school is a school for teaching capitalism, but it is also a school that teaches bureaucracy. The obvious and practical manifestations of this are procedure-based curriculums such as accounting, business information systems, operations management, marketing, human resources and law. Indeed most business schools emerged from the teaching of administration.

At a superficial level the GAA comes over as a bureaucracy, it has norms, rules and hierarchy when seen from a remove. Subordination to the individual and obedience to the impersonal order are less visible and manifest, and certainly are difficult to detect. The ultimate sanction of bureaucratic authority is discipline and exclusion is not available in the GAA. There are no formal or organisation level sanctions, disciplinary procedure or ultimate sanction of being sent to Coventry or excommunicated are simply not present in GAA life. Having said that, there are sanctions around extreme violence in play, but they are invoked at a far higher threshold of violence than in civic society, and appear to exist only to defray the threat of state intervention into the working of GAA life. Nonetheless, the GAA is an organisation that does not have a threat, standard or practices for exclusion.

The GAA also has within itself micro-bureaucracies where they are needed, required or advisable. So the organisation has containers that hold bureaucracies inside it for undertaking large scale capital projects that involve borrowing, for employing professional individuals, for negotiating sponsorship and media rights, but all of these activities are held within separate and subaltern legal entities that report into the main organisation, and the main organisation is not a bureaucracy.

So then the question emerges what is it, what is the GAA and in turn what is the name of this alternative. Making sense of its systems, currency, process, modes of authority, norms of behaviour suggest that the GAA is an intriguing form of community organisation. The

previous chapter detailed the character, spirit and ethos of that organisation which privileges family, feudal, fealty, and a deeply humane ethos of care. The GAA is not against bureaucracy; it is not conceived as an alternative that self-consciously demonstrates resistance. To a certain extent it is a positive and productive response to bureaucracy a form of Anti-bureaucracy (as a noun rather than a verb), but such an appellation does not do it justice. Just like the GAA itself, the appropriate response is to plunder bureaucracy for some its utility, but not to live under its 'kosh'. So the GAA as a form of community organisation is a real and viable alternative to bureaucracy, capitalocentric organisations of high modernity.

Image 76: The philosophy of the club

Perhaps this is what Fisher (2009) was referring to in his book "Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative", as 'glimmers of hope', 'gaps' or 'ruptures' that cracked the image of realism that operates in the interest of corporations and capital.

Maybe what Fisher was searching for when he spoke about the ubiquity of capitalism was something different, something deeper than its criticism; something to start the fight, a new way of thinking? But for this Fisher needed an example like the GAA, and possibly this is what he was referring to when he spoke of 'glimmers' to take advantage of – as the club is different, its philosophy is one of fortification and harmony to both club and community (Fuys et al., 2008; Goldman, 1998; Nonini, 2006; Scharper and Cunningham, 2006). And so, perhaps, this work points to a 'miniature rupture and glimmer of possibility' that the late Fisher so desperately craved. This study of the way of life in the GAA contributes the grammar of alternative organisations, by exploring the underpinning modes of existence in alternative organisation, one that is neither bureaucratic, capitalocentric nor a simple act of resistance to those two ubiquitous ways of organising.

Image 77: Croke Park at night from the sky

6.8 Conclusion

In chapter five, I have examined the GAA against the three principles put forward by Parker et al. (2014). It becomes evident that all three resonated with the GAA, so to answer the question at the surface, the GAA is an alternative – and what has been seen is an organisation that is surrounded by family, carrying with it their values, their emotion and their care. It is the family that holds the powers – they calm things down, control time, put a lid on it in moments of adversity or in more cases, some failed attempts.

Like family, no one is ever cast aside or marginalised for trying to do the right thing. So, leading the club is profoundly influential in sustaining the organisations telos; and this is echoed through the stories as a sacred duty of care. Going further, it seems that leadership here is different; it's about possessing a magical ability to enchant others with your passion for the club; and in doing this fortifying the club and its organisation long into the future.

However in this chapter, chapter six, I have attempted to move beyond the surface of just saying the GAA is an alternative with the support of a contextual opening. This lengthy piece allows me to visit the literature on organisations studies and its influence on the inception of alternatives, whilst examining deeper the character of the GAA. Towards the end of the chapter, the work focuses on distinguishing this alternative, the GAA, from that of others. Answering this question - the GAA is a 'real' alternative as it exists, in fact the GAA is thriving. Going further, what makes it different, the GAA presents itself as an organisation that is not anti-bureaucracy; rather it is Anti-bureaucracy in that it is opposite to bureaucracy not critical of it. This is what makes the GAA a real alternative.

Part three

Chapter seven
Contributions and future research

Image 78: A young Donegal fan makes her way across the main stand before her team's clash with Kerry in the

Allianz Football League Division 1

7.0 Towards conclusions: on contributions and possibilities future research

In introducing the methodology of this study in chapter two I revisited Ryle's observation around how one can see a university - it is not its *"libraries, playing fields, museums, scientific departments and administrative offices.* But how we can say that we have seen the university is by seeing how these come together in concert - how they are *"organized. When they are seen and when their co-ordination is understood, the University has been seen"*. I then set about the task of trying to see the organisation that I live in - the GAA. Imprecise questions tend to have imprecise answers, and so I hope the last three chapters (chapter four dealing with data, chapter five attempting to make sense of this data with a discussion around alternative organisations, taking shape in chapter six) have rendered the GAA visible.

What I have seen, and I hope that a reader of this work sees is a compelling vision of an alternative organisation. That vision is built up from exploring the organisation in terms of scale, boundaries, perspective on time, purpose and major character of the organisations rootedness to family, community leadership and how the organisation approaches conflict. From this grounding, a vision of the GAA as an alternative organisation emerges in my eyes- one that contrasts with the bureaucratic, capitalocentric imaginary and also, somewhat surprisingly with the academic discourse in critical management studies around identifying alternatives. So the contribution of this ethnographically attuned research into the GAA is to glimpse an alternative and explain its character in such a way that there is some normative value in how alternatives can be produced or might emerge. This chapter explores that contribution.

