This chapter relates the experiences of the staff members of an academic department that was merged with a cognate department on the partner campus. The resulting department was then physically relocated to a site that was new for both parties. The chapter discusses the exit of staff through the voluntary exit process, the harmonisation of student fees and the consequences for access.

Being dumped

Geographical re-location from premises at ML Sultan Technikon (MLST) and Technikon Natal (TN) brought a set of problems that affected Department X in a variety of ways. Staff were given very short notice that they would have to vacate their respective ‘academic homes’ and relocate to new accommodation at a common site. During the last week of November 2002, the ‘movers’ came on site. The trauma already being experienced by staff was further compounded by the fact that the ‘movers’ were not professionals – with subsequent negative effects. In retrospect, the head of department viewed the move as ‘a blessing in disguise to come to neutral territory’.

The staff commented that ‘what happened to us was almost criminal … we were dumped here and our colleagues [on the other campus] were given three days to pack’. They explained that they were ‘given promises that they would be given whatever they needed when they moved’. However, ‘…on arrival [there was] nothing … there were no computers, no electricity, twice the number of students, and half the number of staff’.

In spite of all the problems and the challenges faced by the department, even in the initial stages of merger, they ‘fulfilled the syllabus’. Furthermore, industry had an opportunity to critique students’ work and ‘didn’t blink’. In other words, the ‘standard was okay and has gone even higher’.
The experience by Department X of physical relocation and its impact on staff, students and equipment was similar to that of many departments in the institution as reflected by another Durban Institute of Technology (DIT) academic staff member:

A move of academic offices ... can be exhausting and inconvenient at the best of times: in the context of a merger they can more closely approximate hell. The lot of the academic staff ... was a general object of pity and horror, as massive building operations were going on while the academic programme was running, with the result that:

- Office and computer equipment was damaged by building operations.
- A whole computer laboratory's worth of computers was stolen because builders had (accidentally?) broken down one of the walls, leaving the laboratory open.
- There was extreme stress because of the dirt and noise.
- There was no telephone, fax or email.
- There was no air-conditioning, taps or toilets (this in the hottest February for 50 years).
- All of the brass Yale locks were stolen, meaning that offices could not be locked, and personal staff possessions were plundered 'with impunity'.

Like other colleagues, the staff of Department X were also forced to play 'hunt-the-venue'. This situation was ‘exacerbated by inept overall timetabling’. The staff justifiably described their relocation experiences as having been nightmarish; but their experiences were not the worst. Other departments earned the moniker of ‘nomad’ departments with nowhere to stay, because of multiple moves and office renovations not being completed on time.

When the staff were pressed to comment on the level of assistance forthcoming from management during the relocation process, the response was spontaneous: it engendered loud and derisive laughter, coupled with a comment that ‘management continue to be in denial!’ They described how they had ‘been left with a feeling of anger about the lack of support ... not anger with each other ... anger channelled at senior management’. There was no phased-in approach of first evaluating how many staff would be affected; instead, a ‘quick and dirty’ approach was taken with the relocation. It was evident that the ramifications of the move were still being felt three years later. The staff commented that they were still ‘stuck with the impact ... the roof is leaking, there is no parking, you can’t get on [or] off the bus safely, students get stabbed, mugged, cars are stolen and a staff member was shot ... everyone has spoken about students feeling disenfranchised, staff feel the same’ (FG).
The forced integration of academic departments and the tense ‘us’ and ‘them’ situation was further aggravated by ‘clumsy management strategies such as the sacrifice swap’ – some staff were required to move offices to the ‘other’ institution or be arbitrarily swapped around so that cultural mixing could be seen to be taking place.  

Managing the complexities of merger

Whilst the physical relocation of Department X brought about one set of problems, the staff also had to come together in a pattern of new working relationships. This brought to the fore the tension between endeavouring to manage the merger at a departmental level on the one hand, and a prevailing environment of negative perceptions about the support from senior management on the other.

In an attempt both to manage and to counter the effects of the merger on the department, the head of department indicated that he had adopted a ‘non-interventionist’ approach and allocated staff to ‘zones of influence and responsibility’. This approach had a positive result, fostering ‘new definitions and developing new relationships’. This was evident in comments of one respondent:

[My] job has never been better, I love my job ... the student expectation of the new curriculum is better and the programme is more intellectual ... we have consolidated it in merger to ensure a good DIT programme ... now we have this, the best of both worlds ... the key is to do it with respect ... we have put ourselves in a happy place in spite of the lack of support (FG).

Another member of staff expressed sentiments that reinforced the positive outcomes but re-iterated the anger resulting from the perceived lack of support from management:

Staff did not deny where they came from, they acknowledged it and moved on ... no longer two different departments but one ... developed new approaches ... share experiences from TN and MLS ... both parties acknowledging that both have something to contribute ... have gained personal growth, departmental growth, but [we were] left with a lot of anger because of a lack of support from management ... there was a sense that it does not matter to anyone else (FG).

One respondent expressed concern that the recognition of good practice was not considered, while another said: ‘A frequently asked question when we arrived at [this] campus was “did management ask academic questions?”, like the issue of
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the lack of computers ... [but they] only considered physical needs. Academic considerations were not given’ (FG).

**Curriculum development**

Prior to the merger, the two departments that subsequently formed Department X took decisions on how the delivery of Programme Y would be managed post-merger. After much discussion in 2001, the two departments merged the curriculum for the first year of the programme on 1 January 2002, three months before the DIT officially came into being. While the curriculum for first-year students was common, it was delivered at two separate sites. The curriculum for second-, third- and fourth-year students, however, was not merged and was taught separately. This came about because, although the MLST staff were keen to merge all the levels of the programme, TN staff wanted to ‘phase out’ their second-, third- and fourth-year curricula. During the focus group meeting, the staff reflected on this period of split-site delivery as having resulted from ‘intransigence’.

The staff also highlighted another challenge in curriculum development. At MLST, for example, it was an ongoing activity. But after January 2002 there was an inability in Department X to work on a curriculum that was seen as jointly owned; and there were insufficient staff to integrate the two curricula. The approach that was adopted simply merged bits from each pre-existing programme. Between 2002 and 2005, the opportunity to engage in curriculum development was ‘almost a luxury’ in the new department. Thus, curriculum development can be identified as a casualty of the merger.

Within the department, this was a ‘baptism of fire’ that brought the staff together. The head of department steadfastly maintained that it was ‘the calibre of staff that pulled the department through’, because the staff were ‘united’ as they faced the new adverse environment into which they had been thrust.

**Departmental administration**

In many cases around DIT, when departments merged, both departmental heads retained their positions. This had considerable consequences. For example, in one department the two ‘sides’ were ‘literally sulking and not talking to each other’. This had a number of adverse operational consequences.6

Another perspective on the challenges and implications in merging two departments was given by an ex-MLST manager who commented that:

One can look at the physical merging, combination of departments, that’s a milestone … one can tick that off and say yes … Engineering from both sides they are together, housed in one building. [But] as far
as practices are concerned we are far from merged in terms of sharing and imbibing culture, values, common strategies of teaching. (STSM: 4 February 2004).

Students and diversity

The students of Department X faced a number of new challenges. First, the first-year students in Programme Y suffered from what members of staff described as being 'a step-child syndrome' because the students were not relating to their 'new parents'.

Second, in the case of the two departments that formed Department X, there were distinct differences in the way that interventions had been implemented to assist in managing student diversity. Prior to the merger, the department at MLST had offered an externally funded 'access' programme that had been very effective in bringing disadvantaged students into the mainstream programme, while the department at TN ran a self-funded foundation programme. On merger, the external funding ceased and Department X used the foundation programme as a substitute. However, it was not necessarily being delivered in the same way as the programme that had been offered at MLST.

The combining of the different student streams required the staff to be flexible in dealing with the resultant diverse skills and academic standards. The issue of dealing with the diversity of preparedness, knowledge and skills in the student population was inherently linked to the differences in the previous demographic profiles of the two departments that merged to form Department X.

Third, in the department at MLST, the student profile had been 60 per cent black and 35 per cent white, whereas in the department at TN it was 85 to 90 per cent white and 10 per cent black. The merger brought a dramatic change, with the third year having a majority of white students and the first year having approximately only 35 per cent black students (uncorroborated figures reported during the focus group discussion). Thus, as one respondent commented, 'in this programme, the MLS profile for student equity went out of the window'. It would be interesting to track the demographic changes in this department over time to ascertain the point at which it becomes reflective of the demographics of the region.

Fees and student access

The staff in Department X expressed their concern that, while the rationale for merger was to increase access, the fees for Programme Y increased dramatically. MLST fees had been around R4 500, but they increased to approximately
R11 000. Thus, while the overall intention may have been to improve access, the actual outcome was the reverse. In Department X, the practice was to limit the number of students according to the potential number of employment places. Prior to the merger, TN had had 60 student places as had MLST, resulting in a combined student total of 120. After the departments merged, this number was reduced to approximately 80. This reduction of 40 available places for students effectively reduced access to the programme.

Coupled with the quantitative aspect of the issue of access, the different practices for student recruitment in the pre-merger departments had resulted in two streams of students. Traditionally, TN had targeted 'privileged, ex-model-C kids' and 'ML took the rest'. The two learning programmes pre-merger were structured to be responsive to their respective students. At the time of the merger, there was a ‘bun fight’ about who would teach which group, since staff were encountering students with different skills and levels of competence.

The department was only able to consolidate the programme and focus on curriculum issues three years post-merger. The previous lack of consolidation of the programme was a consequence of the pressure to ‘get the programme on track’, notwithstanding the staffing and re-location issues.

