

**SOCIAL INTERACTIONS SHAPING STRATEGY – A CASE STUDY AT TWO
SMALL SOUTH AFRICAN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

by

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ABSTRACT

SOCIAL INTERACTIONS SHAPING STRATEGY – A CASE STUDY AT TWO SMALL SOUTH AFRICAN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

This study was conducted to address a distinct lack of knowledge regarding strategizing as a function of social interaction. Social researchers like Critchley contend that an organisation should essentially be regarded as an evolving product of people's continuous interaction resulting in shared meaning. In subscribing to Critchley's premise, and assuming that strategy inquiry is an empirically informed social science, the current study consequently set out to gain an understanding of how social interaction between practitioners shapes organisational strategizing and subsequent strategic outcomes. The strategy-as-practice perspective served as an integrative lens for the current research. This perspective that subscribes to the practice turn in social research, focuses on the actual practices (praxis) of strategy actors (practitioners) within unique organisational settings with unique strategizing tools, techniques and artefacts (practices).

Informed by the philosophical underpinnings of a pragmatic worldview and a qualitatively driven mixed methods approach, a case study design allowed for in-depth analyses of multiple sources of empirical data to facilitate an understanding of the research phenomena. In addition to exploring social interaction during episodes of strategy practice, the current research investigated how practitioners' motivations to interact shape and are shaped by ongoing interactions and meaning making. The current study also examined how external and internal organisational contexts, including organisational practices, influence and are influenced by ongoing social interactions. Two small private higher education institutions that reflect the typology of most private providers in the South African higher education landscape were selected for the case study. These private providers face numerous challenges in a tough current economic climate. Private providers further fulfil a pivotal role in the demand absorption of a growing need for higher education in South Africa.

The main findings of the current research confirmed that strategizing at the two case study organisations is indeed mainly a function of social interaction. Strategizing is mostly shaped by people as emotional beings. Strategizing is the product of sometimes-irrational interactions and subsequent constantly evolving shared meanings and relationships between people. It is the social interaction between strategy actors during episodes of strategy praxis that serves as a social mechanism in transforming strategizing intent into strategy outcomes. Different strategy actors employ a wide array of techniques to get their ideas or views accepted during strategy-related interactions. Findings indicated that the selected strategies at the two case study organisations are mostly not based on objective reasoning linked to a clear plan or vision, but rather on strategy actors' abilities in getting their ideas to be accepted by the group. Findings further suggested that the owners of the respective case study organisations strongly influence how things are done during episodes of strategy praxis.

Strategizing at both companies is informal and comprises mostly of reacting to challenges and dealing with crises. Both organisations follow a differentiation strategy. Safety and security; employment prospects, as well as certain academic issues like small classes for better learning can be regarded as areas of competitive advantage for both. The proliferation of private providers, significant investment in private higher education, as well as private provision's important demand absorption role suggest that there is a definite future for private higher education in South Africa.

The intended main contribution of the current research is to facilitate an understanding of how social interaction as social mechanism shapes strategizing and resultant strategic outcomes. The understanding of the social world supposedly increases as the collection of the compatible causal mechanisms grows – where mechanisms reveal how the observed relationships between phenomena are created and are explained. The findings of the current research could thus serve as a building block in accumulating social science theory regarding this unexplored avenue of interaction-driven strategy research. To this end, a conceptual framework is proffered to guide similar future studies. The current study provided a glimpse into the strategy-workings of two small private higher education providers and ultimately contributes towards the

growing body of knowledge regarding private provision within the South African higher education landscape.

ABSTRAK

SOSIALE INTERAKSIE WAT STRATEGIE VORM – 'N GEVALLESTUDIE BY TWEE KLEIN SUID-AFRIKAANSE PRIVAATHOËRONDERWYSINSTANSIES

Hierdie studie is uitgevoer om die kennelike gebrek aan kennis oor strategie as 'n funksie van sosiale interaksie aan te spreek. Sosiale navorsers soos Critchley beweer dat 'n organisasie in wese beskou moet word as 'n ontwikkelende produk van mense se deurlopende interaksie wat aanleiding gee tot gedeelde betekenis. In ooreenstemming met Critchley se veronderstelling dat strategiese ondersoek 'n sosiale wetenskap is wat empiries ingelig is, was die uitgangspunt van die bepaalde studie gevolglik om te begryp hoe sosiale interaksie tussen praktisyns organisasie-strategie en gevolglike strategiese uitkomst bepaal. Die strategie-as-praktyk-perspektief het as 'n integrerende lens vir die bepaalde navorsing gedien. Hierdie perspektief wat ooreenstem met die praktyk-omwenteling in sosiale navorsing, fokus op die werklike praktyke van strategierolspelers (-praktisyns) in unieke organisasie-omgewings met unieke strategie-instrumente, -tegnieke en -artefakte (praktyke).

Ingelig deur die filosofiese ondersteuning van 'n pragmatiese wêreldbeskouing en 'n gemengde metodiek van kwalitatiewe benadering, het 'n gevallestudieontwerp voorsiening gemaak vir indringende ontleding van verskeie bronne empiriese data om 'n begrip van die navorsingsfenomene te fasiliteer. Bykomend tot die ondersoek van sosiale interaksie tydens episodes van strategiepraktyk, het die bepaalde navorsing ondersoek hoe praktisyns se motivering om in interaksie te wees deurlopende interaksie en betekenisgewing vorm en daardeur gevorm word. Die bepaalde studie het ook ondersoek hoe eksterne en interne organisasiekontekste, insluitend organisasiepraktyke, deurlopende sosiale interaksie beïnvloed en daardeur beïnvloed word. Twee klein privaathoëronderwysinstansies wat die tipologie van die meeste privaatverskaffers in die Suid-Afrikaanse hoëronderwysomgewing weerspieël, is vir die gevallestudie geselekteer. Hierdie privaatverskaffers het te make met verskeie uitdagings in die bepaalde moeilike ekonomiese klimaat. Privaatverskaffers vervul 'n

kernrol in die vraagabsorpsie van 'n toenemende behoefte aan hoër onderwys in Suid-Afrika.

Die hoofbevindings van die bepaalde navorsing het bevestig dat strategie by die twee organisasies in die gevallestudie wel hoofsaaklik 'n funksie van sosiale interaksie is. Strategie word meestal gevorm deur mense as emosionele wesens. Strategie is die produk van interaksie wat soms irrasioneel is asook gevolglike gedeelde betekenis en verhoudings tussen mense wat konstant ontwikkel. Dit is die sosiale interaksie tussen strategierolspelers tydens periodes van strategiepraktyk wat dien as 'n sosiale meganisme wat strategievoorneme in strategiese uitkomst transformeer. Verskillende strategierolspelers gebruik 'n wye verskeidenheid tegnieke om hulle idees of beskouings tydens strategieverwante interaksie aanvaarbaar te maak. Die bevindings het aangedui dat die geselekteerde strategieë by die twee gevallestudie-instansies meestal nie op objektiewe beredenering wat inskakel by 'n duidelike plan of visie gebaseer word nie, maar eerder op strategierolspelers se vermoë om hulle idees vir die groep aanvaarbaar te maak. Bevindings het verder bevestig dat die eenaars van die onderskeidelike gevallestudie-instansies 'n groot invloed het hoe dinge tydens episodes van strategiepraktyk gedoen word.

Strategie by albei maatskappye is informeel en bestaan meestal uit reaksie op uitdagings en hantering van krisis. Albei organisasies volg 'n differensiëringstrategie. Veiligheid en sekuriteit, werkverskaffingsvooruitsigte asook bepaalde akademiese aangeleenthede soos kleiner klasse vir beter leer, kan beskou word as gebiede van mededingingsvoordeel vir albei. Die proliferasie van privaatverskaffers, beduidende investering in hoër onderwys, asook die belangrike vraagabsorpsierol van privaatverskaffers dui daarop dat daar beslis 'n toekoms vir privaathoëronderwys in Suid-Afrika is.