Beyond exploring the contribution, this chapter also deals with the interpretations attempted and not fully realised. The work is phenomenologically inspired and so trying to achieve some form of authentic account requires that I confront here what I failed to confront in the project. As is the tradition, these are gently recast as suggestions for further research, but best understood as ways of me taking this work forward in the future. A document like this is a curious mix of report-after-the-fact, as well as a live account of the work as it is happening; many routes were not taken. So this chapter also details the conferencing that shaped the final thesis around alternative organisations and the currently forsaken ideas of kinship in bureaucracies, leadership without management and critique as

a cultural practice in management studies. These three theorisations survive as minor reflections around the core thesis of alternative organisations.

The chapter also makes some space for reflection on what this research process has done to me and in a small way what it has done to the GAA. This sows the seeds of how the work might be taken up by the GAA in what might be described in traditional terms as a contribution to practice.

7.1 Another alternative: On the contribution to our understanding of alt-org

The GAA is an organisation unlike any other. Unlike other alternative organisations it is not an organisation of resistance, an organisation in which its self-image is always something of a conscious rejection of the overwhelming attraction of bureaucratic, capitalocentric forms. Such organisations in being hewn in critique are always shaped around their opposition. So the GAA manages to be an alternative organisation to the Weberian, Misesian, du Gayian vision of a bureaucracy; and also an alternative to the organisations we are offered as an alternative. In presenting this organisation, in sharing it for all to see, I hope to have contributed to ending TINA, the sense that *There Is No Alternative*.

The GAA is a big fish in the small pond of Ireland - it occupies a huge space in its landscape and relative to any other sporting organisation on earth, in metric terms it has a large number of members, active players, clubs, participants, budgets and anything else one cares to count. But much more than that, in the symbolic order of significance the GAA holds a central place to Irish life that I struggle to relay. We glimpse this from time-to-time - world leaders holding a Hurley, the national mourning that emerges when a major GAA figure passes on, the entire economic and social life coming to a halt in some counties in September as you feel hundreds of thousands of people hold their breath. Beyond measurement the GAA has meaning that few organisations in the contemporary can aspire to. So the GAA achieves the scale that a hierarchical, specialist, rationale bureaucratic organisation can achieve and so offers hope that the inhumanity that has always been positioned as a trade-off to scale and effectiveness is not as linked as we may think.

GAA life beats to a different rhythm, perhaps even cosmology of time. It is intergenerational and permanent, never growing or declining, time in the GAA is immutable. It has currencies

of time - the annual sporting season, the phases of membership from childhood playing, to competing, to staying fit to staying with your community, to the eras in which a club or county ebb and flow, to the epochs of Ireland in free state, modernising and urbanising, time rolls around rather than marches on. Time in a GAA life is a metronome that constantly moves back and forth, never speeding up or really slowing down. In this way, the alternative approach to time and progress in GAA life suggests that there is an alternative to growth-orientated capitalocentric organisations, and that these alternatives can sometimes win in the contest for engagement with people.

In seeing the GAA, I see a unique approach to community leadership. This is a richer description that a leader-follower relation as it knits everyone in the organisation into the responsibility of leadership; community leadership is a refusal to ever split the organisations into the leaders and the led. Leadership emerges from charisma, people who simply care too much, stick around too long and infect others with their love of all things GAA, after life-long apprenticeships, often intergenerational ones, rise. When thinking of management as a resolutely modernist activity, one that disassembles social in order to reproduce it in a superior manner, what place has leadership? In applying a distinctly modernist, post-enlightenment scientific process of defining, what is ultimately a pre-modern, pre-Cartesian concept such as leadership, we are left floundering.

Perhaps, the very act of management and its tradition of seeking definitional tautness is a form of transcendental philosophy - ontology built from an epistemology. When it comes to some ordinal acts like leadership, whose character appears to arise from ontological fiat; we encounter something that might always be 'unknowable'. In the GAA leadership is a duty, one that requires humility, gentility, caring, sensitivity mixed with raw rage, ruthlessness and passion - a curious combination. In this way, the GAA negotiates leadership without much in the way of management. There is very little going-through-the-motions or doings things right, compared with doing the right things with huge enthusiasm.

Beyond scale and time, what clearly marks out the GAA for me is the unique way it negotiates kinship in contemporary organisation. Every GAA club and community is enmeshed with family - bindings of kinship and care that are durable, resilient and vibrant. Family is everywhere in GAA life. It is this character that underwrites GAA life, ensures its

perseverance from one season to the next, from one generation to the next. Long apprenticeships, the gentle husbanding of leaders, the deep care that comes from kinship and the profound commitment to total inclusion all give the GAA an enviable durability. No more than bureaucratic organisations fear, distain and inability to cope with family in their midst is problematic; the GAA's emersion in family is contentious and difficult. Family is a 'white space' in organisational studies, as the pre-modern, ordinal organisation of the family marches to a different rhythm than contemporary, large-scale bureaucratic organisations. Most contemporary organisations do not know what to do with people who have caring connections with others in the organisation, which speaks to a terror and aberrance for the corporal. Nowhere is this more obvious than how families in organisations deal with conflict.

All of these points of difference are demonstrated in how the GAA negotiates conflict. There are no profound breaches in GAA life, no one is kicked out or sacrificed. And while in the cut and thrust of GAA life there are natural disputes, disagreements, and bust ups; they are the silent kind where everything is known and rarely said. The ethos of care, the instinct to calm things down, put a lid on things, resists breaches and absorbs complexities, paradoxes and dichotomies that are the very stuff of family; can infuse the organisations that host, negotiate and are made by families. Of course conflicts arise in the GAA, but they do not have the pathologies of those in contemporary bureaucracies. The first principle is harmony, settling things down, and failing that silence and seething rage are the main instruments of prosecuting a conflict. We all still have to live together is the central principle that underwrites disputes and the disputed.

Taking all these dimensions of GAA life together, what I see is an alternative to bureaucracy and capitalocentric organisations and those who seek to escape them. Each of these ideas - scale, boundaries, perspective on time, purpose, family, community leadership and conflict represent avenues that were explored in individual research papers in this study and in their presentation here have been sublimated into the more abstract, higher order study of alternativeness. The GAA has the scale and purchase that few organisations can achieve, a sense of circular rather that progressive time that speaks to contemporary concerns over the limits of growth, a rootedness in kinship, community with unique ways of approaching leadership and conflict. In those senses its character is a new alternative, one that we have not encountered in either critical management or organisation studies before. It is an

alternative from the bureaucratic, capitalocentric imaginary of contemporary organising; and also from the current fetish to identify and collect alternatives in the co-operative movement, mutuals, anti-globalisation, protest movements and other spheres of alternativising. I hope that you see in this ethnographic account of the GAA a glimpse of this alternative.