The impact of the Voluntary Exit Package strategy

One of the factors that forced the DIT staff in general into new ways of working was the implementation of the Voluntary Exit Packages (VEP). In July 2002, all institutional staff were invited to apply for the VEP. In Department X, three academics from ex-TN applied for and were granted the package. Two administrative staff from ex-MLST were also granted VEPs. Subsequently, during September 2002, the VEP was offered again but this time applicants had only one week to make the decision to apply. At this stage, the ex-TN head of department took the opportunity to exit the institution. Thus, four academic and two administrative staff left this department via the VEP route. The strain on the staff was aggravated even further by the decision taken by two full-time contract lecturers not to renew their contracts.

Thus, the net result was a total loss of eight people. The remaining staff had to ensure that there was a minimal negative impact on the students. However, there were several repercussions. For instance, as one respondent commented, people were protective ‘about what they do’ and were therefore reticent to share practices which would ensure continuity after they had left the institution. Another impact was that those ex-TN staff who remained felt that they had to apologise for their past history. It was also revealed that the ex-TN staff in Department X felt a ‘sense of colonisation’, because a greater number of ex-MLST staff remained in the newly merged department as a result of the implementation of the VEP process.
According to the head of department, as a result of the VEP the staff complement had decreased by approximately a third, with a concomitant impact on the staff demographic profile which became predominantly white. The impact of the VEP was detrimental to students, because fewer staff were dealing with larger student group sizes. Thus, there was a negative effect on teaching and learning, and important expertise was lost, which resulted in greatly increased levels of stress on the remaining staff.

Further insights into the impact of the VEP on the staff-to-student ratio were described by a staff member, who called the resulting teaching scenario ‘death by a thousand students’:

Inevitably there will be more students and fewer staff after a merger: management cannot resist the temptation to shave costs, and the Voluntary Exit Packages were an ideal opportunity – unfortunately, because an educational institution’s most valuable resources is its experienced academics. Many staff, anxious at the prospect of materially changed working conditions, took the gap: some appear to have had advance warning of just how bad things could get!”

The departmental heads were purportedly integral to the decisions taken as to which staff should be allowed to exit the institution through the VEP route. However, according to the head of Department X, the views of departmental heads were ignored: ‘The decisions of the head of department were overridden to the detriment of the profile of the department and with a negative impact on the academic programme’ (FG).

Another impact of the lack of human resource planning with regard to the VEP was forcibly illustrated by the experiences of Department X where, prior to merger the staff complement in both departments had been developed on the basis of expertise. However, in the merger this was ‘ripped to pieces’. The head of the department explained that he had been very mindful of the need to ensure that ‘expertise was not lost’ in the process. However, it was clear that the purpose of the VEP was to reduce the number of staff, thus reducing the financial burden of the institution.

Another member of staff in Department X also took up the issue of the negative impact, particularly on the staff profile, access and equity by commenting that, ‘I believe we have lost some of our best academics, and that you can’t replace’.

These reflections of the impact of the VEP on the staff equity profile are in stark contrast to the assurances offered by management that the profile had been improved through implementation of the process. To date, it is still a generally held belief among the staff that the VEP process was not well managed, and that the implications were not been thoroughly investigated. As indicated, one
immediate result was the considerable loss of staff expertise, which played itself out in different ways.

The VEP at other levels of the institution also had an effect on Department X. For example, at the management levels what has been described as ‘the accountability vacuum’ was created. This was caused by many experienced middle and upper management personnel taking the VEP, while the remainder were ‘severely stressed by the extra workload and/or fully preoccupied with jockeying for position in the new dispensation’. The outcome of this situation was that ‘the very people who would normally be in a position to help academic staff in a period of transition were either not there or not in a position to help’. The staff in Department X also commented that, together with the loss of important expertise, the implementation of the VEP was detrimental because the staff that took the package had not prepared for merger and did not assist their colleagues with packing for re-location. This further contributed to the greater degree of stress that was placed on the staff who were left behind.

A final set of problems with the VEP arose from the lack of counselling and advice available for those staff who accepted the package. According to the staff union, ‘there were problems in so far as the people administering these packages had no idea about finances and were unable to advise people of the pros and cons’ of taking the package. For example, while the pension-benefit statements that were received earlier in the year indicated that the fund was performing well, when the packages were actually offered in October 2002 the investment returns had dropped drastically, with the result that expectations with regard to the value of the fund were not realised. Thus, many staff who accepted the packages did so on the basis that they could retire comfortably and then discovered later that this was an incorrect assumption.

From the perspective of Department X and the broader community of the DIT staff, it is apparent that the VEP ‘was a messy process’ and that the repercussions of unmanaged staff losses were wide-ranging. For example, whenever it became clear that ‘things were not as they should be’, the stock response kicked in. For example, academic staff were told at Faculty meetings that they were remiss in not providing the students with study guides ‘in spite of the fact that there was a month-and-a-half backlog in duplicating’ them, which was caused through loss of staff in the VEP process.

Conclusion: What result on academic quality?

A sense of the impact of the departmental merger on academic quality, as well as the lack of support and planning, is captured in the words of one staff member in Department X:
If you are putting two sets of people together staff need to be made aware that it will happen. It doesn’t happen in a workshop it takes years. If industry merges they employ people from outside to facilitate. There is not enough room for conversation and finding common ground. Students become primary, but staff also need TLC. There were health implications for staff, two suffered strokes and there were very high stress levels, in some cases life changing. I would put merger up there with death and divorce in terms of stress (FG).

The magnitude of the trauma of re-location and the consequences thereof, suffered by Department X, resonate with the view that ‘the biggest casualty in a merger can be academic quality’.14 The ordeal endured by Department X was by no means unique, and many of the institution’s staff would readily identify with the sentiments expressed above as being illustrative of their own experiences.

To be able to maintain academic quality (and one’s sanity) during the merger process it is essential to have some idea of the factors which could impact negatively on the effective running of academic programmes ... A number of problems which would be relatively minor if experienced individually can collectively not only compromise academic quality but bring an academic programme to a standstill: this can cause academic staff to become severely stressed ... The threat to the academic programme, as well as changes in working conditions during a merger, can inadvertently bring about labour abuses: if a staff member is prevented from carrying out his/her job, this effectively constitutes constructive dismissal. These abuses could be avoided or resisted if staff had prior knowledge of the extent to which working conditions could change during a merger, and the possible effects of these changes on everyday functioning.15

Across the DIT, specific problems emerged that would affect long-term academic quality:

- The loss of focus on, or opportunity for, curriculum development and the serious implications if the relevant support mechanisms are neither identified nor available.
- Staff becoming reticent about voicing their concerns.16
- A growing lack of faith in the ability of management either to recognise or to rectify the severity of the situation.
- The detrimental impact of the VEP on everyone: the staff who were ‘left behind’, as well as the students.

Management did not appear to have given adequate consideration to the cumulative effect of such decisions on academic departments. In Department
X, the overwhelming conclusion was that any successes arising from the merger must be attributed to 'the soldier on the ground ... I think the general person is here to try and make the place work in spite of management'.

The experiences of Department X suggest that there was a very strong link between the spirit of the merger, the issues of institutional culture, and the lack of managerial attention to the human element. As described by one senior manager:

I think we are focusing so much on what we believe has to happen in terms of measurable outcomes that we ignore that whole human side and I maintain that the one major flaw in this whole thing, that at no time has anyone actually sat down and said well how are we going to deal with the people...how they are feeling about merger ... [how can we deal with] the immense amount of pressure that is put onto individuals working in the institution' (TNSM: 16 September 2003).

Overall, the pressures of merging intermingled into a 'toxic mixture' which 'caused the staff at DIT to become exhausted and despondent'. Many staff would identify the first year of the merging departments, 2003, as the 'annus horribilis', when the core business of the institution and the interests of students suffered damage rather than progress or transformation. It seems that the fall-out from these processes may plague the institution for many years to come.
This chapter chronicles a bifurcated history of merger of three institutions: the University of South Africa (Unisa), the distance education unit of Vista University (VUDEC) and Technikon SA (TSA). In 2001, moving on a policy trajectory that could be traced directly back to the 1997 White Paper, the Minister of Education, Prof. Kader Asmal, attempted to induce these institutions – which immediately declared themselves unwilling – to merge. These were the days of the Working Group on Distance Education (WGDE). Ultimately, and in a blaze of newspaper headlines, Unisa took the Minister to court to force him to retract these efforts. In the wrangling, the original gazetting of the merger was withdrawn. But where a purely legislative framework failed, however, greater contextual political pressures and internal institutional turmoil resulted in a change of leadership at the largest institution, Unisa. I argue that this change ultimately rescued a process that was floundering, due to inadequacies of the initial merger mandate framework. Once the Minister’s pressure was removed, the parties took a deep breath and proceeded to work out a merger more on their own terms. National and institutional agendas then intersected, bringing about a merger on 1 January 2004.

This chapter provides a fascinating example of the interplay of national political priorities and institutional dynamics. It shows that, although initially thwarted, the national machinery ultimately achieved its goals, as the merger did in fact occur. Crucially, however, this achievement depended on a strategic retreat to sew up legal loopholes initially exploited by the intransigent institutions.

The chapter does not take a strictly chronological approach to the story of the development of the ‘new Unisa’. Rather, it touches first on the histories of the three institutions; reviews the failure of the WGDE process; and then examines the intricacies of the major management issues of the merger. At each of the latter points, it reports how issues were perceived by some of the major players at management level in the three institutions.