Die beplande hoofbydrae van die bepaalde navorsing is om 'n begrip te fasiliteer van hoe sosiale interaksie as sosiale meganisme strategie en gevolglike strategiese uitkomst vorm. Begrip van die sosiale wêreld neem waarskynlik toe soos die versameling van die versoenbare kousale meganismes groei – waar meganismes openbaar hoe die waargenome verhoudings tussen fenomene geskep en verduidelik word. Die bevindings van die bepaalde navorsing kan dus dien as 'n boublok om

sosialewetenskapsteorie te akkumuleer oor hierdie onverkende baan van interaksiegedrewe strategienavorsing. Om hierdie rede, word 'n konseptuele raamwerk aangebied as riglyn vir soortgelyke toekomstige studies. Die bepaalde studie het 'n blik gebied op die strategiese werking van twee klein privaathoëronderwysverskaffers en uiteindelik bygedra tot die toenemende kennisgeheel van privaatverskaffing in die Suid-Afrikaanse hoëronderwysomgewing.

ISIFINYEZO ESISUKETHE UMONGO WOCWANINGO

UKUSEBENZISANA KWABANTU OKUBUMBA ISU – ISIFUNDO ESIMUMBONISO WOKUCWANINGA NGEZIKHUNGO EZIMBILI EZINCANE ZEMFUNDO EPHAKEME YANGASESE

Ucwaningo lwenzelwe ukubhekana nokusweleka kolwazi maqondana nokwenza isu njengomsebenzi wokusebenzisana kwabantu. Abacwaningi ngabantu, abanjengo Critchley, babeka ukuthi inhlangotho kumele ithathwe njengento eguqukayo nenqubo yabantu yokusebenzisana kwabantu okunomphumela wokwabelwana ngencazelo. Ngokulandela inqubo ka Critchley, kanye nokuthatha ngokuthi ukuphenyisisa isu yinto esekelwe ubufakazi obusekelwe yisayense ngabantu, ucwaningo lwamanje, ngakho-ke lufuna ukuthola ngokusebenzisana kwabantu phakathi kwemifanekiso yama-practitioner, ukwenza isu lenhlangotho kanye nemiphumela ebalulekile elandelayo. Isu njengenqubo eyenziwayo nombono lisebenze njengesibuko esihlangane kucwaningo lwamanje. Umbono ohambisana nenqubo yokwenza kucwaningo ngabantu ugxila kwinqubo yokwenza yangempela (praxis) ngalabo abasebenza ngesu (practitioners) kwisimo esingavamile senhlangotho enamathuluzi angavamile okwenza isu, amathekniki kanye nezinto ezenziwa ngezandla zama-artefact (practices).

Ngokusekelwa kwisisekelo sefilosofi ngombono womhlaba wokwenza ngokubambekayo kanye nendlela exubene yokwenza ye-qualitative, idizayini yesifundo ngesibonelo, kuvumele ukuthi kwenziwe uhlaziyo olunzulu ngemithombo ehlukeneyo lwazi olutholakale ngobufakazi bophenyisiso, kusize ukuqondisisa ngento okwenziwa ngayo ucwaningo. Nangaphezu kwalokho, ukuphenya ngokusebenzisana kwabantu ngesikhathi sezikhawu zokwenzeka kwezinto, ucwaningo lwamanje luhenyisisa ngokuthi ngabe ama-practitioner agqugquzelwa yini ukwenza umumo wobunjalo kanye nokuthi lowo mumo nawu ube nomphumela kubo ngokuqhubekela phambili kanye nokuthi kube nencazelo. Ucwaningo lwamanje, lubuye luhlale nokuthi ngabe izimo zangaphakathi nezangaphandle kwenhlangotho, ezibandakanya inqubo yokusebenza kwenhlangotho, zinomthelela kanjani futhi nazo zibawumthelela kanjani kwezokuxhumana nokusebenzisana kwabantu. Izikhungo ezimbili ezincane zemfundo

ephakeme ezibonisa ithayipholoji yabahlinzeki abaningi bangasese kwindawo yemfundo ephakeme eNingizimu Afrika ziye zakhethwa. Laba bahlinzeki bangasese babhekene nezinseselele ezihlukene kumkhakha onzima wamanje kwezomnotho. Abahlinzeki bangasese babuye badlale indima ebalulekile nokuthi badinga ukuthi banganyelwe kwisidingo esikhulayo semfundo ephakeme eNingizimu Afrika.

Okuthokele kakhulu ngocwaningo lwamanje kuqinisa ukuthi ukwenza isu ngeziboniso ezimbili zocwaningo, kwinhlangano, kuyadingeka ikakhulukazi njengomsebenzi wokusebenzisana kwabantu. Ukwenza isu kuvamise ukusekelwa ngabantu njengabantu abanemizwa ngokomoya. Ukwenza isu kungumphumela wokuthi ngezinye izikhathi kuba nokusebenzisana okungenasizathu esibambekayo kanti imiphumela kuvamise ukuba ngeshintshayo nokwabelana ngesizathu sayo kanye nobuhlobo bayo phakathi kwabantu. Ukusebenzisa kwabantu phakathi kwalabo abenza isu ngezikhathi zenqubo yokwenza okusiza njengendlela yabantu ekuguquleni inhloso yesu ukuze libe yisu elinemiphumela. Abantu abenza amasu abehlukene basebenzisa amathekniki ehlukeni ukwenza ukuthi imibono yabo kanye nezindlela ababona ngayo izinto kwemukeleke ngesikhathi sokuxhumana mayelana namasu. Imiphumela etholakele ikhombisa ukuthi amasu akhethiwe kwizifundo zezibonelo ezimbili zezinhlangano zisekelwe kwizizathu ezingatshekele ohlangothini oluthize, kodwa esihambisana nohlelo olucacile kanye nombono, kodwa kuncike kumakhono abenzi bamasu ekwenzeni ukuthi imibono yabo yemukeleke eqenjini. Okunye okuthokakele kubuye kwaphakamisa nokuthi abanikazi bezinhlangano okwenziwa ngazo iziboniso zesifundo banomthelela kakhulu ngokuthi izinto zenziwe kanjani ngezikhathi zenqubo ebambekayo yokwenza.

Ukwenza amasu kuzo zimbili izinkampani kwenziwa ngendlela engahlelekile kakhulu, kanti kuquka ekuncikeni ekuphenduleni kwizinseselele kanye nokuphendula kwizimo ezisikazayo ezivelayo. Zombili izinhlangano zilandela amasu ehlukeni. Ukuphepha nokuvikeleka, amathuba emisebenzi kanye nezinto ezithile zesiakhademiki ezifana namaklasi amancane ukuze kufundeke kangcono nakho nngeminye yemikkhakha esiza kakhulu ekuphumeleleni. Ukubakhona ngobuningi kwabahlinzeki bangasese, ukutshalwa kakhulu kwezimali kwimfundo yangasese ephakeme, kanye nokuhlinzekwa kwemfundo yangasese kanye nesidingo sendima

yokumuncwa ngokwenganyelwa, kuphakamisa ukuthi likhona ikusasa langampela lemfundo yangasese ephakeme eNingizimu Afrika.

Inhloso eqondiwe ngokuthela esivivaneni kocwaningo lwamanje ukusiza ekutheni kube nokuqondisisa ngokuthi ukusebenzisana kwabantu njengendlela yokubumba amasu kanye nemiphumela kungasiza kanjani. Ukuqondisisa ngomkhakha wabantu kuyenyuka njengoba kukhula ukuqoqana kwezindlela zokwenza – lapho khona izindlela zokwenza ziveza ukuthi ngabe ubudlelwane obubhekiwe nobuqashelwayo bungabanjani uma kuqhathaniswa izinto ezenziwe futhi nokuthi zichazwa kanjani. Okutholakele ngocwaningo lwamanje kungasiza ngokuba yisakhelo ekuqokeleleni itiyori yesayense ngabantu maqondana nalo mkhakha ongakaphenyisiswa ngokwanele kwisu elixhumene ngokusebenzisana locwaningo. Maqondana nalokhu, uhlaka lombono luyahlinzekwa ukuba ngumkhombandlela kocwaningo lwangekusasa. Ucwano lwamanje luveze kancane ukusebenza kwesu kwizikhungo ezimbili ezincane zabahlinzeki ngemfundo ephakeme yangasese, kanti futhi luthela esivivaneni ekukhuleni kolwazi ngokuhlinzekwa kwemfundo yangasese emkhakheni wemfundo ephakeme eNingizimu Afrika.