7.2 Reflections on process: An emerging contribution to practice

This work has taken four years to realise, although it has its antecedents in my picking up a hurley, and by extension a genealogy that goes back to the first person to fashion. The work also drew inspiration from my undergraduate and master's business study degrees. It is also impossible to disentangle my own journey into a PhD from those around me, with my interest at heart, but one eye on supporting Waterford GAA's long held ambitions. Support, encouragement, inducement were enmeshed with my own patterning of my life in commencing the research. I make these points here, rather than in the acknowledgements section as I try to offer an account of how the work emerged. A significant, acknowledged and unavoidable bias of this work is my deep love, commitment and embeddedness in GAA life. From this springs a natural desire to contribute to GAA life.

This has obvious advantages in bringing an insiders eye to the organisation - my unique place within the GAA opened the gates to a large pool of participants; working at all registers of the organisation, yielded an immediate reaction, but more so willingness to assist in any way possible (100 percent response rate is a material manifestation of this). Going further and possibly more important, the sense of comfort and openness of the stories, words used like 'you know yourself', 'ask your father', 'it's the same in Passage' etc. The stories were told without little hesitation or reluctance as the organisations principles were laid on thick. The thicket of natural talk made the transcription hard work, but gives an incredibly rich data set, which fundamentally drove the research.

The last few years have not been an even, tightly project managed journey of scientific inquiry. I started this work with an incredible sense of freedom, trawling through the theories and concepts and placing forward arguments, arguments that ranged from the reasonable to the more aloof. I thought it was going to be a classic of sports/business leadership thesis of normative value, an idea that fell away quickly in proposal writing. I

variously described the project as inductive - although I am deeply situated in the organisation, postmodern - although I have modernist aspirations of improving the organisation and producing something of normative value for critical management and organisation studies scholars. Presenting narrative data proved very challenging and I felt a special responsibility to do justice to the stories of the men and women of the GAA. My theorisation was deeply impacted by calls for papers and conference I participated in - EGOS, SCOS, BAM, IAM, CMS, AAI are all three letter acronyms that changed the course of this work. The minor interpretations (scale/boundaries/time/purpose/ kinship/community leadership/conflict) were all ventilated at conferences and I found the form of this work between the first and second drafts at a CMS conference on alternative organisations in Paris, 2017. By the end, I am just happy to have something to say, which is to share my journey of exploring this intriguing organisation and hoping that others can see what I can see.

Although it is beyond the scope of this research, the quick collapse of other sports organisational life inspires my desire to contribute to the GAA's own understanding of what kind of an organisation it is. The rapid demise of the amateur games of Cricket and Rugby, as well as the balkinisation of sports like boxing and darts demonstrate how brittle organisations can be. So for all the talk in the data of durability and permanence, the GAA could be swept away through neglect or a minor injury. By narrating the GAA as an alternative, and explaining the character of the alternativeness I aspire to defend the organisations existing mode of being. In doing this, I hope that I have not over-egged the data, and through my desire to protect the GAA skewed what I have found. This is a natural and unavoidable risk of the approach that I have taken, and all I can do is acknowledge the risk.

For the GAA to continue to negotiate the pressures of commercialisation and become capitalocentric, and to regularise, formalise and become more bureaucratic it needs a vision of why it must resist the allure. The GAA is still recognisable from its foundations in 1884 but has stadia, media rights, IR issues that are all more comfortably of the capitalosphere and bureacratiosphere. A proud vision of itself will allow it to account for its resistance, its principles and approach. In this way, the alternativeness might continue, flowing through family lines and close networks and binds of community.

To preserve this, the organisation must navigate the market and organisational pressures in a way that seems natural; renew its husbandry of leaders, its nepotism and favouritism as positive values. In this way, it might resist common governance that ultimately kill off voluntary organisations through a set of bizarre isomorphic – to become like other sell-out sporting organisations, selling out their communities and kin. Therefore the time, energy and emphasis is placed on what is central, its telos of participation and the continuation of the club. Perhaps the best example of this huge growth in membership over the past few years, with initiatives like the GAA Cúl Camps that drags in children from non-GAA family with the sugary pleasures of cheap summer camps to convert and colonise - almost 25% of all Irish children now participate in these camps.

Scale always brings pressure to negotiate modernity - to regularise with more governance, further systems and control, additional protocols, lengthy and drawn out processes – in essence become more bureaucratic. So, drawing on the reflections of the storytellers and their satisfied method to organisation, the research narrates why this might be a bad thing, and how the organisation needs to renew and fortify its commitment to its principles at every encounter. The appropriate response to the commodification of other sports is to reaffirm purpose and customs.

As a GAA person doing this type of work, I have already been called on to contribute to practice. So I am sitting on the GAA Strategic Review Committee, presented to GAA Games Development Conference on my research proposal and again two years later on my research findings, I have launched a Club Leadership Initiative, and briefed many other people within the GAA, GAA media and the public on my work. More than all this, and someone who has battled through the earlier chapters will appreciate, I have secured my position on my own club - Passage East Hurling Club, and now have my feet under the committee table. So this work has a social life, one that reflects on how it has been conducted.

Nonetheless, the contribution to practice is not necessarily limited to the GAA club. As a large scale, voluntary organisation that are innately thrifty, operating in low resourced environments, they succeed in building tremendous commitment, motivation, capability, passion and sustainability as part of ongoing operations that maintain huge organisational

flexibility with little material rewards. Considering broader organisational discourses on flexibilisation and organisational precarity it appears the majority of organisation, commercial or alternative can learn from GAA club-level practices. Underpinning these are the alternative principles and its leadership practices at club level.

The GAA is an alternative.

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Image: Albert Einstein's desk, taken on the day of his death in 1955

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Appendices

Image: GAA congress 2015

Appendix A - Informed consent from Croke Park

Pat Daly,
GAA Director of Games Development & Research,
Croke Park,
Dublin

Noel Connors,
Office AT120,
Main Campus Cork Road,
Co. Waterford

08/09/2014

To whom it may concern,

On behalf of the GAA, we have reviewed the proposal put forward by Noel Connors and Dr Ray Griffin- tentatively titled "A study of club leadership in Gaelic games: understanding the practices, processes and passions of grass-roots leadership".