...It has been observed that changing higher education is like changing a religion in which tradition abounds, the status quo is honoured, and any innovation is met with both resistance and high emotion. Reform in higher education is further complicated by leadership turnover; a reward system focused more on priorities external to the institution than inside it, and search committees that often apply criteria that
have little to do with the institution’s needs or the position’s actual demands.

Despite the difficulties involved and the many barriers to overcome, most colleges and universities today must address the reform agenda. They have no choice. The need to serve a growing and more diverse student body combines with decreasing financial support per student and revised accreditation standards to make major academic reform a necessity. In addition, there are pressures from employers and taxpayers and increased competition from for-profit educational providers. With the advent of new technologies and the information age, we have entered a new era of continuous and ongoing institutional change.¹

The need to transform the higher education system from the configuration and design of the apartheid ideological imagination to one that served post-liberation society was palpable once it became apparent in early 1990 that political change in South Africa was imminent. While the skewed nature and fragmentation of the system presented one immediate set of challenges for change, another flowed from the general isolation of South African higher education institutions from the sea-change of reform that had swept through higher education institutions around the world, in response to a myriad influences, on which Diamond, Gardiner and Wheeler provide a window above.

That the development of a policy framework for the transformation of South African higher education took much longer than many similar policy initiatives in other governmental sectors testifies to the contested nature of the process, and the importance with which the policy development process was viewed. The publication of the White Paper on Higher Education³ provided the first detailed iteration of the principles, values and objectives that would drive the transformation of higher education in post-apartheid South Africa. The National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) elaborated upon how the policy objectives would be translated into practical outcomes.⁴

In the NPHE, amid a number of signals that the higher education system was to be restructured, the Ministry of Education also declared its objective of establishing a single dedicated distance education institution. The NPHE proposal was in consonance with the Council on Higher Education's recommendation which had been made earlier.⁵ The NPHE affirmed the rationale as follows: 'A single predominantly dedicated distance education institution that provides innovative and quality programmes, especially at the undergraduate level, is required for the country. The opportunities that the present distance education institutions have created for students in Africa and other parts of the world must be maintained and expanded.'⁶
The particular policy objective was to be realised through the merger of the University of South Africa (Unisa) and Technikon Southern Africa (TSA), and the incorporation of the distance education arm of Vista University (VUDEC).

Aside from aggregating substantial resources and capacities, and making possible some rationalisation, the main advantages of the merger were seen as follows:

- Developing a clear focus and strategy for the role of distance education in contributing to national and regional goals.
- Developing a national network of centres of innovation, which would enable the development of courses and learning materials for use nationally, thus enhancing quality within the higher education system.
- Developing a national network of learning centres, which would facilitate access and coordinate learner support systems.
- Enhancing access and contributing to human resource development within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region in particular and the African continent as a whole.
- Enabling economies of scale and scope, in particular, ensuring that advantage was taken of the rapid changes in information and communications technology, which were expensive and where the additional investment was unlikely to be within the capacity of any one institution.

In anticipating questions about the efficacy of merging a technikon and university — each with different purposes — the NPHE indicated its intention to retain the distinction between universities and technikons as ‘two types of institutions offering different kinds of higher education programmes in the short to medium term’.

It was also signalled in the NPHE that a working group would be established to facilitate the merger and develop an implementation plan. In this way, it was intended that the momentum of restructuring and change in the higher education sector precipitated by the NPHE would be maintained at a brisk pace.

This chapter traces the trajectory of the merger of Unisa and TSA, and the incorporation of VUDEC — from policy objectives, through process, to effects. The broad policy terrain is sketched out, followed by an exploration of how the merger process has unfolded since the onset of the NPHE. With an intended emphasis on the effects of the merger, I then examine critical issues, concerns and challenges that arose in the merger process, refracting these through the voices of the affected, so that a predominantly authentic rather than construed account is given of the issues that loomed largest in the minds of those affected.

On the issues that have arisen, I attempt to provide a multi-dimensional perspective, drawing upon experiences in and theorisations on mergers elsewhere.
to enhance understandings of these issues. I conclude by reflecting upon the extent to which the NPHE policy objective (of establishing a single dedicated distance education institution) was translated into outcomes at the institutional level. My intention through these analyses is manifold. I seek first to reflect upon the extent to which the policy objectives for a diverse and differentiated system of education were advanced through this particular merger. Secondly, I explore the conjuncture of conditions that are necessary for a merger to be successful. Finally, I seek to evaluate whether we can, in a project of such enormity, really declare that it has been a success.

I begin with a potted history of each of the merging institutions and then proceed to the policy objectives to provide the context.

### A brief history of the University of South Africa

University education in South Africa is closely associated with its colonial history. It was only in 1839 that a government education system for state schooling was established. University education had more tentative beginnings, with colonists rather than government leading the initiative in 1827 to found an ‘Athenaeum’ in Cape Town. This was to become The South African College in 1829 after a period of development of its programmes and facilities.4

Following the granting of responsible government to the Cape in 1872, attention was given to establishing an examining university, leading to the foundation of the University of the Cape of Good Hope in 1873. The newly established University did not do any teaching, but conducted examinations and maintained academic standards for various degrees and certificates spanning the Humanities, Arts, Law, Divinity, Engineering and Music, among other disciplines. Teaching occurred in several colleges whose teachers were not allowed to administer their own examinations.1

In 1877, the University was bestowed with a Royal Charter by Queen Victoria, thereby admitting it to an elite band of British and imperial universities. The main impact of this was that degrees of the university were recognised throughout the British Empire, enjoying a status equivalent to the British universities.11

The years following saw a growth in the number of the academic programmes of the University and considerable attention being paid to establishing the rules of the University. Expansion in the fields of study responded to the emerging needs at the time. In the late 1890s, a School of Mines was established. During this time, the University extended its activities to include examinations for the Royal schools of music in London. This was to be an enduring relationship and function.

Up to the period of Union, a degree of uniformity developed in the educational system, as the existing and newly formed Colleges emerged and
became established in their own right, mirroring developments in Britain, where University College London shed its colleges, allowing them to become fully fledged universities (e.g. Manchester and Bristol).\textsuperscript{12} Aside from Mining, which had grown considerably, a burgeoning economy demanded an even more diverse range of skills.\textsuperscript{13}

Considerable development and ongoing contestation about how the South African university system should be formed followed, to culminate in three university Acts being passed in 1916. Through these Acts, two of the existing Colleges became Universities in their own right. While the University of the Cape of Good Hope became the University of South Africa, the remaining six Colleges became its constituent parts. Within the next four decades, five of these Colleges evolved to claim independent university status.\textsuperscript{14}

The University of South Africa had to redefine its role in the changing education landscape. Following the establishment of the universities, its role as an examining authority diminished. Its niche, which became increasingly apparent, lay in the teaching of external students through correspondence methods. In 1946, a Director of External Studies was appointed.\textsuperscript{15} This was the first step in the development of a distinctive educational methodology using distance education, thereby establishing the University as the first distance education university in the world.

Unisa’s nature as an education provider changed a number of times over the century and a quarter of its existence, following its founding as an examining university with its teaching done by a number of residential colleges. Changing societal needs and new demands in a thriving economy led to the expansion of the higher education sector. This caused the University to shift its emphasis away from school-leaving students at residential colleges, to focus on working and mature students who needed tertiary education delivered at their workplaces and homes. In the post-apartheid context, it was therefore inevitable that its role in the new South Africa would once again come under review through a government policy intervention.

A brief history of Technikon SA

Technikon SA began its life as Technikon RSA on 1 April 1980 as an offshoot of Technikon Witwatersrand’s correspondence wing. Its initial purpose was to provide correspondence-type education for police learners at tertiary level in view of the dearth of learning opportunities in this field at the existing higher education institutions. Internal security and policing had self-evidently been catapulted to the top of government priorities following the student protests of 1976. It became starkly apparent at the time that an insurrectionary climate could rapidly take hold and spread throughout the country.
The Technikon was situated in Braamfontein, in central Johannesburg, at the time it was founded, consisting of 4 000 learners and 22 academic staff. By 1989, when it moved to the purpose-built Florida campus (approximately 30 kilometres away), learner enrolment exceeded 19 000. With the growth in numbers came an expansion in the range of fields in which learning programmes were offered. The range had expanded to include the fields of Management, Business and Science in addition to the spectrum of Policing-related offerings. The 1990s heralded a period of dynamic development and growth for Technikon RSA.¹⁶

It had become abundantly clear that it was no longer sustainable for any tertiary institution to operate as a traditional correspondence institution. Discourse on open and distance learning gathered momentum abroad and locally, leading to increasing pressure on the distance education institutions to rethink their educational models. The call was for far greater flexibility in entry and exit, the provision of quality courseware, and defensible levels and quality of learner support.

Traditional correspondence education had demonstrably failed to provide the kind of education required. The sustained surge in enrolments provoked challenges in other areas too, especially in view of the increasing numbers of first-time entrants straight from school, with a diverse range of class, racial, language and educational backgrounds. TSA responded by taking a strategic decision in March 1992 to be responsive to the changing market needs and diverse student body.¹⁷

A system of education that was designed for mature students capable of independent study increasingly had to cater for first-time entrants fresh out of school, and a burgeoning number for whom English or Afrikaans – the languages of instruction – was a second or third language. The position was ameliorated slightly by private-sector provision of coaching or tutoring of TSA students over and above the educational provision of the Technikon. For this, the students paid a further fee to the private provider.¹⁸

In August 1993, the Technikon re-launched its identity with a new name, Technikon SA (TSA), and marked a decisive shift from correspondence to distance learning. To provide solid conceptual foundations to the paradigm shift, the Technikon introduced its model of Integrated Learner-Centred Distance Education (ILCDE), which aimed at curriculum development aligned with leading-edge open distance learning practices, and sought to provide quality learner support. To give further impetus to the ILCDE model, a network of regional centres was set up throughout the country.