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LIST OF KEY TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

KEY TERMS:

Social interaction; interactionism; strategy; strategizing; strategising; strategy-making, strategic management; competitive advantage; competitive strategy; emergent strategies; higher education; private higher education; strategy-as-practice; student choice.

KEY DEFINITIONS

Competitive advantage: A favourable competitive position of a firm that cannot be easily duplicated by its competitors (Porter, 1985:1; Parnell, 2014:612).

Competitive strategy: An organisation's "search for a favourable competitive position in an industry" (Porter, 1985:1).

Deliberate strategies: Strategies that tend to be planned and realised, as intended (Mintzberg & Walters, 1985:258).

Dominant logic: "Obscured assumptions that strategy scholars refer to when theorizing about strategic management" (Rasche, 2008:x).

Emergent strategies: Strategies that display a consistent pattern of action that tends to evolve in the absence of intention (Mintzberg & Walters, 1985:258).

Interactionism: A sociological approach that informs organisational sociology studies. With this approach, organisations are viewed from a relational perspective. Organisations supposedly represent continuous interactions and evolving relationships (including negotiations) between individuals, resulting in shared meanings or reality, identity and connectedness (Godwyn & Hoffer Gittell, 2012:xii).

Meaningful competitive advantage: An attribute/ benefit or feature unique to a product offering (in relation to competitors' offerings; something that they cannot copy) providing superior meaningful value to customers (own compilation). The true test of a competitive advantage is in the marketplace (Henry, 2018:16).

Private higher education in South Africa: Eligibility requirements for a private provider in South Africa include the need to be registered as a company in accordance with the Companies' Act, and to offer higher education, thus offering full programmes on NQF levels 5-10 (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013:4).

Social interaction: “Social interactions are the acts, actions, or practices of two or more people mutually oriented towards each other's selves, that is, any behaviour that tries to affect or take account of each other's subjective experiences or intentions” (Rummel,1979).

Strategizing or strategy-making: It entails the activities of practitioners and organisations in ultimately realising competitive advantages, or superior performance.

Strategic management: “The strategic management process is a sequential set of analyses and choices that can increase the likelihood that a firm would choose a good strategy that generates competitive advantages.” (Barney, 2001:4)

Strategy: The actions impacting on the performance of organisations within their operating environments (own compilation).

Strategy-as-practice: “(This) research agenda is concerned with strategy as a situated, socially accomplished activity constructed through the actions and interactions of multiple actors.” (Jarzabkowski, 2005:7).

Strategy-as-practice; practice (also known as praxis): What people actually do that relates to strategy (Johnson, Langley, Melin & Whittington 2007: 27).

Strategy-as-practice; practices: These include the institutionalised tools, techniques and artefacts that organisational members use in strategizing. It also involves unique practices, like organisational routines that guide strategy-making (Jarzabkowski, 2005:8; Johnson *et al.*, 2007:26).

Strategy-as-practice; practitioners or strategy actors: All people involved in conceptualising, shaping and implementing strategies; strategizing is thus not considered to be solely the domain of top management (Whittington, 2006:619)

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

- CHE:** Council on Higher Education
- CEO:** Chief executive officer
- DHET:** Department of Higher Education and Training
- DoE:** Department of Education
- HE:** Higher education
- HEI:** Higher education institution
- HEQSF:** Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
- HESA:** Higher Education South Africa
- NQF:** National Qualifications Framework
- PBHEI:** Public higher education institution
- PHE:** Private higher education
- PHEI:** Private higher education institution
- SAQA:** South African Qualifications framework
- Unisa:** University of South Africa
- Wits University:** University of the Witwatersrand

CHAPTER 1: RESEARCH ORIENTATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the current research. The first section provides a background to and the motivation for the current study. This culminates in a description of the research problem and the subsequent research questions. These questions mainly allude to the need for an in-depth investigation of the social interactions between strategy practitioners and the way these interactions shape the emergence of the competitive position of two South African small private higher education institutions (PHEIs). Chapter 1 further offers a brief introduction to the research paradigm, together with an approach that underpins the research design that was employed to address the stated research questions, and to statistically test a single stated null hypothesis.

A concise description of the proposed contribution of the current research, the delimitations thereof and the relevant ethical considerations is followed by a breakdown of the different chapters of the current research. Figure 1.1 offers a diagrammatic depiction of the structure of Chapter 1.

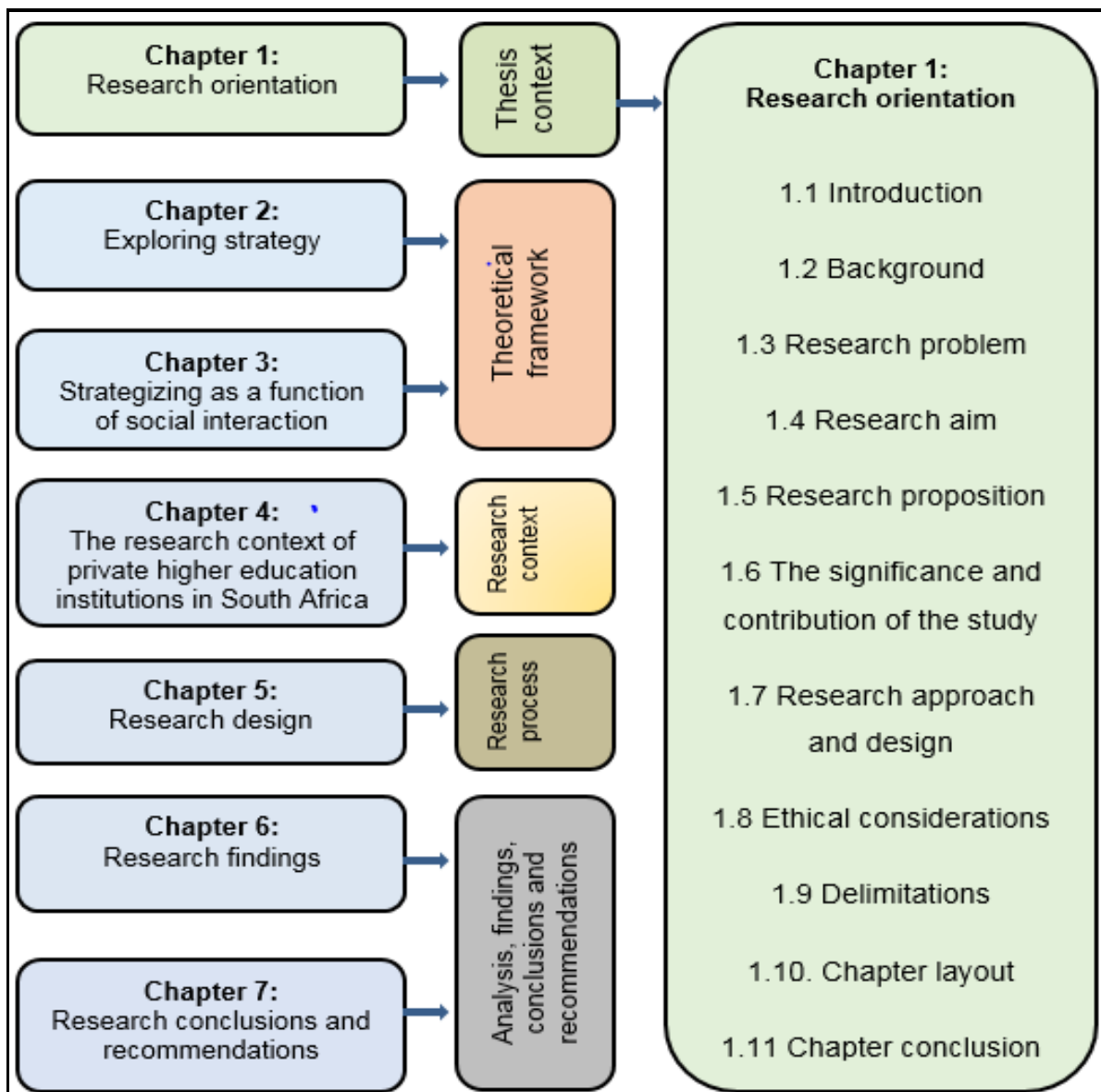


Figure 1.1: The structure of Chapter 1 (own compilation)

1.2 BACKGROUND

This section provides an introduction to and the motivation for the current study. This includes a discussion of the important constructs of the current research.