We consent to the research-taking place across the organisation. We also have received details on how individuals named above will be approached, individual consent will be obtained and how the data gathered will be used and managed.

Finally, we are wishing both researches well in their work.

Yours sincerely,
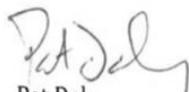
Pat Daly
GAA Director of Games Development & Research

Appendix B - Ethical consent from Waterford Institute of Technology

Instítiúid Teicneolaíochta Phort Láirge   Waterford Institute *of* Technology

Port Láirge, Éire.   Waterford, Ireland.
T: +353-51-302000   T: +353-51-302000
info@wit.ie   www.wit.ie

Ref: 14/MO/01

31st January, 2017

Mr. Noel Connors,
Hollymount,
Knockroe,
Passage East,
Co. Waterford.

Dear Noel,

Thank you for informing the committee of the change in your project title. The WIT Research Ethics Committee is pleased to inform you that we approve WIT's participation in your research project entitled *'Alternative organising – A case exemplar of leadership & kinship in a large organisation'*. We will convey this change to Academic Council.

We wish you well in the work ahead.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. John Wells,
Chairperson,
Research Ethics Committee

cc: Dr. Ray Griffin

Appendix C - Data Collection Protocol

Data Collection Protocol:	A study of club leadership in Gaelic games: understanding the practices, processes and passions of grass-roots leadership

Researchers	*Interviewee:*
Noel Connors | noelieconnors@hotmail.com	
Dr Ray Griffin | rgriffin@wit.ie	*Name, address and email of Interviewee*
School of Business, Waterford Institute of Technology, Waterford Ireland	

About   the   research:

The interview, for which you are being asked to participate in, is part of a research study that examines the practices, processes and passions of grass-roots leadership. It is hoped that this study will allow a better understanding of club leadership within Gaelic Games. The primary method of data collection is one-on-one interviews.

Your participation:

Your participation in this study will consist of an interview lasting approximately one hour. The interview will focus on individual's experiences in an historical but unique manner with societal locations and processes, such as organisations and families' movements.

- You are not required to answer the questions.
- You may pass on any question/topic that makes you feel uncomfortable.
- At any time you can withdraw from the interview and study.

Recording and use of recordings:

With your permission, the interview will be recorded and the above named researchers will store this recording for the duration of the study. You will be given a digital recording of the interview. At any point in the future you can request to have the interview recording corrected, parts redacted or fully deleted. As a historically important interview, it is planned to submit this recording to an archive where it will be retained for use by future researchers after a twenty-year moratorium. The recording will clearly identify you and your organisation.

Transcription and use of transcriptions:

The recordings will be transcribed and stored in both digital and printed form by the above named researchers for the duration of the study. You will also be given a copy of the transcript of the interview. At any point in the future you can request to have the interview transcript corrected, parts redacted or fully deleted. The transcript will clearly identify you and your organisation. It is also planned to submit the transcript to a reputable archive where it will be retained for use by future researchers after a twenty-year moratorium. Sections of the transcript will be used in reports and potentially publications of this study. These reports will clearly identify and attribute your quotes to you.

Please confirm by ticking

I agree to participate

I agree to have our interview recorded

I agree to have that interview stored by the researchers

I agree to have that interview submitted to a reputable archive

I agree to have our interview transcribed

I agree to my name be **clearly identified** on the recording, transcription and in quotes used from the interview in academic reports and publications

Signed: _____   _____

           Interviewee   Date

Signed: _____   _____

           Researcher   Date

Appendix D - The launch of the Club Leadership Development Programme

Appendix E - Presenting our findings at the GAA Annual Games Development Conference in Croke Park, Dublin 2017

Appendix F - Template for the unstructured interviews

This represents the initial and emergent questions, including prompts that I used to encourage participants to reveal the stories of their experiences of club life. This is not an exhaustive list, as many of the questions developed naturally within the context of individual interviews.

The single narrative inducing question:

So (the name of the person) I know you are involved in (the clubs name) can you tell me how you started and we can move on from this.

Prompts and emerging questions

What influenced you?

What is important?

What is the best thing about the GAA?

What are the biggest arguments over?

Who makes the decisions?

So drove the club before now?

What are the high moments in the club?

What are the lows?

What was your view of the GAA?

Has your view changed of the organisation?

What do you make of the GAA culture?

Who is the product in the GAA?

Appendix G - An example of a deconstructed story

In a professional capacity I got involved in the organisation in feb 2014,	Terms of recognition Instant establish **professional/unprofessional** dualism Capacity … potential for action, ability…. Inertia/inability…. I am hired gun, I can do what they cannot do for themselves Date- crisp professionalism, short-term ideation
and I was brought on board in	brought on board- navy metaphor, functionalism … barbaric ultilitarism
what is a new, or what was a new position then	New… tight professional definition of new (precision) Two distinctions

and that is Commercial and sponsorship manager of GAA and Croke park.	Commercial/ un-commercial Sponsorship GAA and croke pk distinction but oneness
So I work across both the GAA portfolio and a CP portfolio.	Heighten distinction GGA CP Portfolio- investment-speak
How did that come about, I suppose I had the guts of about 13 years working with the professional sports body	"How did that come about".. takes on role of interviewer… interesting syntactical backflip…. Take charge kinda guy… Guts- management speak… talks of wartime experience (Jack Welchesque), George Bushism- truth from the gut (invokes harrowing, challenging, macho experience) ….. establishing, recognition… calling cards. "called the"… at a level arrogant…. Invoking

before that call ERC running a tournament called the Heineken cup and what was then called the Amlin challenge cup, before that I would have been in an agency in town which was called slattory communications which is now called PSG.	that he is the caller… he is the namer Knowingly set up as a false modesty… how can I bring this up In town (I own this city… its my town)…. Precision on naming…
In that previous life between 1995-2000 give or take my clients would have included BOI who have title sponsorship of the football championship it would have also included a brand called church and general that's now called alliance and back then they would have sponsored cumin a mscoile and they use to sponsor the leagues and they still sponsor both properties.	Precise on the naming and renaming of things…professional care for naming of brands. …. In a few sentences he has rolled out eight brand names… Establishing credentials glengarry glen ross alec baldwin speech
Alliance are one of the longest sponsors the GAA has in fact, the same person that was the client back then is the client now, a fella	I know people, they know me… they follow

by the name of Damien O'Neill, a top guy.	me "top guy"= "I am top guy"
So I would have worked on GAA properties then, my perception of the GAA then working in an agency was there was a sponsorship somewhere in the client, negotiated with the GAA and we could go off and do whatever we wanted to do with it, there wasn't a regular interaction between the sponsorship department within the GAA, where was now there is a department of 4 people, and we interact with all the agencies on a regular basis.	"So I would have".... Gloriously tortured syntax.... It was not important at the time, but now is it is important in my story... GAA was inconsequential to me at the time GAA properties The GAA were not professional/ad-hoc.... And as a professional I found them messy.... Now this is solved----- professionals with a "dept" of 4
So whats where I has come about, I am lucky that I have worked in professional sport give or take since 1995, be it on the PR side of things I was brought into ERC to set up the communication side of things across	Attempts to end his establishing narrative Who is lucky (them or me)