Following strong representations by the technikon principals through the Committee of Technikon Principals, the Ministry of Education accorded technikons degree-granting status, which TSA and other technikons assumed
in 1995. This meant that TSA was empowered to confer degrees up to the level of doctorates in its four divisions of Applied Natural Sciences and Engineering, Applied Community Sciences, Applied Management Sciences, and Public Safety and Criminal Justice. A number of academic institutes were also established at TSA to promote academic research.

By 2001, there were 60 000 learners registered at Technikon SA in more than 70 programmes of study. Its staff numbered 1 000. With 23 regional and branch offices spread throughout South Africa, it had a national reach, and the status of being the largest institution for career-specific distance education in southern Africa.19

While the majority of the 60 000 students were from South Africa, significant numbers were registered in Namibia, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho and elsewhere in Africa. At the time of the announcement of the merger, the institution was in the process of expanding its operations in Africa.

A brief history of VUDEC

The Vista University Distance Education Campus (VUDEC) was an integral part of Vista University. Any account of VUDEC thus must of necessity begin with the establishment of Vista University. In view of the dearth of published material on the establishment of Vista University, the account that follows is drawn from ‘The Story of Vista University, 21st Anniversary’.20

Vista University was established in 1981 in response to the burgeoning need to expand the skills base, and to provide higher educational opportunities for blacks in urban areas. The main motivation for this was that it was becoming difficult to maintain a policy of sending black students from urban townships to study at the far-flung homeland universities set up for the purpose.

The University started to function with a small cohort of 14 academics and 300 students in 1982. By 1983, five campuses were in operation and the first certificates and diplomas were awarded. In 1984, a sixth campus was added.

The Faculty of Education was one of the first faculties to be established. Typically, except for the Education Faculty that was established at the time that the university was, and the Faculty of Arts which followed in 1983, the other faculties started as a cluster of departments and evolved into faculties. The Faculties of Law and Science were established in 1991. The University was configured on a decentralised campus model with considerable authority devolved to the various campuses. By 1995 the University had 35 600 students.

Since its inception, Vista University had focused on providing pre-service, in-service and further education and training to teachers, trainers and tutors through its further training campus. In 1996, the decision was taken to re-establish this initiative as VUDEC – the distance education campus of Vista University. The main reason for the strategic shift was the declining need for
in-service training of teachers, and the increased capacity of VUDEC staff in distance education practice.

However, it was only in 1998 that the first degree courses were offered by VUDEC. The first degrees were awarded by VUDEC in 2000, when the fate of the University and of VUDEC was already being drafted by higher education policy makers.

Against the above backdrop I turn next to a focus on the trajectory followed in the merger process of Technikon SA and Unisa, and the incorporation of VUDEC.

The policy process

The literature shows that whether mergers are voluntary or involuntary, is not the important issue. The process, the inducements, the model, and internal and external support for the motives for merger, are important. Whilst there may be major objections to these government initiated merger proposals, grasping the opportunities available in such mergers, and taking ownership of the process and making institutional proposals for a model, must be the pro-active route to go.21

Being among the first of the mergers to occur, the merger of Technikon SA and Unisa and the incorporation of VUDEC began tentatively, primarily due to the scale of the challenge of planning, mobilising and organising resources and personnel to get the juggernaut rolling. There was not much to go on in terms of process or the anticipated shape, form, identity and character of the new single dedicated distance education institution (SDDEI).

The NPHE had identified the main characteristics of the SDDEI as follows:

- Focus on undergraduate studies
- Expanding distance education provisions to African and global students
- Clearly focused mission and strategy for the role of distance education in contributing to national and regional goals
- Developing a national network of learning centres, to facilitate access and coordinate learner support systems
- Enhancing access to higher education and contributing to human resource development within the SADC region in particular and the continent as a whole
- Enabling economies of scale and scope, in particular ensuring that advantage is taken of the rapid changes in information and communication technologies. It is important to note that the great expense involved was unlikely to be within the scope of a single institution.22
It was also a period during which the Ministry of Education was grappling with the challenge of ensuring that the stated intentions for the restructuring of the higher education system were translated into reality. In the case of the Unisa/TSA/VUDEC merger, its approach was assertive and interventionist. I explore in this section the key issues that arose in the realisation of the merger, as the process unfolded.

While driving the merger process at the systemic level was an onerous challenge at the institutional level, leading the process was to all intents and purposes a far more formidable challenge. It is at the institutional level that the minitiae of intricate political, organisational, individual and conceptual factors intersect. It is also the site where potent and even uncontrollable forces are unleashed – leading potentially to a climate of disequilibrium.

In worst cases, where a leadership vacuum develops in the absence of a clear leader of the process, or where there is contestation between leaders from the merging institutions, individuals with an opportunistic bent can ‘take the gap’. Together with the complex new demands, the merging institutions must maintain themselves as going concerns. Applebaum et al echo the particular threats and challenges of managing a merger while sustaining the merging entities as going concerns:

> Mergers and acquisitions require senior management to turn their attention away from the daily duties of doing business and focus on something that is probably the biggest challenge their organization faces. Yet, all too often this is not done. Whether management realises it or not, any organization involved in a merger or acquisition is at its most vulnerable state. The uncertainty that is created, if not addressed promptly and adequately, can give the competition an advantage. Whereas the merger or acquisition was originally intended to create a stronger and more competitive organization, the opposite can in fact happen, leaving the newly formed organization smaller than some of its parts. A merger or acquisition therefore brings with it the challenge of running the business while managing the merger and acquisition process at the same time.25

I shall attempt to show, in the account that follows, how the challenges of running a going concern while giving effect to the merger were addressed.
Tentative beginnings – the Working Group on Distance Education

In May 2001, it was announced by the Minister of Education that a Working Group would be established to facilitate the merger between TSA and Unisa and the incorporation of VUDEC, producing amongst other things, the following:

- A framework and implementation plan
- A mission and vision for the new institution
- An administrative, management and governance structure
- An academic structure
- A financial framework.

The Working Group on Distance Education (WGDE) was to be accountable directly to the Minister, although it was required to consult with constituencies at the merging institutions. A strongly driven merger, with the impetus coming from the Ministry, was seemingly calculated to obviate any attempts to stall or delay the merger. This did not go down well at the merging institutions, as reflected in the following view by a TSA member of management:

I don’t think that all instances of the merger were thought through before the merger was proclaimed. I don’t think that there were operational thoughts on the side of the Minister regarding implementation of the merger process, regarding people, and processes, regarding going-concern. It was on the level of strategic importance that the mergers were to take place. There was little regard for how the mergers will be operationally accepted (SMT1).

The imposed process did not go down well at Unisa either, as reflected in the following perception by a Unisa management member when asked about the conflict caused by the imposition of a merger process by the Ministry: ‘The nature of the conflict was not clear, except that the Minister did not apply his mind well. The whole thing started with the National Working Group. I don’t think it benefited (the old) Unisa – even after the conflict, the merger was (still) finalised. It (the conflict) did not benefit the old Unisa’ (SMU1).

It was also suggested that the intervention had the effect of delaying the merger:

Yes it caused lots of uncertainty among the staff members – not knowing whether we were going or coming; and the stress level was very high. It was much uncalled for and very unfortunate. There was a perception at that time that the Minister was friendlier to the former TSA than Unisa itself; he even addressed the TSA staff members at some stage. He never even came to us. So maybe that is why Unisa went to court.
The reason was not clear why Unisa went to court. It was a waste of time (SMU1).

The suggestion by the respondent was that since the merger was a fait accompli, it was of no use to provoke a conflict by the imposition of a process from outside – the cooperation of the merging institutions was vital for the success of the process.

The WGDE established a Steering Committee and nine Inter-Institutional Task Teams (IITTs) representing the key functional areas of the proposed new single dedicated distance education institution. Unisa and Technikon SA responded by establishing Institutional Working Groups (IWGs) for the functional areas. This resulted in the formation of IWGs that articulated with the nine IITTs. A Merger Office was established at each of the merging institutions to manage and co-ordinate the institutional and inter-institutional merger processes.

It was agreed that each of the three partners would present comprehensive institutional profiles including student enrolments, staff composition, academic programme offerings, research outputs, financial status and physical infrastructure reports. The Department of Education would provide a guiding template for these presentations.

In the early days of the merger, there was a pervasive sense of an intention to take over TSA, while the paradigm at TSA was one committed to establishing a new institution in the national interest.

Initially the anticipated outcome of the WGDE's work was a merger implementation plan. But due to strong representations on the part of Unisa, a review of the terms of reference of the WGDE led to a revised plan that was less dominated and driven by the WGDE Steering Committee. The Terms of Reference of the Steering Committee's work was amended to involve the development of a report to the Minister based on IITT activities. The report would advise the Minister on characteristics and a high-level planning framework of the new institution to facilitate merger implementation.

The process plan submitted to the Minister on 30 June 2002 dealt with a status report on the interrupted merger process. Progress with developing IITT plans was interrupted by decisions by the statutory structures of both Technikon SA and Unisa. In the former case, the observation was made that the perceived merger of equal partners was giving way to dictates of a self-proclaimed major partner, while in the latter, a court case was brought against the Minister.