1.2.1 Strategy and meaningful sustainable competitive advantage

Authors, like Rasche, (2008:77); Clegg, Carter, Kornberger, and Schweitzer (2011:48); Rindova Reger and Dalpiaz (2012:147-148); Sminia (2014:8); and Henry (2018:16) claim that competitiveness stands central to strategy, and that competitive

advantage is most commonly used by strategy researchers to explain superior performance. These endeavours of organisations in attempting to create sustainable favourable positions (Porter, 1985:1-5) relate to the purpose of strategic management (Dess, Eisner, Lumpkin & McNamara, 2011:3).

This school of thought in strategy implies that organisations operate and compete within environments with other organisations for the patronage of the consumer. With the above in mind, and within a plethora of complex and diverse definitions, a simplistic explanation of strategic endeavour or strategizing could propose that this entails the activities of organisations in realising competitive advantage, or superior performance. The marketing concept philosophy further contends that, to be successful, not only does an organisation have to engage in strategic activities to create sustainable competitive advantages; but these advantages need to be related to superior customer value in comparison with its competitors (Venter, 2009:9; Safarnia, Akbari & Abbasi, 2011:135; Henry, 2018:16).

From this viewpoint, organisations' competitive advantages can only really be confirmed by the perceptions and the choices of consumers. In other words; competitive advantages can only be viewed as legitimate if customers acknowledge them.

1.2.2 Strategizing as a function of social interaction

Numerous approaches in studying strategy have evolved over the past six decades. Verity (2012:1-4) notes the existence of two different primary streams of approaches or paradigms of strategic thought. The dominant stream links strategy to rational thinking, rules and linearity, mostly anchored in economic philosophy. The second, according to Verity (2012:1-4), is anchored in anthropology and social theory; and it views strategy as *messy*, non-linear and complex. The latter stream has gained prominence, in part, due to the perceived gap between scholarly writings and managers' ability to successfully apply this knowledge. Rasche (2008:1) explains that: "Strategy research has been criticized that its contributions are paradigmatically constrained by positivistic assumptions and research traditions largely stemming from economic analysis."

Criticising the dominant stream of strategy theory, Clegg *et al.* (2011:13), advocate an evolution of strategy from a “managerial-economist perspective” to an “empirically informed social science”. Critchley (2012:168-169), a supporter of the social theory stream, goes as far as to argue that the word *organisation* is not really worthy of being labelled as an object per se. He contends that *organisation* should rather be viewed as a process of continuous interaction between groups of people, resulting in shared meaning. Based on this premise of Critchley (2012:168-169), one may postulate that all activities (including those deemed strategic) within organisations are the products of the interaction between the people of that entity. This viewpoint makes for a compelling case to investigate how human interactions ultimately shape shared meaning in strategy-making.

In order to investigate the notion that strategizing is in essence an exponent of social interaction, it is necessary to explore social interaction as a concept per se. Offering a definition of social interaction in general, Rummel (1979) states: “Social interactions are the acts, actions, or practices of two or more people mutually oriented towards each other's selves, that is, any behaviour that tries to affect or take account of each other's subjective experiences or intentions”. Godwyn and Hoffer Gittell (2012: xv) refer to the interactionist paradigm that allows for a relational perspective on organisations. Social interaction, according to the above authors, ultimately consists of various elements or dimensions, including *symbolic interaction*, *social psychology*, *interpretive sociology*, *ethnomethodology* and *dramaturgy*. Actual interactions, for example, like strategic meetings, thus consist of much more than the interaction that can be observed. Likewise, Rummel (1979) suggests that the *manifestations*, or the actual interactions that can be observed, are manipulated by *latents*. These *latents* (comparable to the elements of the interactionism perspective, as discussed above) are, according to Rummel (1979), intentions or undercurrents creating a *socio-cultural space* for the interaction, in which to take place. These *latents*, Rummel (1979) contends, include *perceptions of each other*, *perceived occasion*, *behavioural dispositions*, *expectations*, and *actual social behaviour*.

Various authors identify certain latent issues that influence social interaction. Gibson, Ivanevich, Donnelly and Konopaske (2009:30-31) refer to Schein's Three-Layer Model

that offers organisational culture as the perspective from which to view group interaction, amongst others. Similar to Rummel's ideas, the model depicts the invisible basic assumptions of people that guide their behaviour. Other authors focus on specific latent issues deemed to significantly influence strategy-making. Clegg *et al.* (2011:34), for example, postulate that, even though latent issues like power and politics should stand central to strategic-management studies, they are largely absent in scholarly writings regarding this discipline. Organisation-behavioural authors, like Gibson *et al.* (2009: 289-309), likewise place considerable attention on the issues of power and politics in work-place interactions. Su, Mark and Sutton (2007:131-135) further identify various *connectors* that set contexts for different types of work-place interaction. The proposed *connector types* include *work home, company, common work role, social, private, professional* and *formal community of practice*.

The above discussion alludes to the notion that, in the workplace, different visible social interactions take place within different contexts; and that these are manipulated by certain latent (invisible) issues. An interactionist perspective further proposes that interaction consists of different dimensions, or elements (symbolic interaction, social psychology, interpretive sociology, ethno-methodology, or dramaturgy). From a social perspective, social interaction, with all its dimensions and undercurrents, ultimately shapes the way in which organisations strategize. From this viewpoint, studying social interaction, and all its intricacies, within the context of strategizing is imperative. The strategy-as-practice perspective, as discussed in the next section, provides an appropriate lens for viewing social interaction and its influence on strategy-making within organisations.

1.2.3 The Strategy-as-practice perspective

Drawing on Miller and Norton, Davis (2013:11) reports the significant failure (as high as 90%) of organisations to execute or implement strategies. This may allude to the possibility that, in contrast to viewing strategic management as a rational step-by-step process that organisations perform, there may be other factors that could impact on strategic execution. The Strategy-as-Practice International Network (SAP-IN) (2010) submits that the conventional strategic-management research approaches focus on static "top-down reified notions of the firm and strategy" from a macro-perspective.

Conversely, SAP-IN (2010) contends that a strategy-as-practice perspective on strategic management advocates the investigation of human practices in strategic management. This practice perspective serves as an alternative to economics-dominated strategy research (Jarzabkowski, 2005:3). Whittington (2006:614) and Jarzabkowski (2005:2) note the increasing attention given to strategizing, as a human activity. This, according to the above authors, is in concert with the wider *practice turn* in sociological research. In a strategy-as-practice perspective, the micro-activities of the strategic planners/practitioners and how these relate to wider “organisational and social contexts” are examined (SAP-IN, 2010).