EU.	
To write the media rules, the term, ruby was new into professionalism at the time so there was a thing called the participation agreement that's the rules, that's the contact that all the clubs sign before they can participate in the tournament, in turn every single player, and remember they are professions only just, anti-doping forms, code of conduct, IP all those varies different aspects of it.	I have done the am to pro thing before….. Core thing was to lock down the asset to sell.. control the media access
And what I would of brought to the table was, what are the rules and regulations, when do you announce a team, how many interviews do you have to give and so forth.	
And because ruby was not soccer and therefore, you had to treat the media in a very different way to earn space, and then after do that for 5 years I set up a commercial department in ERC which didn't exist beforehand because all the commercial work was farmed out to agencies and at the time we would have had Heineken as the main sponsor and ball supplier, and then after time I would of built that up with	Sensitivity to context (rugby to soccer…) Yawn… same story… repeat his playbook Establishes a teleology for sport .. soccer is the place to be(perhaps US are ahead with NFL), rugby is getting there… GAA will get there… isomorphic

brands like dove for men, Adidas, FedEx, EDF, electric de la france one of the biggest energy companies in the world and various other companies, Amlin for the Amlin challenge cup for example.	Again establish the self through brands (EDF eg)
So and I think that there was enough there in the CV to attract the attention of the GAA, to do the commercial job that I was doing in ruby, to do that job for the GAA.	Ha ha… tongue in cheek… cocky…. Once again an attempt to close it out as the end of the establishment…
So I am here now to do a commercial job for the GAA, and that is across sponsorship, which is primarily the national sponsorship, what I mean by that is that Waterford don't come to me to find them a sponsor for their jersey, or a program that they have in Waterford but what I will bring in a sponsor for the leagues, or a renewal or a sponsor for feile, a national competition or a sponsor for HEC, senior championship is the most high profile of them all the multi sponsor model that has been in place I think since 2008, which mimics the championships league, I mean mimic in a good way and that's one aspect of it.	commercial job- hired hand Waterford… demonstrates the tailoring of the interview … dialogical… instruction to remind you that this is for you… so the story would be different for someone else.. multi sponsor model… techno mumbojumbo… lingo

	Explicit on the mimic impulse…
Finding sponsors and minding sponsors, and that's once aspect of the job, and that's GAA that's part of my remit,	Playing on previous experience… known in the industry… big hitter… also playing the parental role, minding these people… yet this is only a fraction of what I do…
at CP side of my remit if you want to come and business in the stadium you need to come and talk to me.	But also large organs come to me… because they know my powers… "business"… come to me because I make the final decisions… the book stops with me… "stadium" no use of GAA speak… HQ, Croke park… rarely called the stadium…
And what I mean by that for example is, if you want, we will sale tayto crisps, cadburys chocolate, coca cola all of those deals would go through	Sales… referral to he's quantifiable skill… he has learned he's trade…. "if you want"… as in, you would be foolish not to… Association with top quality brands… ill only deal with these organisations…

me, and that's a CP part of the business.	
CP is a separate company wholly own by the GAA, that pays a dividend back into the GAA each year.	
A third strand of work is licensing, so that's pretty varied and that is Oneill's contract for example, azzurri, cookery that are the three companies that have deals with the GAA that allow them to become a kit manufacturer for a county, below that, all three of those have also have what we call a clubs, schools and college licences and as well as those three who have county there are also like Macia and others who have those junior licences as well, that's other contracts that come through my desk, and that's a fascinating space in itself	"strand"… the notion that it is like the hair on your head… I have loads… yet very important visually… "my desk" that's where I make my decisions…. That's where people come… they know where I am…

but that's now the question you are asking me.	
	Taking over the interview again… a realisation that I am coming to the end of my generic talk on what I do… shit, its time to focus on the answer…
Then another aspect of it is footage sales for example, so footage sales is if someone is producing a movie and wants to use GAA,	"movie"… the large aspect of money… the glamorous industry… I am the director…
or if someone was producing an ad and would like to put GAA footage in it also comes through my department.	"my department"…. Since when are you the ower????
And equally if someone uses footage that should not use footage they have me coming after them,	However I am the enforcer…. Don't use my material… this is my environment, not yours to make your money without my say-so…

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and all the legalities that we need to bring to bear, which happens.	And I am aware of the laws… I can talk the talk and walk the walk… and I have…
And there are times would you believe that I am delighted it happens	"you believe"… imagine, people think they can fool me… however I have the last laugh….
because it is very important that the GAA sends out a very vigorous message to say so not mess or take liberties with our properties,	However this is important to the organisation also… not just my reputation… its to maintain what the GAA is about… but people wont be making money off us…
don't masquerade as having an association that doesn't exist with the GAA, that is very important in the commercial world.	Don't mess with the organisation and my position… in my professional work this is not tolerated…
We are a very small country so we have to act when we do have a case, and act with great precision and power and as hard as possible to	Everyone knows everyone… and I have to maintain my reputation…