Perceptions among staff on these developments varied. A TSA staff member was of the following view:

Through my TSA experience ... the resistance was a power play in terms of timing. I don't see that (that) had an effect in terms of the merger process, the merger still happened. It was on the side of (old)
Unisa a strategy to position itself as a stronger partner in the merger. It just postponed some of the issues to be dealt with. (SMT2)

A member of the administrative staff at TSA summed up the general feeling of uncertainty and demoralisation that the impasse had on the staff:

At the time I also thought the Minister was overactive. I thought that there is no way that you can merge the institutions. He did know what he was doing. To me it was like it will never work.

I thought at that stage Unisa was correct in taking the Minister to court. I thought Unisa will regret – they acted on the spur of the moment. The Minister set a loose structure where he abandoned the working groups. At that stage I had a very negative thought – feeling I was already saying ‘that's it; this will not work’. It was really confirming my suspicion about the failures of the merger. (AOT1)

In reflecting on the failure of the WGDE process, the TSA Merger Manager summarised the reasons for the failure as lack of agreement on a conceptual framework, and absence of a common vision for the new institution. These were exacerbated by diverse institutional cultures. Additional factors were lack of uniformity and level of institutional involvement in IITT processes. Growing perceptions that a merger was not feasible between very different partners in both a qualitative and quantitative sense also led to uneven and even reluctant participation by some merger partners.

By the time that the WGDE tabled its report with the Minister in June 2002, it had become abundantly clear that the process was in disarray. It was time to go back to the drawing board.

It is self evident that in a merger process, there must be necessary conditions for success in a merger, failing which such a merger is doomed to fail. An illuminating perspective on the necessary conditions is provided by Harman as follows:

- a strong commitment to merger by participating institutions and their staff with strong leadership from the heads of participating institutions;
- a shared view of a threat facing the current institution and/or a shared vision of the future potential benefits from the merger;
- wide consultation with staff and their involvement in the planning and integration process, and transparency in key decision-making processes;
- a guarantee given to staff as soon as possible about security of employment and to continuing students about the continuity of their courses;
- a well-thought out plan for merger negotiation and implementation of any merger agreement;
- a decision as early as possible about the name of the merged institution;
• strong efforts to build a sense of loyalty to the new institution and a common culture.\textsuperscript{24}

It was clear that none of these conditions were substantially met to establish an enabling climate for the merger to be successfully implemented. Viewed through the above prism, the WGDE process was a dismal failure. The gazetting of the merger was withdrawn, and it was only after the leadership of the merging institutions was re-engaged through a more conciliatory approach that the tide turned.

The politically driven initial short merger planning phase (October 2001–June 2002) failed to yield the desired result and did not deliver a merger implementation plan to the Minister by 30 June 2002 as anticipated. The Vice-Chancellors jointly submitted a framework for merger planning and implementation to the Minister. The Minister was requested to consider a phased merger process, defined by a more realistic timeline to ensure implementation of a well thought-out and researched merger plan.

**Merger process and planning**

In October 2002, the vice-chancellors of the merging institutions – Prof. Barney Pityana of Unisa, Prof. Neo Mathabe of TSA and Prof. Setiloane Keto of Vista University – took charge of the merger. Later, Prof. Keto was replaced by Prof. Sipho Seepe due to ill health.

The process led to the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding in 2003. The road was long and riddled with conceptual, political, legal, and other challenges, each of which had to be arduously addressed. However, once the process was begun and there was a meeting of minds on how to go forward, planning, as well as regular meetings to monitor progress and solve emerging problems, gave increasing momentum to it.

It was recognised that the merger would take place in the distance education context and it was necessary to begin with a common understanding of distance education. It was further recognised that a paradigm shift based on transformation was needed to conceptualise the new institution. Strategically the institution needed to be positioned to give adequate learner support and make extensive use of new and emerging technologies.

The biggest challenge was to give effect to the merger while maintaining the going concerns. The existing institutions were still registering students, providing tuition and engaged in the business of higher education institutions, following registration, tuition and examination cycles – all of which could be thrown into disarray by rash action. To avoid this, it was agreed that the merger process would span three phases so that it could happen in a planned and controlled manner, with a minimum of disruption:
• Pre Merger: October 2002–December 2003
• Transitional Stage: January 2004–December 2005

In mid November 2002, the merging institutions held a conference to consider the rationale for the merger. There were several presentations on the conceptual and philosophical underpinnings to be taken into account, that informed the restructuring of the higher education sector in South Africa, the regulatory framework for the restructuring of public higher education in South Africa, and the politics of policy implementation in the South African higher education system. These were followed by presentations on national and international experiences in mergers in higher education sectors, as well as some presentations on best practices in mergers internationally.

From establishing the conceptual bases and finding commonality on most issues, it was possible for the merging institutions to gravitate towards a memorandum of agreement that formalised critical agreement that had been reached on a range of issues.

While allowing the merging institutions to take primary responsibility for managing the merger, the Ministry did not abdicate control of the process. To maintain the momentum and ensure that the key milestones were met, in a letter to the Chairpersons of the Councils of TSA, Unisa and Vista the Minister requested a collective response on the following five issues:

• Date of the merger
• Preferred name of the institution
• Physical location of the new institution
• Process to be followed for compliance with Labour and Industrial Relations legislation
• Nominees for the Interim Council.

Plainly, from the range of issues identified, among the dozens that were possible, the signal was that there was no going back or stalling the process. The cooperative approach began to yield fruit, making it possible to comply with the Minister’s request, even though important considerations, such as merging of equal partners and the name of the new institution, provoked considerable contestation.

Having been benchmarked against international practices in merger processes, from a very convoluted and protracted process that at times felt like a rollercoaster ride, the following management milestones may be distilled from the TSA-Unisa-VUDEC experience that may be useful to others contemplating a similar path:

• Developing realistic merger expectations and timeframes
• Conceptualising a detailed and widely acceptable merger strategy
• Development of a viable merger implementation plan
• Strategies for the retention and effective management of talent
• Accurate costing of the transition
• Identification of areas where synergies are apparent
• Looking for convergences and divergences in institutional cultures and managing these in constructive ways
• Managing the going concerns to ensure sustainability
• Ameliorating uncertainty among the public through appropriate interventions
• Providing effective leadership during the transition
• Thorough due diligence exercises on vital issues related to the merger in order to mitigate risks
• Managing change and dealing with resistance to change
• An extensive communications strategy
• Securing buy-in to national restructuring plan.

A primary criterion for success in a merger is that of sound planning from the very beginning. The starting point in a merger process is arguably the announcement or indication of an intention by government to merge. Padayachee proposed that institutions must respond immediately to the benefits as well as to the demerits of the proposed combination, and she suggests that an institutional response should contain information that gives attention to a range of strategic, conceptual, structural and financial issues, including a structure for the new entity, objectives and ambitions of the new institution, an assessment of the financial benefits, cost estimates, timeframes, and anticipated impact.  

The absence of planning and due diligence studies to determine synergies which are normally a necessary part of the merger process presented an immediate challenge to the leadership and intensified the need for rigorously directive actions at the start of the process.

Inevitably delays in implementing the merger resulted. The failure to gazette the merger by the Minister as planned, coupled with protracted negotiations, served to increase anxiety and insecurity at the individual staff member and institutional levels. Anticipated erosion of the boundaries between university and technikon and the unknown nature of the proposed new comprehensive institution exacerbated the uncertainty.

While there were myriad issues that provoked passions, challenges and contestations throughout the merger process, an account such as the present one can pragmatically engage only a limited range. The analysis of the interview data revealed the following recurring issues: asymmetry in the merger, effects on the people, staff perceptions of the process, institutional cultures, communication,
perceptions of the benefits, and student fees. I turn now to explore this range of issues in greater depth.

**Asymmetry in merger**

The TSA–Unisa merger was not strictly speaking a vertical merger, since all the institutions produce graduates and postgraduates. Even though the programme types are different, there is no earlier and later stage of production and a technikon cannot be viewed as a sub-university. The clearly different clientele of technikons and universities means that the classification horizontal or lateral merger is not applicable, even though the core business and stages of production are the same. If the merger was to be treated as a horizontal merger, the different geographical locations of the various components may have posed major difficulties.26

Due to the unequal size of the main merging institutions, to all intents and purposes, the merger was an asymmetrical one. The Ministry was insistent throughout that the merger was one of equal partners. The leadership in the merger process de-emphasised the unequal relations between the merging institutions and focused on the tasks at hand – with equal representation in all merger committees and sub-committees.

Pritchard sums up the different configurations possible:

Mergers can be a manifestation of either competition or cooperation (sometimes both at the same time). If they are on equal terms, they are what Harman (1988) calls a ‘consolidation’. If both partners play from equal or nearly equal strength, the relationship is symmetrical and cooperation predominates, but this is rarely the reality. In practice, most mergers are on unequal terms (asymmetrical) and have a major and a minor partner – what would be termed in the language of business, an ‘acquirer’ and a ‘victim’ ... Asymmetrical mergers can be viewed as a form of competition in which the ‘acquirer’ wins out.27

While at the leadership level a spirit of cooperation and equitableness was fostered, perceptions on the ground were quite different.

A member of the management of the incorporated partner in the merger was forthright in his view: ‘Let me start in the non-academic areas. I think that here we have been given a raw deal with the students. The SRC of VUDEC had been totally disregarded and sidelined and I don’t know how. On the academic side, I think the problem was that students were forced to register on Unisa (old) programmes’ (SMV1).