In contrast to the conventional notion that strategic management is the property of the organisation, a strategy-as-practice perspective thus proposes that strategy is “something that people do” (Whittington, 2006:614). Whittington (2006:619) identifies three core elements within the strategy-as-practice perspective, namely; practitioners, practices and praxis: *Practitioners* refers to the people; and these comprise the *strategic actors* that are actually performing strategic activities. *Practices* refers to behaviour like norms, procedures and traditions that have become the accepted way of doing things; and they have, therefore, become routine within organisations. Whittington (2006:621) also, in addition to intra-organisational practices, acknowledges the influence of institutional practices from a macro-perspective. These extra-organisational practices, according to the above author, can include practices from, for example, the broader social field or industry field, like the use of standardised strategizing techniques. *Praxis* refers to the actual strategy formulation and implementation. Whittington (2006:619) further suggests that these praxes largely take place within *episodes of strategy praxis*, for example, board meetings and strategy workshops (comparable to the *connectors* of Su, Mark and Sutton (2007:131-135), as discussed in Section 1.2.2).

Paroutis, Heracleous and Angwin (2013:11) point to the inter-connectedness of the above three core elements of practitioners, practices and praxis. Regnér (2012:193) concurs, by referring to the *interplay* between activities (praxis) and practices. Whittington (2006:620) denotes the interaction between practices and praxis within the different episodes of strategy praxis, as discussed in the previous paragraph. It is noticeable that the strategy-as-practice perspective does not explicitly endeavour to

link strategizing activities to some sort of performance measurements. Whittington (2007:1578) refers to the process approach to strategy that promotes the linkage of strategizing to strategic outcomes.

According to the above author, the strategy-as-practice perspective differs from the process approach by rather focusing on a deep understanding of strategic activities rather than on performance. Regnér (2012:195-196) calls for the use of a strategy-as-practice perspective in efforts to understand the emergence of competitive positioning. The above author proposes that scholars should consider linking practitioners, practices and praxis to outcomes. Regnér (2012:195-196) thus requests a narrowing of the gap between the institutional-performance approaches (traditional strategy studies) and activity-based approaches (for example a strategy-as-practice perspective). In the current study, Regnér's (2012) call for a strategy-as-practice view that connects more with the traditional view of strategy-making, is heeded.

A strategy-as-practice perspective thus provides a comprehensive, inter-connected approach that allows researchers to examine all the interactions between strategy practitioners and how this shapes strategic processes and symbols, as well as the implementation of these strategies from a micro-perspective. 'Micro' thus refers to the actual activities of human beings that are inextricably linked to the unique situation in which they find themselves. The interactions between strategy-practitioners are contextualised within *episodes of strategic praxis* (see the discussion on *connectors* in Section 1.2.2) that ultimately shape strategizing. Together with observable issues, latent issues, like power and politics, culture and perceptions; (see Section 1.2.2) manipulate the actual social interaction within *episodes of strategy praxis*. The latent issues arise from the extra and intra-organisational practices and from the predisposition of the strategy practitioners. The next section will explore the practitioners of strategizing.

1.2.4 Who is responsible for strategy?

Traditionally, the senior management of an organisation is considered to be responsible for its strategic direction (Clegg *et al.*, 2011:216; Parnell, 2014:10-11). Although the top management team is ultimately responsible for strategic decision-

making, Parnell (2014:11) maintains that involving a number of capable strategy practitioners, for example functional managers, would increase the quality of strategic decision-making. Jarzabkowski (2005:8) postulates that strategy emanates from the social interactions between numerous people. These include the interactions between all the internal employees on different levels, as well as the external people, like consultants and consumers. She, however, acknowledges the importance of the senior management in strategic decision-making by completing a case study based on their interactions (within a university context).

Davis (2013:99-120) proposes that the importance of middle managers in strategizing does not only lie in their role of strategy implementation. Drawing on numerous studies regarding the role of middle managers in strategizing, the above author suggests that middle managers, each within the influential confines of their organisational context, should be able to influence strategy by means of the various different strategic roles they fulfil within the organisation. From the above discussion, it is apparent that, even though all organisational members, consultants and even consumers may be involved in strategizing, it can be accepted that the senior- and middle-management of organisations are mainly responsible for strategy-making. This should be the case in South African private higher education institutions; to be discussed in the next section.

1.2.5 Private higher education in South Africa

“The growth of private higher education is a global phenomenon. Driven in large measure by the growing demand for education and the inability or unwillingness of the public sector to handle the surge in student demand, these new institutions now serve nearly a third of all students in post-secondary education around the world” (Kinser & Levy, 2010:ix). With one third of all higher education enrolments globally, private higher education (PHE) is currently the fastest growing segment in higher education (HE) (Altbach, Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009:67-77).

Gupta (2008:572) suggests that this trend is also noticeable in South Africa, where the number of private higher education institutions (PHEI) are significantly growing; absorbing the excess in demand for HE for which public providers cannot cater. There are currently 106 registered and 30 provisionally registered PHEIs in South Africa

(South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training, 2018b). Judging from the significant proliferation of private provision worldwide and in South Africa, the importance of private higher education institutions (PHEI) globally and in South Africa seems indisputable. PHEIs have a vital role to play in the South African higher educational landscape; to address the growing demand for HE, the continued successful existence of PHEIs in South Africa is of paramount importance (Bezuidenhout, De Jager & Naidoo, 2013:1184). This sentiment is echoed in the 2014 White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2014: 44), in which the role of private providers in providing for a diversified and expanded HE system is clearly acknowledged.

Most PHEIs are profit-seeking, are quite small with less than a thousand registered students; and they operate from large urban centres (Kruss, 2004, 2007; Blom, 2011; Dirkse Van Schalkwyk, 2011; Bezuidenhout, 2013; CHE, 2016; Caerus Capital, 2017; DHET, 2018a; Webbstock, 2018). Even though these PHEIs are fully integrated within the South African National Qualifications Framework, in contrast to public higher education institutions (PBHEI), they do not receive any subsidies from Government (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2014:43). Bezuidenhout (2013:3) notes the lingering concerns regarding the quality of private provision. The 2014 White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2014:43) refers to “unscrupulous” private providers that exploit gaps in the education system and that advertise unregistered programmes. Competing with a host of other private providers and their subsidised public counterparts constitutes challenges that require rigorous strategic attention from PHEIs.

The Department of Higher Education and Training of South Africa (DHET) (2014:43) recognises the distinct lack of research on private provision in South Africa. This becomes evident in the noticeable absence of private provision statistics and literature in official HE-related publications in South Africa. A keyword search of global scholarly writings on strategy in HE during the past fifteen years has yielded various existing studies regarding strategic activities in higher education institutions (HEI) (e.g. Mazzarol & Soutar, 1999; Garnett, 2005; Richardson, 2006; Essary, 2011; Mainardes, Ferreira & Tontini, 2011; Huang & Lee, 2012; Hinton 2012, Dirkse van Schalkwyk, 2011, 2018; Davis 2013).

Many of the above authors have conceptualised proposed models that HEIs should follow, to ensure successful strategic planning. The problem is that many of these studies, in keeping with the dominant mechanistic strategy logic, focus on generic “how to” outcomes. Considering the reported high failure rates of organisations following through to strategy implementation (see Section 1.2.3); there is a need for a deeper understanding of the topic under discussion. From the discussions in the preceding sections, it could be argued that, instead of just following a series of proposed steps, HEIs, in line with the strategy-as-practice perspective, should take cognisance of the fact that strategic planning is ultimately conducted by people within a social and organisational context; and that it is the interaction between people that ultimately shapes the strategic-planning process, and the execution thereof. Davis (2013) paved the way for this more in-depth investigation of strategic practitioners in HEIs in South Africa by studying the strategizing practices of middle managers at a South African public university. The researcher could not, however, find any strategy-as-practice perspective related studies on PHEIs in South Africa per se. Because of their distinct differentiation from public providers in terms of their lack of government subsidising and their profit-seeking nature, PHEIs warrant investigation independently from HE in general.