protect the brand, to protect those interests of those sponsors who have invested so there is some of the, there is the top line.	"brand"…. GAA persons don't view the organisation as a brand… and also the top line is the games… not the sponsor's investment…
Ya, I think that every kid in the country that went to a national school had street leagues, 3-4-5-6 class in scoile in Bishopstown.	Deflection of the question as if it was a silly one… "every kid"…. Yet didn't answer the question… Bishopstown… a well-known cork strong hold… how dare you ask me that….
I use to joke when I jointed the GAA, I played with brian cutbert, who was the footballer manager for the last 2 seasons but what I don't tell people is that I played ruby with him not football, so I played with bishopstown and my school.	Joke… the uncomfortable sitting… Brian… is used to show that he knew people personally from a young age that reached the top… Continued joke as truth of rugby, rather than the GAA… and moves back to the safety of the school "every kid"… reinforcing the fact he did play…
In secondary school I didn't play, gaelic games wasn't played, and one of my class mates went on to captain cork and you will probably know him, alan browne, and I don't	From joke to being frank… "didn't play"… I was restricted… my classmate did… and captained cork… that could have been me…

know if he won an all Ireland but his brother john did and his older brother Richard, long before your time did as well in 1986 would you believe.	I know the family… and the dates…. But you wouldn't…
So alan, and ray cummins, was it, he was in our school as well blackrock, his son alan cummins was a year behind me, but it was a ruby playing school so my involvement in GAA would have been in primary school, street leagues, the feile and got presented a medal by the president of Ireland a long time ago and a lot of my cousins would of played in aghada in east cork it was big hurling country and my cousin would have been involved for example he was a statistician for conor Conahan would you believe.	My school focused on rugby… but I did play… and I can prove it with a medal… But my family are involved… "hurling country"… this is where it all happens… and was involved in corks all Ireland football 2010… clear example that he is not just ignorant about the games…
A guy called john he was a keeper, my first ever big match, big sporting event and I am working in sport all of my life, and the biggest was in 1984 my aunt took me to the munster final between tipp and cork, and we were about 7 points down with 7 minutes to go and we ended up winning by about 7	Introduces the family… see I told you so… I know the match and the teams… but also I could give a commentary of it….

points,	
seanie o leary got a goal, tomas mulcahy was only a young fella, JBM was playing you know, and I remember being blown away by the colour of the moment and I had never been at, and that's never left me and	See these were the players….
	Also provides emotional memory… the colours…
then there is other little stories.	
	But i have more than just the one… I am not just a one trick pony…
My dad told before he died, he was brought to the final in 1939, by his father, and it was a strangle thing because he had 6 brothers and I never understood why he was taken but he was cork were beaten by KK unfortunately, it was famous or infamous if you are from cork the final of thunder and lightning and since I jointed the GAA I read up about it and my dad told me about it as they were leaving CP that day miserable because cork had lost they had found out that	My father even was a GAA lover… death used as a more serious moment… jokes are distant..
	Again reverting to the what the games was known for… and from a corks perspective… along with the weather… traditional irish backdrop to a conversation…

ww2 had been called, which is an extraordinary link to history if you think about it ww2 was call on bbc radio but when I read up about it the	Further adding the date in historic memory…
president of Ireland was not welcome to CP that day because he had been at a soccer match, association match in daly mount park the previous feb, Douglas hyde it is,	Also including the presidential ritual in important games today, back then was not invited…
none of us are a anymore than a degree moved from the GAA in this country.	
	Very strong statement… illustrating the GAA's influence on society… perhaps more influential because of his role within the organisation… but to the power it has on the president…
I think in the commercial role if I was to focus on that,	Focusing on his professional position…
I always say I take greatest pleasure in the	

second deal I'll do with you and the reason I say that is, because I think if you are a sales person youll probably be about to sell a certain amount of things in a certain amount of time, but it is when you do it a second time is when you come back and when you come back its for a reason that we have delivered for you and hopefully over delivered for you and that gives me great satisfaction so I am only,	It is the challenge… the notion of it being more about the chase… it is a buckle on the belt… illustrating that I can deliver…
I am not to the point that I am renewing deals that I have done even though I have done a lot of the deals for the GAA but they are the deals the GAA had before me and will probably have long after me as well I think bringing in AIB to replace GAAGO in the football championship was a very significant deal for the GAA and I take great pleasure in that for a number of reasons.	I am not at this stage because I am not here that long… yet I have delivered in other means… I will continue to…
Number 1 it's a game changer in terms of revenue, number 2 they have retained their position with the club championships and extended as well as camogie so they haven't been transferred from one slot into another they have actually doubled down the amount of slots they have and almost on top of all of those things I think AIB are an	Lists… obvious well thought out prior to this question… but also into the selling mode…

outstanding sponsor and have almost contemporised games in Ireland in the last 3 years and that pre dates my arrival and I would of thought that in terms with the club championship, the toughest, I think it is absolutely outstanding, I think the storytelling that they have adopted with regard to gaelic games has been outstanding and I think we are very lucky in the GAA to have a sponsor of that calibre applying their wit to our sport as against any other sport.	"we"…. Is he the GAA or who is he referring to???...
It's the first question everyone asks me, they are dying to know the difference working in rugby and working in the GAA.	Everyone knows my background… I am the topic of many conversations…. This is a generic question…
The difference isn't great really, it is a very similar job and what takes place here is CP is a very professional unit, and it has to be, with people paying an awful lot of money, sponsors paying an awful lot of money, yes for an association that is a sport with amateur status	Both are professional… I wouldn't work here otherwise… did you see your sponsors…. And yes I am aware of the amateur status…

but they want an very professional client servicing so whether you are servicing FedEx our of brussels or you are servicing AIB out of ballysbridge the principles of best practice should apply,	Going back to past companies…. Doesn't matter where I work as long as it is professional… "the principles of best practice should apply", basic principle in my eyes…
they should not change if we want to be and we do want to be the best sponsorship department in the country bar none then it is quite simple, it does not change, that's a philosophy you have or don't have then you go out to apply it so therefore how you mind you clients grow your clients, the research you attach,	"best sponsorship department in the country bar none then it is quite simple", his aspirations
the sporting analogy you are always looking for inches you are always always looking for inches you are always trying to leave the office in a better condition than you found it for the next person, so the next person can come in and add another percentage to it.	Comparing it to sport…. But suggests that the office was not as run as effectively as this prior to his appointment… but I wont let that happen…
Ah look, you know, highest moment since I jointed, there wasn't too many high moments for cork unfortunately, the truth is I really enjoy making deals, its not really	Very sales.. professional focus… acknowledging the sport but not a focus… "romantic" understands its not the most fitting answer.. nonetheless the truth and