A member of the Unisa management had the following to say on the subject of asymmetry in the merger:
I've never seen the merger (as one) of equals. You can simply go into a merger on equal footing but in reality you can’t be equal. On the other hand there are decisions that need to be made; it is unfortunate that these decisions may not be palatable to everyone. You cannot suddenly write off a R3 billion structure that is visible on the mountain for some other structure elsewhere. The decision was made (Interim Council) that the Pretoria campus should be headquarters of the new institution, therefore it is equally acceptable for most things to happen at the Pretoria Campus, there is nothing wrong in that (SMU1).

An academic from Technikon SA expressed the following view:

Everybody in the old TSA Campus who is moving that side – you sense that they (Unisa) do not accommodate our new management structure. Obviously in the merged institution you are looking at revamping of structures, which is fine. But sometimes, in various areas there are crucial positions due to our history and now they don’t take that into consideration.

So a lot of old TSA people moving that way are not as happy as can be. That plays the vital role on the productivity and the morale of the staff because once again it does not emphasise its merger, it boils down to a take over; due to the giant swallowing the little fish (AST1).

Yet another TSA academic manager expresses similar reservations and perceptions of a takeover with the aggravating factor of a work ethos that was expected to overwhelm the smaller partner as well:

It is unfortunate that the former/merging partners are bigger than us, now their value system influences us. I think the massive gains that TSA has had over the years have just been lost. TSA had made inroads, great strides in addressing employment equity in the programme group for instance where blacks were well represented. It cannot be said of the old Unisa staff profile, it is skewed...

There at Unisa it is a very materialistic climate there as well, the academic staff will not do a single thing unless you tell them how much you will pay them (AMT1).

**Mergers’ effects on the people involved**

A pervasive sense of upheaval, insecurity, and uncertainty characterises the way in which mergers affect staff at a personal level. The effects are diverse and vary in degrees of debilitation.
An early effect is a loss of power and control over one’s own destiny. However this can be aggravated in an asymmetrical merger where someone enjoyed a senior position in one of the merging institutions but is relegated to a lower one in the post-merger institution, as the following account from the incorporated institution reveals:

There is a change in terms of the weight of position which is now quite different. As a Campus Principal, I was involved in all the structures of the University, which are Council, Executive Management and Senate. I was participating fully in such structures and here I am just confined to my portfolio.

To be honest with you this happens to be a negative experience if you take into account the position I occupy. I was a senior person and ... I was accommodated (only) as late as June/July ... (so) that was unfairness... (SMV1).

A TSA management member also expressed a sense of loss of power and control over her life:

I am coping. What I am not sure of is for how long would I be influential and be able to change things. The only thing that is of concern to me is that we are travelling a lot to Pretoria – most meetings are held in Pretoria. Don’t think that there is fair work distribution. UNISA (old) has more staff than the old TSA. When I was an ED I used to have subjects that I taught, but I can’t carry those subjects over to the new UNISA, however, I still have to prepare tutorial letters (MT1).

For other staff members from the TSA it was a positive experience, especially where the relocation meant that they would be closer to home, as for this TSA manager:

I was lucky the merger has not touched my personal life per se in terms of relocation to Pretoria; I was in any way shuttling from Pretoria to the TSA Florida Campus everyday. Professionally, there have been drastic changes in terms of my employment contract. Previously, I had two-thirds more in terms of management of people, budget, scope, etc. (SMT1).

However, while it was not without negative effects, the general experience was positive as he went on to state:

At the personal level I am stressed, I think I am very concerned about the final product (in the merger). At the professional level I have grown. I must say the merger had positive spin-offs – everything I knew about IT I learned in my previous lives. The merger process has
taught me how to manage conflict in the work situation. I’ve learned a lot (SMT1).

The effect on staff travelling came up repeatedly as a top-of-the-mind issue in view of the need for several staff members to travel between two geographically dispersed campuses 75 kilometres apart. A TSA admin officer expressed the following sentiments: ‘At the personal level I am stressed, I think I am very concerned about the travelling. The big change to me is the travelling; not the work itself’ (AOT1).

Increased stress was also frequently indicated, as with the following by a professional staff member, albeit self-induced: ‘Everyone is becoming more defensive. It is affecting my work a lot. At times I get angry with myself, because in trying to prove myself I put a lot of pressure on myself. And that causes lot of stress’ (PST1). The same staff member went on to add: ‘The new institution has brought greater anxiety among staff and students. There are more uncertainties than before. There is no improvement whatsoever. The staff morale is low’ (PST1).

Another TSA academic staff member echoed these sentiments and assigned blame to the leadership:

Let’s start with staff morale – you walk in the corridor – you could see there is negativism and … there is lack of leadership at this point in time. Normally we should have had a very strong interim merging leadership that is supposed to take the whole institution forward. We sense that the leadership (TSA) jumped the ship, they settle themselves into nice positions … [they say] ‘everything is hunky-dory’ (AST1).

In spite of the asymmetrical character of the merger, even at the largest of the merging institutions, staff were affected by the uncertainties and potential relocations, as a member of the management indicated:

It has brought lot of uncertainties – the employees are very demoralised. Even though one tries to reassure them they feel insecure. As to the way forward, people accepted that there were going to be changes but they do not find it easy to change, especially if the conflict or the principle of the merger and what it means are taken into consideration. They are aware about the implication of the merger, but as soon as it comes down to a personal level, you get a lot of resistance. People find it difficult to adapt to change as they do not want to move from their comfort zones. With regards to relocation, people are reluctant to move (MU1).

Aside from the effects of the merger on individuals within the organisations, Applebaum and Gandell warn us of other more complex dynamics affecting individual staff members in a climate of vulnerability:
However, it is not just a merger that makes employees anxious, it is the perceived decline in the organization before the merger takes place, the lack of other jobs elsewhere, or other constraints that do not allow the employee to leave that create excessive stress … When an organization merges with another, employees feel as though they have lost control over important aspects of their lives. In an attempt to regain control they often withdraw. This withdrawal creates heightened stress within the individual, which usually leads to lower productivity and reduced job satisfaction.28

**Staff perceptions of process**

Outside perceptions of the merger process can be radically different from how it is encountered and represented by those plugged into the daily warp and weft of the merger process. It is illuminating to establish the views of a range of staff on the process.

Many of the views expressed were very positive, as expressed by a TSA member of management: ‘I think that the merger process is visible and undoubted. The top management strategy is in place and I think the Council if we must look at what they have done, none of the senior personnel (executive management from old, pre-merged institutions) have been sacrificed, and everybody has been (appropriately rewarded and) placed’ (SMU1).

Perceptions about the minutiae of integration, alignment and consolidation also received a positive response by the same TSA management member:

Our College has developed an interest in the integration process. We are the only College which is new in the sense that our College was not formed from one whole Faculty. We have the Faculty from the old TSA, a few departments from VUDEC and one department from old Unisa, that give us what could be described as a ‘comprehensive nature’. I think merely because we are small in size and merely because we are so heterogeneous, these reasons make us quite unique …

In terms of the curriculum we have different programmes, I think it would take a long time to fully integrate/merge them, but at the same time it gives us a good opportunity for developing a comprehensive PQM (Programme Qualification Mix). I think most of the integration issues are cultural issues. Also we have serious problems in terms of differences in cultures, to us, grappling with diverse institutional cultures poses an interesting challenge (SMT3).
Equally positive perceptions of the process were expressed by a member of the Unisa management, with a few brickbats thrown at the systemic arrangements for driving the merger process:

It was a good merger. I think we reinforced our human resources; we reinforced our academic strength, our research capacity and reinforced all aspects that you can look for in the institution. All of us emerged out of the uncertainty victoriously. The management of the merger itself is worth rewarding. We never experienced problems with the management, with the MIC (merger integration committee) and portfolio managers. The only obstacle in my view was that I fail to understand until now why the DoE Merger Office still exists … Our merger integration team, which had firsthand merger experience can do a better job than the DoE Merger Unit. How do you get the DoE Merger Office led by people who do not have experience in mergers and acquisitions telling us what to do? The merger guidelines were not helpful I must say, they came late when all of us had our own merger plan (SMU1).

Perceptions were that the pace was not fast enough with negative effects, as a TSA manager commented:

I think the process is too slow because it leads to a lot of uncertainties. I understand it is a huge undertaking that needs planning. A lot of planning was done in my portfolio. The longer the merger process takes place the more it will take to get rid of the ‘us and them’ feelings. And this will impact negatively on service delivery to our students. I think both sides are ready to integrate but it is taking too long (SMT2).

Lack of resolution of staffing structures and appointments were indicated by a TSA manager as a central factor in a speedy process:

The appointment of the managers and directors. Even though I am dissatisfied at the manner in which these managers were appointed/placed. I was happy that the process had started. The low point was the resignation of people in the department, I guess, because of staff morale. Some people will relocate to departments that offer stability, e.g. the University Press. The low point again is the appointment process (PST1).

On the other end of the spectrum, a TSA academic manager was quite scathing about the process and considered it quite chaotic:

People are confused – they do not know what is going on. Haphazard and very disorganised people. Placement had been made within
the new structure. People are feeling leaderless. There is certainly no leadership. Everything is interim. We are over six months in the merger but there are no placements lower down the rank. And then they will say there is placement for three months. After that they would call for CV's (because people) are complaining that there is not fair representation between the two campuses. I don’t know the manager of the School were I am – how long the planning must be. Very difficult to do planning if staff are not placed with interim appointments because of uncertainty surrounding the placement and the duration of the interim period. It is difficult to put much effort in planning for something that might change within three months. Why bother? (MT2).