From the discussion above, in this section it can be argued that private provision is significantly growing worldwide and in South Africa; and that PHEIs have an important role to play in expanding and diversifying HE-provision in South Africa. PHEIs face various challenges including a lack of governmental funding and negative perceptions regarding the quality of private provision. There is a lack of information regarding private provision within the context of the South African HE-landscape, as well as a lack of scholarly writing on strategy in South African PHE. In this researcher’s opinion, the above-mentioned issues justify the importance of scholarly enquiry into the strategic endeavours of PHEIs in South Africa. The researcher consequently chose two small South African private profit-seeking HE-providers, with less than a thousand enrolled students that operate in large urban centres, for the current research.

The perceived failure of the strategic management discipline to contribute, through theory, to successes in real-life settings has been widely documented. In contrast to the traditional institutional performance-based strategy approaches, a strategy-as-

practice perspective allows for a deep understanding of strategy-making activities; but it fails to link these activities to actual performance outcomes. The reason for strategizing in the first place (see Section 1.2.1), Rather than adopting an either-or stance, the narrowing of the gap between the above approaches may need consideration. Pragmatic linking of social interactions with the actual sustainable, meaningful competitive advantages of an organisation, as identified by consumers, could be crucial in providing a deeper understanding of strategizing in organisations and the emergence of competitive positions. Two small profit-seeking PHEs within the South African HE-landscape provided fertile ground in which to study the above phenomenon, as indicated in the formulation of the research problem.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Section 1.2 alludes to a knowledge gap in the existing literature, and what is needed, in order to gain a deeper understanding of how social workplace interactions that shape strategizing, and ultimately the strategic outcomes of an organisation. This rings especially true within the South African PHEI-context, where private providers must compete with numerous other PHEIs in a tough economic climate.

In fulfilling a crucial demand-absorption role, these organisations must also contend with a lingering perceived inferiority stigma; and they must face their public counterparts, which exclusively receive government subsidies. Research, dealing with the human relational side of strategizing in private providers is almost non-existent in the South African HE-landscape. Because senior management is ultimately responsible for strategic decision-making within an organisation, and because of middle-management's role in implementing and influencing strategy (see Section 1.2.4), it is important to specifically investigate the social workplace interactions of top and middle managers when they strategize.

1.3.1 Main research question

Considering the research problem, the main research question for the current study was formulated as follows:

- What are the strategizing practices of top and middle managers as they socially interact at two small South African private higher education institutions?

1.3.2 Investigative research questions

Five investigative questions requiring specific answers were drafted to facilitate the robust addressing of the main research question. These sub-research questions thus served to solicit answers that would represent the “puzzle pieces” in building a comprehensive answer to the main research question. With reference to the discussion of social interaction, as well as the strategy-as-practice perspective in Section 1.2.3 of the current study, the following investigative research questions were formulated:

1. What motivation processes influence the top and middle managers at two small South African private higher education institutions when they engage in strategizing interactions?
2. What situational factors influence strategizing in two small South African private higher education institutions?

Moore (2011) refers to the conflicting views of two of the most prominent academics in strategic thought, namely Porter and Mintzberg: Porter contends that strategy-making should follow a deliberate approach; while Mintzberg advocates the emergent character of strategy-making. Vaara and Whittington (2012:312) further question whether practitioners only retrospectively identify certain activities as being strategic. Investigating the emergent nature of strategy-making at the private higher education institutions of the current study may provide valuable insights into the nature of the social interaction, in addition to its influence on strategizing at these organisations. From this, the following research question was formulated:

3. To what extent is strategy-making within two small South African private higher education institutions deliberate or emergent in nature?

In order to pragmatically link social interaction from a strategy-as-practice perspective to the competitive position of an organisation, its strategic outcomes need to be determined. In recognition of the Marketing Concept philosophy advocating the creation of competitive advantages that are meaningful to customers (as discussed in Section 1.2.2; competitive advantages can only be legitimate if acknowledged by an organisation's customers), the following research question was formulated:

4. What are the areas of competitive advantage of two small South African private higher education institutions, as perceived by their customers (students)?

1.3.3 Hypothesis

The current research project further set out to ascertain whether the respective student groups of two PHEIs differed in the areas of competitive advantage that they have ascribed to their private provider of choice. In addition to a descriptive analysis of the possible overall difference between respondent-group answers (PHEI A versus PHEI B), inferential statistics were employed to statistically test the below-formulated null hypothesis.

H₀: The respondents at two small private higher education institutions in South Africa do not significantly differ in the importance they assign to different factors that influence them in their choice of an educational institution.

H_a: The respondents at two small private higher education institutions in South Africa differ significantly in the importance they assign to different factors that influence them in their choice of an educational institution.

1.3.3 Conceptual framework

The development of a conceptual framework to guide future research focusing on understanding social interaction as a social mechanism in shaping strategizing was further envisaged. The following investigative question was formulated to address this objective:

5. Can a conceptual framework be constructed to guide further studies regarding how social interactions between managers shape strategizing?

1.4 RESEARCH AIM

The aim of the current research was to gain a deeper understanding of social interaction, as the social mechanism in shaping strategizing. The outcomes extended theory regarding an interactionist perspective on strategizing at two selected organisations. It also presented a proposed conceptual framework to guide further inquiry in this area of interest.

1.5 RESEARCH PROPOSITION

Based on a literature review of the main constructs that relate to the current study, the following research proposition was formulated:

Social interaction between top- and middle-level managers has a profound influence on the competitive strategy-making of the private higher education institutions of the current study. This interaction within different contexts (episodes of praxis) can be manipulated by observable and latent issues: some will contribute; while others will constrain meaningful strategy-making. Competitive strategy-making at the chosen case study organisations, namely two private higher education institutions, is largely not deliberate; it is rather reactionary to market pressures. How these reactionary measures are implemented is mostly shaped by the social interaction between top and middle managers.

1.6 THE SIGNIFICANCE AND CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

No published research could be found which, in an in-depth manner, investigates all the intricacies of social interaction within a strategizing context; and which attempts to explore the link between these interactions and the competitive position of organisations. The current study provides new insights regarding the above. The current research uniquely contributes towards the overall body of knowledge of strategy, as well as that of private higher education in South Africa. The current study

will hopefully assist, not only private higher education providers in South Africa, but organisations in general, to improve their overall strategizing by recognising its holistic nature, as well as acknowledging the importance of social interactions and the resultant meaning-making in shaping strategizing and resultant outcomes.

Tracy (2013:240-241) claims that a quality study should provide a significant contribution. She (p.241) proposes that significant research findings should "...extend, transform or complicate a body of knowledge, theory or practice in new and important ways". Tracy (2013:240-241) further alludes to four dimensions of significant research, namely theoretical significance, heuristic significance, conceptual development, and practical significance. As discussed in the following sections, in the current study; a contribution to all four of the above dimensions is envisaged.

1.6.1 Theoretically and heuristically significant contribution

The current study firstly provides new insights on the growing strategy-as-practice body of knowledge regarding the interaction between strategy practitioners and its influence on the strategy-making and competitive position of organisations, specifically within the context of South African PHEIs. This study contributes to the body of knowledge on PHEIs in South Africa. The proliferation of PHEIs and their integral role in the HE-landscape (discussed in Section 1.5), demand attention from the research community.

Regnér (2012:182) states: "...our understanding of how competitive positions emerge still remains limited". He further postulates that, despite the investigation of managerial effort and the individual beliefs (positivism) at the one end, and shared organisational meanings and practices at the other, their full impact on the emergence of competitive positioning has not yet been investigated. He then suggests (p.195-196) using the strategy-as-practice perspective in investigating the impact of micro- and macro-level interplay on the competitive positioning of organisations. The aim of the current research is to explore this information gap by investigating the link between the social interaction between strategy practitioners and strategy-making.