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romantic perhaps but I really enjoy making deals and that's the truth of it.	why he is in the position…
It would have been the same with rugby, getting a contract negotiated, done and signed, additional revenue for the association, that gives me a kick every single time and that's as I said its not very romantic but that's it.	This is the same with the other organisations… making us aware this is not just a once off…. "kick"…
Of course having the proximity to, for example half time during an all Ireland when your escorting the president and the president of the GAA to their seats, along with your sponsors you do pinch yourself in terms of the proximity to sport on great occasions and you should never become immune to it the day you do is the day you should leave the chair and give it to some else.	The unique opportunities… not the sports matches themselves… perhaps more interested in contacts???.. again professional stance… Focus and rootlessness… don't take your eye off the ball… second deal might be compromised…. If this occurs, time to leave… professionalism

	jeopardised… even possibility of job loss…
Like for an example, a client said to me three weeks out from the hurling championship final, you must be dying for it all to be over not at all, I cant wait for the finals and I mean that, sincerely, so I love the big day, but you cant fully get caught up in it either, you've a job to do	"client", We are the service providers…. Always aware of the job in hand…. Surroundings are irrelevant… continuous "job" mentality…
and you cant lose sight of that so despite the amazing moments that might be happening on the pitch and you have to take that in too, and enjoy it but if there is a glitch in your signing system or in the backdrop or a part of the delivery or the big screen or what ever it may be	You are judged on the delivery… no space/time for errors… the match is only a game viewpoint….
my team needs to see it so you need your eyes wide open, but yes enjoy it be aware of it, take it in but you have a job to do.	"my team", I am the leader… its about the task in hand… not the match…
I would imagine as a player if you go to croke park, I guess you are told to enjoy it as much	Putting himself into my shoes… already after taking the interviewee, interviewer and now

as you can but you have a job too, and youll enjoy it all the more if the job is done right and you get the right result.	it is the players viewpoint… Taking the business approach… youll enjoy it more if you win…
Not yet I am delighted to say, not yet, you know, before the tape started rolling I said that the economy at a national level in the country has moved on significantly in the last 24 months and looks like to continue but I am aware that there is a 2-3 tier economy in Ireland, county towns that are decimated in some cases there are other cities outside of Dublin who are doing better than others, and then there is Dublin, and Dublin is kicking on at a much faster rate than others, economy wise than the rest of the country.	Referral to something out of his control….
Because we are selling at a national level we will be the first to benefit from that, so I keep the low moments as far from the door I guess.	Pulling it back to the organisation… spin to positive movement for the organisation… "low moments as far from the door I guess" very much teacher to bold child…. I am not

	dealing with you now…

Oh a low moment ill give you a low moment, cork losing to Tipperary last year was a particularly low moment.	Somewhat of a fill the gap… "oh", not something that is really a low, but finishes the conversation…
And the manner of the defeat was a low moment so, but that's the divorced from the professional, you know what my actual job, but you would be human.	"Divorced", strong wording into more serious information… "my actual job" I am here to fulfil a mission…
I don't think it would be my default, I think the type of GAA person I would be, before joining the GAA is a cork supporter that loves coming to croke park when they are playing in CP that's the category.	A nice way of saying no… sun shine support… following the community, conforming to the norm of society… "category", can you put the GAA into a category????
I mean Guinness would map there consumers, they have absolute loyalist that drink it year in year out, there are other people that only drink it in the winter time, and there are others that only drink it in	The move to provide an organisational example… somewhat fitting to the GAA, both irish and seen as strong persons sport/drink…

particular places.	
And that's how you can map out a supporter a consumer call it what you will and that's the category I would have fallen into, so I wasn't playing, I had started coaching, I am a coach in girls under 8's in KMC , my eldest played camogie for years in faoges for years so I was on the side line there and like a lot of these things you are reintroduced to sport by your children and what ever that sport may be, and in the case of my 2 girls it is GAA and my son plays with the school, and he was here today he wasn't playing but with the school.	The transition into the grassroots… nonetheless only because of he's kids…
So honestly, in terms of you verses me, I would imagine and I don't know, club, parish, community you name it I haven't been that person, I am the person that comes to CP and supports cork, we are both GAA people but the case is where do you came in a scale of 1 is to 10 and who wants to rate that, who ever wants to rate that, you are a 10 and I am a 5 I am not sure, ill let other decide that, I wouldn't be your stereotypical	Comparing… and trying to positon on a scale where we both sit…. Yet who is the decider in this measurement… in other words who is to judge me…

GAA person, I would have a particular love of hurling, which wouldn't be usual being from cork and now I am coaching ladies Gaelic football,	
and its one of my favourite hours in the week I also coach ruby would my young fella, so I wouldn't be you stereotypical GAA person I guess but always a big hurling fan.	Why only one hour??????.....
My perceptions of those individuals are the same as I have of my cousins, who are GAA people true and true and true.	Never answered the question… just compared like with like… family again somewhat used as a point of departure…
From aghada my brother in law that lifted an all Ireland for cork he is GAA true and true he played for cork he played for killmurray he played divisional, he won a junior all Ireland he captained cork.	Family rooted in the story… yet still not providing insights…
So that's like asking me what's my perception of my brother in law that's like my brother or my first cousins you know people that love there soccer, love what ever it might be, I love it,	Trying to turn the question into something of an unanswerable question… dragging family in…

I would move the question into an other area in terms of things that are happening in the GAA that I have exposure to, that I wouldn't have if I wasn't working in this job, like the healthy club, extraordinary the things that are taking place.	Becoming interviewer again, moving the question... diverting it far from the initial question... to a promo for the GAA... sales somewhat...
The investment that takes place in CP that the general public might not know about,	Providing professional insight... you don't know what I know and you are a GAA person...
how the GAA has embraced innovation, how the GAA have hawk eye before soccer and ruby fantastic how the GAA has GAAGO which in 18 months in probably the best streaming service in EU	Using the GAA as a comparison... putting it on a pedestal... innovation is the GAA... that's what we do here...
so the innovation that's attached to the GAA in terms of continuous investment, its fantastic that comes from GAA people and ill be forever learning and the last thing that I should pretend to be is that hard core GAA person that I think you are referencing because I am not but that's ok because I think I bring a different perceptive.	How great it is as an organisation... but I am not hard core GAA... but I am great in many other ways... I am unique.. I think differently...
I think the answer that I have given	South of france.... Very much posh and far