It was not all chaos, however. Immediate positive spin-offs from the process were also indicated, even though there was a qualification on the human resources dimension, as in the following instance by a Unisa manager:

I’ve managed to introduce a completely new system for the provision of information to our students. Because the new system is far better than previously, I managed to get the input and the collaboration from a number of departments from both campuses. We also managed to finalise the system according to the schedule. It is a vast improvement for both campuses (merging institutions) than what was available previously. In the end it was new, not one particular section had ownership of it. All people in the combined institution worked towards achieving the new objectives.

We are struggling with HR related issues. If we could have moved faster on the HR issues, it could have accelerated the entire process. All aspects of the HR issues are lagging behind. We are still working under two different sets of working/service conditions. The conditions of service are not harmonised (MU1).

**Institutional culture**

According to Padayachee, 'corporate culture is a peculiar blend of an institution’s values, traditions, beliefs and priorities. It is a sociological dimension that shapes managements’ styles as well as operational philosophies and practices.' She goes on to argue that in a merger situation, where a clash of cultures occurs, behaviours and practices that were once approved of and rewarded may now suddenly be disapproved of and even sanctioned.

Institutional culture plainly is more than mere individual behaviours and practices. It can be a complex of beliefs, ways of doing things, operational management and planning behaviours which are peculiar to one institution.
It consists of styles of leadership and management, corporate governance rigours (or lack thereof), as well as an institutional ethos that favours technicist, managerialist, or bureaucratic approaches to management. It may also reflect an ethos that employs a soft-touch to leadership and management on one end of the spectrum, to command and control types of leadership on the other, ranging also in degrees of transparency. Many configurations are possible. What is significant though is that it allows people to feel comfortable in the work environment and have a sense of belonging – a place they can connect to at various levels.

In an asymmetrical merger situation, it is not unusual for the smaller partner in the merger process to feel subsumed by the larger one's culture, as the following comment by a TSA academic indicated:

They — Unisa — focus on the task team approach; we had a management approach, we had a business mindset – that's totally the opposite with the Unisa Campus. Very conservative, very narrow minded, very autocratic driven style when moved. We moved away from the fact that structure is so bureaucratic – it is sometimes difficult to take prompt decisions between the ED and myself on certain things; then we have to inform the Dean and now the various task teams – and you get the final approval by the Director, then the Director (School) must take it to the Dean. Then the decision-making level is now becoming red taped. In TSA, I can remember in 1993, we had a flat structure to make quick and informed decisions. That is why business was booming in 1993 up until 1999 but now you get the sense that everything has been turned back in history on the management level (AST2).

A TSA academic echoed this view: 'Another shift from our focus to their focus: we had our paradigm they had their paradigm. We get the sense that they are forcing their paradigm on us and that is affecting various industries. It could be that they have been around for more than 130 years and now think that they don't need industry for survival but we see it totally different' (AST1).

The primary difference in culture was viewed by a Unisa manager as emanating from the different institutional types – one a technikon and the other a university – each with its own way of doing things.

Obviously there are differences because the Unisa focus and the TSA focus are different in terms of the academic offerings. TSA dealt with industry. The employment practices were different. They cater for different students than the old Unisa. The entry requirements were different. I do not see any difference with VUDEC as a former university and Unisa. There are minor administrative differences. The difference in culture is merely influenced or informed by the nature
of academic offerings the two distinct pre-merger institutions were offering (SMU1).

Management styles, methods and approach to technologies were also seen as provoking divergences in institutional cultures:

There are huge cultural differences. I might be biased towards the old TSA. I think we have moved three years back in terms of what we had in the IT shop of the former TSA as compared to the combined IT shop of the new institution. Technologies that we employed and methodologies that we deployed are totally not aligned toward the old Unisa IT shop. There are totally different management styles than what we had in the former TSA (SMT1).

Institutional culture is also perceived to be prevalent in how work is allocated and capacities developed, as commented by another TSA manager:

In terms of conducting of business, there are differences. This is related to the fact that the one institution (old Unisa) is a bigger institution than the other (TSA) and that the bigger institution cannot conduct business in the same way as the smaller institution. In the smaller institution you create more opportunities for staff to be multi-skilled and there is a huge support culture in the smaller institution because people are used supporting one another in the area where there are backlogs and peak times. In the bigger institution there is not a lot of multi-skilling. The challenge is how to bring these two diverse cultures together. I should think there is more of an Afrikaans culture in Pretoria (Unisa) than what we are used to. I was surprised to see that some business is still conducted in Afrikaans at the old Unisa.

Now we see that people at old TSA are losing faith in the whole system (merger process) because what we had is gone and it wasn’t replaced with the so-called comprehensiveness that they always talk about and the lot of the task teams you sense that the comprehensiveness does not feature unless you enforce and talk to the student involved, to the people to include it in the minutes (Agenda) and some of the people from the Pretoria side do not understand the comprehensive and what we had and they don’t ask, please explain the comprehensiveness or your service that you render; apparently they don’t care (to understand the services and the programmes that the old TSA used to render to clients). To them as long as we fit into their mindset, that’s the end of the story (SMT2).

The institutional culture was even seen in the way in which staff engages with students:
I think we took better care of our students in the past than Unisa. I still recall that lecturers and admin people were always on hand to assist our students. Their academic staff do not take calls on certain matters (administrative queries). They are very distant from their students and we are not (we are used to helping students at any given time). Sometimes they (students) will walk into our office and ask to be facilitated – then we just do it. That side, they won’t do it. They talk about tuition. We talk about facilitation of learning. They change the term also and looks like they don’t understand the terminology – the facilitation of learning. They are still rendering the learning services and the students are on the receiving end when we actually negotiate and talk to the student, include the industry, and really render the facilitation of learning within a cooperative education approach and they don’t have that (AST1).

Merger communications

Applebaum and Gandell emphasise the primacy of sound and regular communication throughout a merger process, arguing that its ‘effect on employees through this trying time is pervasive and significantly influences the adoption of a new culture, the change process itself, and the level of stress employees can experience’.

They also point to numerous obstacles to good communication, citing ‘merger syndrome’ as a key obstacle to good communication. The phenomenon is characterised by centralisation of management control and a concomitant decrease in communication. The effect of this, they argue, is that informal channels of communication take the gap. They elaborate on why top-down communication is vital:

This lack of top-down communication starts the rumour mill churning as employees become preoccupied with themselves, their incomes and their careers. Distrust is inevitable and becomes widespread unless the communication element is handled properly. The key challenge for communication is addressing the uncertainty and resolving as much uncertainty as quickly as possible. Being truthful, open and forthright in this communication process is particularly important.

There were diverse experiences of the degree and frequency of communication at the merging institutions. A manager at VUDEC had the following to say:

At VUDEC I don’t think there is anybody to beat us at that. Communication on merger related issues was not only adequate but effective. All of us were under one room. We had merger related
information sessions regularly. We also had used the bulletin board. On a weekly basis the merger manager of VUDEC convened progress report meetings to share current merger developments. The communication was flowing very healthily (SMV1).

A Unisa manager had a generally positive sense of the degree of communication as well, and clearly assigned the responsibility for communication to the management cohort:

If you envisage retrenchments don’t make promises. I believe if it does happen that we get there, we won’t make promises – we will indicate as management what, and how, the retrenchments are to unfold. Generally the communication between the portfolio managers and their departments were very good, this entire portfolio went for a strategic session, and they were involved in all sorts of debate on operational matters and merger issues. It is for each and every portfolio manager, including those who report to him, middle management and so forth to cascade everything to shop-floor level. I believe there was enough communication. The merger is the responsibility of portfolio managers. So technically the communication part of it will also become the responsibility of the portfolio managers. As far as I know, all portfolio managers had meetings and strategic planning sessions with their respective managers and that I believe is the time when portfolio managers had an opportunity to communicate merger-related issues with their staff. In addition to that the merger offices also cooperate and send communications to the various communities on merger related issues (SMU1).

Not all were agreed, however. A manager at TSA felt that communication could have been better, and drew attention to the website as an important avenue for communication and dissemination of information:

I think everybody would say that it could have been better. What we did in the Library – we created a ‘question box’ for Frequently Asked Questions. We also had a merger feedback meeting. We also created an opportunity where people could share their concerns and rumours. At this point in time the merger website is very informative (what’s new, what is happening). It has an archive of the news releases, it gives one a picture of how the integration process is unfolding. I also find the use of the e-mail system and newsletters useful (SMT2).

A TSA professional staff member was also not entirely enamoured of the quality of communication and suggested that much more could be done:
I don’t think we got much communication from the top management and even from the DoE. In the post-merger integration, I also feel that the communication is not enough. There is one assembly that we had with the Principal, I think it cleared up many issues. We should have more of those imbizos. We also need special merger-related newsletters. We need to be informed of what exactly the management is planning. There must be transparency with regard to how the Management plans to integrate the systems and processes, as well as the staff members (PST1).

**Perceptions of benefits of the merger**

Were there perceived benefits from the merger among staff? It is instructive to consider staff views about the benefits of the merger and refract these through the case made in the higher education policy development process above. Views ranged from the sceptical …

I don’t know what the argument was and how Unisa presented this case but I think it is crucial that there should be an institution, well … economically and financially established. But what worries me is that we won’t be able to impact on students (to offer quality learning experience/support) as we would like to. We won’t be able to reach out and really make the students feel special. I think the huge number of students expected to enrol with us will make it difficult for us to achieve this objective (SMV1).