Vaara and Whittington (2012:308-317), influential strategy-as-practice writers, published an article that suggests directions for future research in strategy-as-practice. Some of these proposed future directions include: a), a broader investigation of all activities that may have an impact on strategy-making; b), an investigation of the variety of discursive practices related to strategy-making; c), an exploration of the contributions of all organisational actors to strategy-making; d), an investigation of the emergence of strategy-making, specifically investigating retrospective construction in practice, and e), an in-depth understanding of the development of shared meanings through an analysis of narratives. This current research delves into all of the above-mentioned areas, thereby contributing to the overall body of knowledge on strategy-making from a social perspective (specifically strategy-as-practice).

In offering a better understanding of how social interaction mediates strategizing, the researcher hopes that this research will, in a heuristic fashion, spark other researchers' interest to further explore strategizing as a function social interaction in different contexts. Based on Tracy's (2013:241) writings, a theoretical, as well as a heuristically significant contribution is thus hopefully proffered.

1.6.2 Conceptual development and practically significant research

The next contribution includes a proffered conceptual framework that illustrates the interactions between top and middle managers during the episodes of strategy praxis within different social and organisational contexts. This includes how these perpetual interactions and the subsequent evolving meaning-making and relationships shape strategizing, and ultimately, the strategic organisational outcomes. This conceptual framework, presented in Chapter 7, could possibly guide future research, aimed at holistically understanding social interaction as a social mechanism in shaping strategizing and its outcomes in different settings: analytical generalisation, instead of statistical generalisation (Yin, 2012:6, 18-19).

1.7 RESEARCH APPROACH AND DESIGN

Chapter 5 describes the chosen research design in addressing the research aim and the questions of the current research. This includes a discussion of the philosophical

underpinnings of the researcher's paradigmatic worldview, and the consequential research approach. This section provides a short summary thereof.

1.7.1 A Pragmatic worldview

The current research subscribes to the philosophical underpinnings of pragmatic research:

The a priori choice between post-positivism and interpretivism and the subsequent epistemological and ontological restrictions are regarded as redundant. A subscription to methodological instrumentalism is preferred: the selected research method is based on its ability to explain and predict a phenomenon. A subscription to **methodological pluralism or holism** means that the inclusion of different research methods from seemingly 'incompatible' paradigms supposedly facilitates an enhanced understanding of the research problem.

The pragmatist researcher **values the primacy of human experience**. He thus concerns himself with how actors' social interactions (social transactions) and resultant experiences create and recreate social meaning and identity (the 'social self') that consequently govern thought and action over time. The **production of knowledge**, or the truth, is non-linear and temporal; and dynamically, it is cyclically created and recreated through social interactions and consequential social experiences with resultant consequences. The **pragmatic inquiry process** is socially, emotionally and contextually (cultural, historical and political) laden, with beliefs and actions interacting in many cycles of inquiry: knowing and doing are inseparable. Pragmatic inquiry has a **problem-solving nature**; consequently, habits based on past experiences represent most of the problem-solving endeavours of social actors and pragmatic researchers alike.

1.7.2 A qualitatively driven mixed methods approach

This approach allows for a better understanding of the research problem through in-depth, rich, contextualised knowledge. This specific mixed methods approach entails a qualitative-dominant methodology conducting an inductive investigation of experiences and meaning-making, with an auxiliary-embedded quantitative phase, as

a supplementary method for further elucidation. Methodological triangulation leading to better understanding is realised, as opposed to triangulation, as a method to validate the results. **The strategy-as-practice perspective** provides an appropriate lens to view strategizing; as it aligns with the integrative and pragmatic nature of the interactionist conception of organisational sociology. The social actor is at the centre of investigation and the practicality of knowledge is valued.

Investigating **the black box**, the ‘tacit dimension’ of strategy entails studying the unseen antecedent and the non-deliberate elements of strategy-making and strategic outcomes within a dwelling worldview. The specific **social mechanism** explored in the current study includes the process by which an input (social interaction) leads to an outcome (strategizing). How the process of social interaction shapes strategizing thus represents the social mechanism. The **Hermeneutic approach** followed relates to focusing on the interpretation of the meanings of social actions. In terms of **heuristics**, the pragmatic researcher’s inquiry mirrors the problem-solving nature of practitioners; taking ‘mental shortcuts’, or simply applying the ‘rules of thumb’.

1.7.3 A case study design

The current study, within an overarching pragmatic paradigm and qualitative-driven mixed methods research approach, employed multiple sources of data in an embedded, multiple, multi-phase, exploratory and explanatory, instrumental case study research design involving two selected private higher education institutions (PHEI). The main units of analysis or cases were the episodes of strategy praxis between top and middle managers (strategy actors). Within these cases, embedded subcases firstly included an exploration of the predisposition and meaning making of social actors that engage in these episodes of praxis.

It also included an investigation of the organisational tools, mechanisms or processes and techniques (practices) that relate to strategizing within the intra- and extra-organisational environments of the case study organisations. An investigation of the competitive advantages of the respective PHEIs was also included as part of this subcase. The three qualitative and one quantitative data collection phases, as well as

the analyses and subsequent reporting of the findings from the case study are described in Chapter 5.

1.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

A careful perusal of the University of South Africa's policy on research ethics (Unisa, 2012) yielded important ethical issues that were addressed in the current study, as discussed below:

The current research was guided by four moral principles of ethics in research (Unisa, 2012:9):

- The autonomy, rights and dignity of each participant were respected.
- Beneficence; the current study aimed to provide a positive contribution to people's welfare.
- Non-maleficence; this study did not cause harm to any research participant.
- Justice; the benefits of this study will be fairly distributed among people.

In addition to the above moral principles, ten general ethics principles, as published in the Unisa research ethics policy (Unisa, 2012:9, 10), further guided the current study. They include ensuring essential and relevant research, the maximisation of public interest and of social justice, competence, ability and commitment to research, respect for and protection of the rights and interests of the participants and the institutions, informed and non-coerced consent, respect for cultural difference, justice, fairness and objectivity, integrity, transparency and accountability, risk-minimisation and non-exploitation.

The Unisa Department of Business Management Research Ethics Review Committee issued an approval certificate for the current research. Permission was granted after the evaluation of a detailed submission that comprehensively addressed the moral and ethical principles described in the previous paragraph. A copy of the ethical clearance certificate is attached in Appendix A.

1.9 DELIMITATIONS

The core focus of the current research was on the social interaction between the strategy practitioners of two small private providers within the South African HE-landscape during episodes of strategy praxis. Because the current study included a limited number of participants at only two organisations – out of a possible population exceeding a hundred organisations, the findings cannot be generalised at all. The current research rather yielded data that should facilitate analytical generalisation: findings from the current study should guide similar future studies in terms of what to include and what to expect in other contexts (Kvale, 2007:127; Yin, 2012:6, 18,19).

The current study and proposed future research in this file should facilitate a deep understanding of the complex concept of social interaction informed strategizing between strategy practitioners and the consequential strategic organisational outcomes. The single quantitative phase of the current study that included a survey among the registered students of the respective case study organisations, however, allows for comparison with other existing quantitative studies related to student choice.

1.10 CHAPTER LAYOUT

The chapters of this thesis include the following:

Chapter 1: Research orientation

This chapter contextualises the current study. Background information to and motivation for the current research leading to the research problem and subsequent research questions, are thus presented.

Chapter 2: Exploring strategy

The literature review phase of the current study starts with this chapter that presents the findings of a critical review of the existing literature on strategy thought. Different theoretical perspectives of strategy are explored. Dominant strategy paradigms are further examined, as well as topical issues, like competitive advantage and value. The

social stream of strategy is briefly probed, with a special emphasis on the strategy-as-practice perspective.

Chapter 3: Strategizing as a function of social interaction

This chapter examines the literature related to social interaction within an organisational and strategy-making context. The strategy-as-practice perspective is explored as a sociology-based alternative to the main strategic thought paradigms. Chapter 3 further identifies, justifies and describes the theoretical framework that guided the empirical phase of the current research.