previously is it's a kin to working with professional ruby in the south of france, where, and what I mean by that, if you are walking down the town in cast, which is a relatively small town south east of T, the heart of ruby country in france.	from the mud and grassroots of the GAA… money is king…
The ruby players faithed like senior inter county players in Ireland, so far as, they get the meat thrown at them as long as they have won the previous Saturday or Sunday type thing.	These players that are heros in the community… they are provided with extra benefits as a result… but winning is everything… in other words getting the job done is paramount…
They are absolute hero's, they, while it is a professional sport it really is at the heart of the community and when you go down there as an irish person who is considered a salary man, that's what your considered, you should first of all, my view is front up, don't spend your time hiding in CP go around the country and see whats happening and listen to people and talk to people because these are the people who are delivering so much of the sponsorships in many respects youll learn a huge amount and youll benefit from that, and give what	Telling me how I am considered… thus providing advice on how to become somewhat of a better person… Nonetheless dragging it back into a business

you should be doing in life anyway, which is giving respect to people. of.	context… and the financial investment…
You have a point of view, I think I have something to offer, I think I would have something to offer in my area of expertise in any conversation far from, there will always be that I will always not know a lot more than what I do know but I can add value to a conversation in the association across the country on the commercial side of things so they can teach me whats going on in there county and there club and there province but there might be elements that I can bring to the table as well they may perhaps have not previously thought	Confident and forward… I think… offer… nice wording but hiding the forcefulness intended…
It's a two way thing.	
Well there was a position previously but it is an expanded role so I would like to think when I do have those conversations and it is part of the job and I didn't outline it as part of the job at the beginning.	Hidden in the role… didn't mention… why??? This is an expanded role… perhaps because I had the experience to handle it…
A county might call trying to sell sponsorship of my jersey a particular county in the North,	Illustration of he's impact… I told you I can make changes… my advice is worthwhile…

and they told me what they were doing in sponsorship and I suggested they rethink and restructure how and compartmentalise how they put together the various different packages to allow the guy that wants to give 300 euro a year for a half a page in the program to maybe someone that might want to give multiple of that as the main sponsor of the year and that there is lots of different ways, and I have explained that to them how they could break down and put into sectors what they have to offer.	"rethink" as if the idea was silly… childish perhaps…. Break down… barrier as if they were unable to progress without he's assistance…
I am delighted because since they have some back to me and said what you suggested doing, we have taken in significantly more revenue and we are doing things very differently than we have done previously.	Hahaha… I knew this would work…
I think we both know that every county cannot winning an all Ireland but every county has a story to tell and it is very	GAA talk… common pundit talk on winning…

important that each county, every county with no exception has a story to tell and they can sometimes benefit in me dragging that story out of them in some cases, whether you're a louth, Waterford, cork or kk they are all stories and they are all as, as rich as the next.	I am the daddy.. I need to get the best out of these people by dragging it out of them.. it is a task to do so….
Because richness is not just liam Mc every year richness can be progression, this is where we are and this is where we want to be and this is what we are going to do to get there we have 4 points in our plan, do you want to join us in that journey, commercial company do you want to with us on this exciting challenge, success may never be Liam Mc but success is more participation win more matches in championship go up a division or 2 in the league, maher, ring who knowns it is all relevant, but there are all disciples there that if you	Again back to the pundit speak… hearsay… conversations in the toilet… Plan… strategic, business talk and this will sell to companies…

can apply them that youll give confidence to someone that might invest rather than going and that I am not going to give my money to someone that doesn't know where they are going.	You need your vision… if you want to sell youll need this… and I can get this vision for you…
So a company will invest if they have confidence in where they are putting their money so, you need to know what you are at and how to structure that, that sales pitch if you like.	"sales pitch"…. Are you selling yourself????
You always have learn from other organisations I think, benchmarking is always critical, you always look to the best.	"benchmarking"…
But that is a matter of perception, of what the best is, I always think that champions league do things particularly well, people look at the Olympics it's a very different model, people look at NFL people look at FIFA world cups most recently they might look at the ruby world cup.	I think this… however I wont argue if you think differently… as long as you can argue your point…
And there is certainly a lot good done but you know what, there is a lot of things, like I saw a presentation last week about the ruby	We do things well, but could do more…

world cup, on a podium, with an led attached to it and I wondered, that looks more gimmicky than I ever saw, and this is personal opinion, and I thought it looked awful, it added nothing, but obviously there was a technology out there and someone wanted to use it and they thought this was the place to do it.	"gimmicky", come on, how dare they…. We are professional sports bodies… don't let the team down…. Be smart about how you want to come across…
You should always be looking, the nature of my job is I cant look at any sport as just a sport I am looking at the surrounding.	I am always at work… always the professional..
I always think, the analogy I would give you is the artist are the players, and I cant affect anything the artist do, but part of my job is the framing of that event, and I think you could botch a painting with a very bad frame.	My view… this is my impact… but it is vital… even though you might not think so…
And that's part of my job and the framing right and the commercials that are attached	I know my place… its clear…

to it.	
I would say be very opening, realise how much you have to learn but I don't think I would think that I would give any different advice to anybody starting in any job, do as much as you can speck to as many people as you can there is no job that you will never do that you will draw on at some stage later in your career and we all know, and it may be a cliché but we all know you learn a lot more from your failures than you do from your success.	Very generic… interview like answer… Modesty… but failures…. I have my weaknesses and I have learnt… I am now more robust…
How often, I was at a breakfast recently and we heard all about KK and their thoughts are dominated, the few all Irelands they have lost we heard the same about the all blacks, not dominated by the 52/54 matches they won but the matches they lost and I am convinced that you will learn more, in my case I will learn more from the sale I don't make than the one I do make, if I had the sense to ask why, what could I have done better, why didn't you go for it.	Again moving roles… giving sports examples… somewhat motivational…
So I don't know if I would carve out	"surrounding" learn the language… the

particular, but obvious be aware of your surrounds you know,

your in the home of Gaelic games, you in a very historic building in CP and if you are not aware of that you are in the wrong place anyway, you know and if you need to be total that I don't think you are in the right place. | general chat at lunch…

This place is a place of worship… I know that… |
| So I don't think I will be tailoring my advice, know that when you are coming into CP know that you are very much in a cutting edge environment in the

commercial side of things. | "tailoring", suiting up… the professional environment… this place is at the top…

Definitely, cutting edge in my department anyway…. |