… to the more optimistic, from the same manager:

I think the aim of merger is to transform, to change, to reflect, and that was the spirit of the new constitution. Other things are equity in terms of employment, access in terms of the advantaged and disadvantaged groups, access in terms of bringing services near to where students are, access in terms of affordability because you can be available but if people cannot afford your courses then you are not available. I think the new institution is in a better position to do that and on a bigger scale because of its size. But then it is a serious challenge to Management. I think each of the three institutions is bringing the positive and the bad experiences that would make the new institution to grow (SMV1).

The benefit of aggregation of resources, making possible the expansion of facilities and services were also seen:

Definitely it will. It will in terms of its learner support structures or its learner support systems. By that we are saying that we are taking
the services from the centre to where students are. It might be in rural areas, peri-urban areas or urban areas wherever students are, even beyond the borders. Wherever students are, the new institution is there in terms of services so its tentacles will enable it to bring about positive change (SMV1).

The benefits of complementary capacities and resources brought together to create critical mass was acknowledged:

Even in terms of expertise, TSA's expertise in terms of experienced staff bringing along practical and technical experience and Unisa brings along its huge research background. That on its own is a major benefit to our students, but not only that. If you also look at the experiences of staff, Unisa have been in distance education for over 100 years and TSA had a well-functioning administrative machinery. Even the new menu of courses – at VUDEC we had fewer courses and now we have got a major advantage with Technikon programmes and we never have had that privilege before. Apart from that, Unisa is also bringing its menu of courses and students now have wider choices in terms of programmes to study. So that to me is a major advantage (SMV1).

Even though there was a widespread perception at Unisa that the merger was a forced fit, the benefits in transforming the higher education sector through mergers were still acknowledged:

I find it difficult to single out Unisa in the entire transformation (process). What I'll rather say is look at transformation itself from a national perspective, because Unisa did not choose to transform. We were made to transform because we were seen not to be transforming. Generally, it is not like the whole merger between the two institutions originated from these institutions. This merger was not a voluntary merger with clear objectives. It was a forced marriage with the hope that the forced marriage will eventually transform education, which I believe it did. If we're to take the combination of RAU [Rand Afrikaans University] and Wits Tech [Witwatersrand Technikon], in itself is a very good thing when looking at the two diverse cultures they bring to the fore (SMU1).

But not without a few questions and some lukewarm feelings:

If you look at the number of students TSA and Unisa had, and the finances of both institutions, these institutions did not experience financial problems. Both had impressive student enrolment. I still fail to understand why Unisa and TSA (had to merge). One understands the reason for forming a dedicated distance comprehensive university.
But I fail to understand the (reasoning) of DoE to give other institutions a leeway to offer a number of distance education programmes and to prescribe the number of students that these institutions should enrol (SMU1).

The strategic benefits of pooled resources and the obvious strengths of Unisa were acknowledged by the merging partners:

For transformation of society you need a solid base to work from. I think Unisa is a solid base because of its nature as a mega-institution. It is recognised as the mega-university in Africa. The comprehensiveness of the (merged) university will have an added value to the transformation agenda. People want Unisa to be there (as a catalyst for transformation). The governments in Africa want Unisa to be there ... The name and the brand that we have in Africa indicate the role that Unisa plays in the transformation of Africa. Our legacy and ability to deliver distance and quality educational programmes puts us in a better position to transform society. In Africa (the rest of Africa) little infrastructure exists due to residential conflicts. Therefore, our technologies and the network systems would help us in making a positive contribution to the development of Africa (SMT1).

The benefits for students were also indicated as a desirable outcome of the merger:

There are more opportunities available for both staff and students than before. More courses to choose. Yes, it would also widen access and help in fulfilling the goals of NPHE. With so many academic programmes we reach many people on the entire Continent. Greater access is now possible. It will boost students' morale. Students will feel that they are now part and parcel of the new mega-university (PST1).

**Student fees**

A critical concern in the post-merger environment is whether fees would remain affordable for students. This issue, perhaps more than any other, directly affects possibilities of access for low-income students – because the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, though growing, is not offered to all needy students. In South African mergers, the trend has generally been for an upward push – for fee increases to match those of the higher-cost institution. This is therefore an issue worth bringing under scrutiny.

In the TSA-Unisa-VUDEC merger, the issue of student fees did not reach the same level of controversy it did at other merging institutions. Perceptions of
the issue and its influence in the merger were varied. The VUDEC manager was unperturbed: ‘Well, I’ve been communicating with the SRC and the Registrar and the impression was that the fee differential is very minimal. However, we insisted and communicated this to our Merger Integration Committee’ (SMV1).

A Unisa manager indicated that there were different approaches to fee determination that were symptomatic of a more deep-seated problem:

Look, one is about culture and secondly, there is this perception about them and us. ‘Them’ being the former HDU, the management of which will consult with student leadership in determining the student fees. The ‘us’ who think that they do not want a ‘disadvantage’ culture (culture of non-payment) to be inculcated in them. The other issue in keeping them there in the Mamelodi campus of the former Vista, and we are here (former HWIs), we can send all material over there as long as they don’t come over here. We can send our lecturers over there, even if they present lectures in Afrikaans. If you look at Wits Tech and RAU, former Technikon Pretoria these institutions are still predominately Afrikaans. I do not think that some of the management people have ever been in these disadvantaged areas where their new campuses are situated. I do not think they see things from the disadvantaged perspectives. These leaders need to change their mindsets; it’s no longer a question of sitting in offices and deciding on the student fees. Look at [the University of Pretoria] — they are not even unionised. I am sure that applies to the former RAU. These institutions must wake up to reality that we have moved to new ways of doing things. It is not necessarily about fees, it is about culture, and it is about the language policy. The language policy of these institutions needs to be revised and harmonised (SMU1).

One view was for a differentiated fee structure, as reflected by an administrative staff member from TSA: ‘I think the difference in student fees should be kept as it is. Students who are studying university programmes should pay different fees from those who are doing technikon programmes. It is going to be difficult to resolve the different student fees. I foresee problems in the student fees for the new University’ (AOT1).

In the end, however, the new Unisa developed a ‘one-fee-per-course’ policy which was based on comparative and market research rather than on political wrangling between representatives of the three former institutions.
Factors in merger success

Ncayiyana has argued that there were several structural prerequisites for a successful merger – including strategic leadership, staff participation, clarity of objectives, a due diligence exercise, interim governance and post-merger management strategy.32

Wyatt emphasised teamwork, arguing that 'teams work well when they assemble those who ought to be there, when the agenda is about things to be done, when the members know they are getting answers to the problems and can go away and act, and where the team can be reassembled or disbanded when appropriate'.33

It is illuminating to examine what staff members of the merging institutions considered to be success indicators for the Unisa/TSA/VUDEC merger.

An important consideration is that the pay system must work and that there must be effective planning, as suggested by a TSA administrative staff member:

I am concerned about the turn-about of systems. We were getting used to the salary pay system, now we have to change again to the new system. I don’t think that everyone likes change. Change is good sometimes. Whoever thought that the old TSA will cease to exist…? Planning the merger and the post-integration process is a key to merger success. It is a good thing to go for change (AOT1).

A professional staff member from the same institution expressed that view that policies, strategies and structures must be given attention, as well as the people issues:

Work out policies and merger strategies, missions and values and, very important, think about people. Develop a structure. Look at people, whether there are going to be job losses. Don’t see your counterpart as a threat. Acknowledge your partner’s weaknesses. Also admit and acknowledge good practices that are brought on board by your merger partner (PST1).

A Unisa staff member also emphasised planning, and added consultation and communication:

Be very clear where to start, and about the objectives you want to reach, get enough information on the merger and keep on communicating at all times what the issues are, and how it is going to affect each and everyone. Involve people on the merger process, it is impossible to involve everyone. If there are major decisions to be taken, communicate them as accurately as possible to discuss everything with everybody, because there are a lot of people involved (MU1).
Higher education mergers can happen in a context where institutions are beleaguered due to a flight of intellectual capital, or face difficulties in building and maintaining capacity due to a variety of reasons. Imposition of a merger can test already meagre capacities, provoke a state of protracted disequilibrium, and initiate gradual atrophy in the merging institution. In a climate of uncertainty, there is generally an exodus of the most talented staff who go to greener pastures. This can have a debilitating effect on the merged institution. Merging institutions also demand high-level capacities and skills that are not readily available within higher education institutions. Even then they must have particular qualities. These include conviction in the process and outcomes, complex technical and analytical skills, sound leadership abilities, and influence. They must have the resolve to drive a difficult agenda in the context of apathy and demoralisation at best, and hostility, resistance and open rebellion at worst.

**Conclusion**

The establishment of the SDDEI was nothing less than a three-year roller-coaster ride. The old Unisa, South Africa’s oldest institution, was able to call on its considerable financial, legal and administrative reserves to force the national ministry to back away from the top-down approach of the WGDE. Yet new leadership took national priorities to heart and proceeded to make a merger happen, but much more on its own terms. In the meantime, the Ministry learned from its mistakes and got its legal house in order in time to see off other challenges from the next set of institutions affected by the restructuring proposals. The Unisa/TSA/VUDEC merger was thus a crucial piece of the national restructuring puzzle.

Internally, once the new approach was underway, the merger found itself in the common position of having a great deal to accomplish with few specific guidelines. The management issues reviewed in this chapter reveal that there were deep differences between people in the three institutions; that they carried on with work for a new institution in the absence of any alternative; and that many of the processes were developed under immense time pressure.

The SDDEI is up and running. For now, its stability is testimony to the way that the essentially asymmetrical nature of the merging partners and the ambiguities of the national policy environment were strategically employed by institutional leadership.