Chapter 4: The research context of private higher education institutions in South Africa

This chapter concludes the literature review phase of the current research. A discussion of higher education internationally and locally, is followed by an exploration of the private higher education landscape globally and in South Africa. This eventually leads to a comprehensive discussion of the private institutions and their peculiarities that form the research context for this study.

Chapter 5: Research design

In this chapter, the case study design details are framed within the research aim and the subsequent research questions; the research proposition; the theoretical framework; the research context; the philosophical underpinnings, as well as the research approach.

Chapter 6: Research findings

The findings of the current research are reported in this chapter. The chapter includes a cross-case study context analysis, followed by an integrated interpretive, theory-related narrative report on the social interaction processes that shaped strategizing at the two chosen case study organisations.

Chapter 7: Research conclusions and recommendations

This chapter describes the theoretical contributions of the current study. The respective research questions of the current research are explicitly addressed. This includes a proffered conceptual framework for investigating social interaction and strategizing. This is followed by the conclusions drawn from this inductive research. This chapter also offers some recommendations for future research.

1.11 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Chapter 1 has provided an orientation to the current research. The chapter commenced with a background to and the motivation for the current study. Four main arguments were put forward: firstly; through strategizing, organisations strive to create sustainable competitive advantages that are recognised as meaningful by consumers. Secondly; from a strategy-as-practice viewpoint, these strategy-making activities are significantly influenced by the social interactions between strategy practitioners. Thirdly; pragmatically linking social interactions with the actual sustainable, meaningful competitive advantages of an organisation, as identified by consumers, could be crucial in providing a deeper understanding of strategizing in organisations and the emergence of competitive positions. Fourthly; a PHEI within the South African higher education landscape should provide fertile grounds, in which to study the above phenomena.

PHEIs are important role players and very little similar research exists in this field. This chapter has also briefly described the chosen research design to answer the main and investigative research questions, and to explore the research proposition within the discussed proposed research approach. Chapter 1 further described the proposed contribution and the delimitations of the current research; it addressed ethics-considerations; and it provided a chapter outline of the current study.

Chapter 2 signals the start of the literature review-phase of the current research. A critical overview of divergent strategy thought culminates in a discussion of the dominant strategy paradigms. Topical issues, like competitive advantage and value

are explored. The social stream of strategy, as well as the strategy-as-practice perspective, are also investigated.

CHAPTER 2: EXPLORING STRATEGY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 contain the literature review section of the current study. This includes an in-depth investigation of the literature surrounding the constructs of this study. Figure 2.1 provides a diagrammatical depiction of the structure of Chapter 2 within the context of the current research.

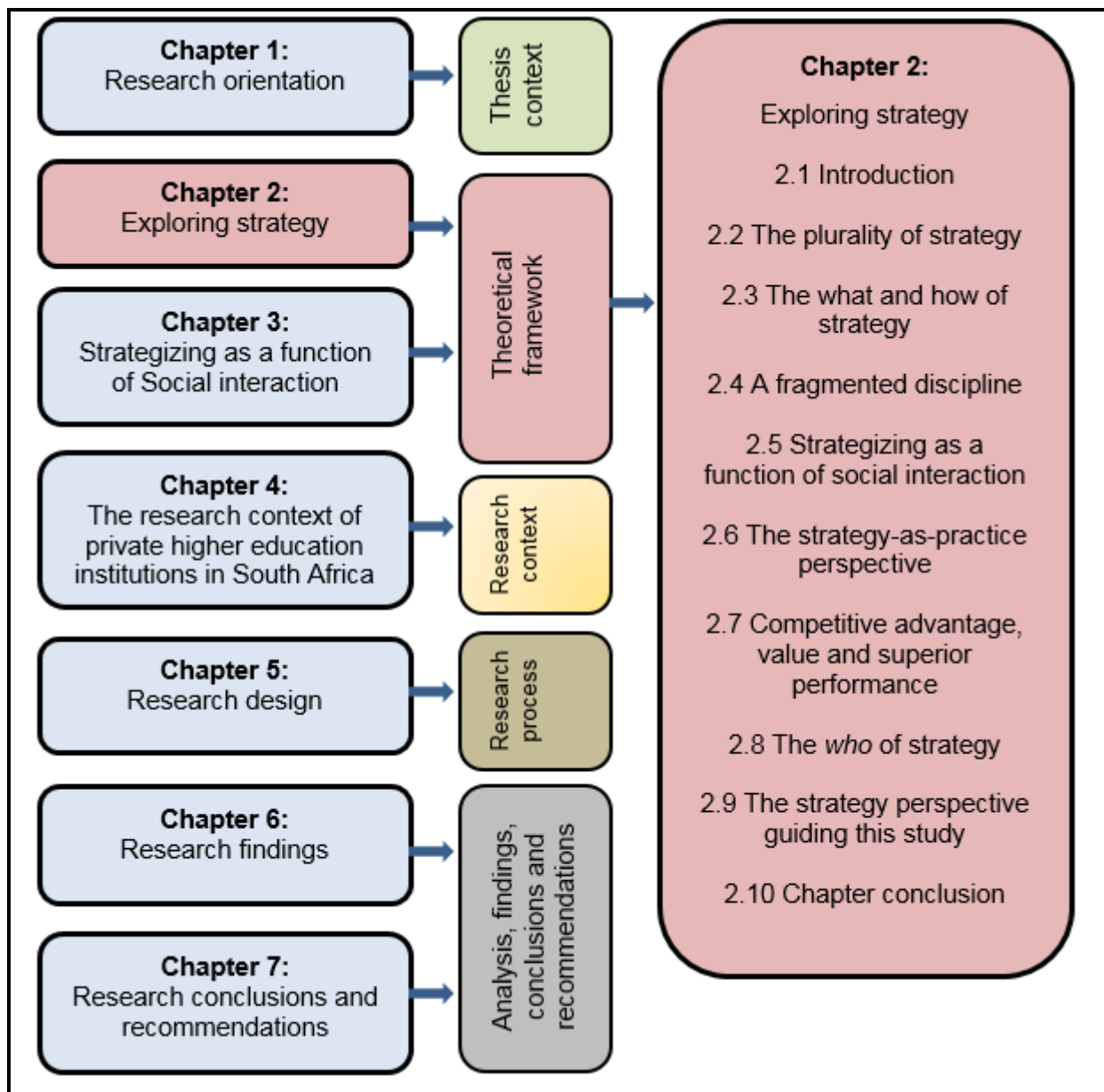


Figure 2.1: The structure of Chapter 2 (own compilation)

To explore how social interactions between top and middle managers shape strategizing, and ultimately the strategy outcome of two small South African private higher education institutions, the overall aim of the literature review phase (Chapters 2 and 3) is to firstly identify and describe the theoretical framework for the current research. The review secondly aims to depict the organisational context for the current study (Chapter 4). The emphasis of these chapters is not merely on reporting on the relevant literature, but also on the critical analysis, comparison and integration (identifying trends) thereof. In addition, areas in need of further exploration within the field of strategy, are investigated.

The review commences with an investigation of strategy as a field of study in Chapter 2. The divergence in scholarly thought in this discipline is introduced by discussing the plurality of strategy. Dominant strategy paradigms are then examined. Various topical issues are touched on, including competitive advantage and value. In Chapter 3, specific attention is given to the strategy-as-practice perspective, as a sociology-based alternative to the main strategic thought paradigms. The social interaction within an organisational and strategy-making context is then investigated. The specific organisational context for the current study, namely two private higher education institutions in South Africa, is examined in Chapter 4.

2.1.1 A comprehensive review of strategy thought

The current study is situated within the strategic management discipline. Consequently, the overall aim of Chapter 2, is firstly to explore the strategy phenomenon, as it pertains to the research orientation and the subsequent research problems, as discussed in Chapter 1. The second overall aim is to justify and describe the specific approach to strategy enquiry guiding this study. To achieve this second objective, a comprehensive literature review is undertaken. Figure 2.2 depicts this chapter's path in reviewing strategy research.

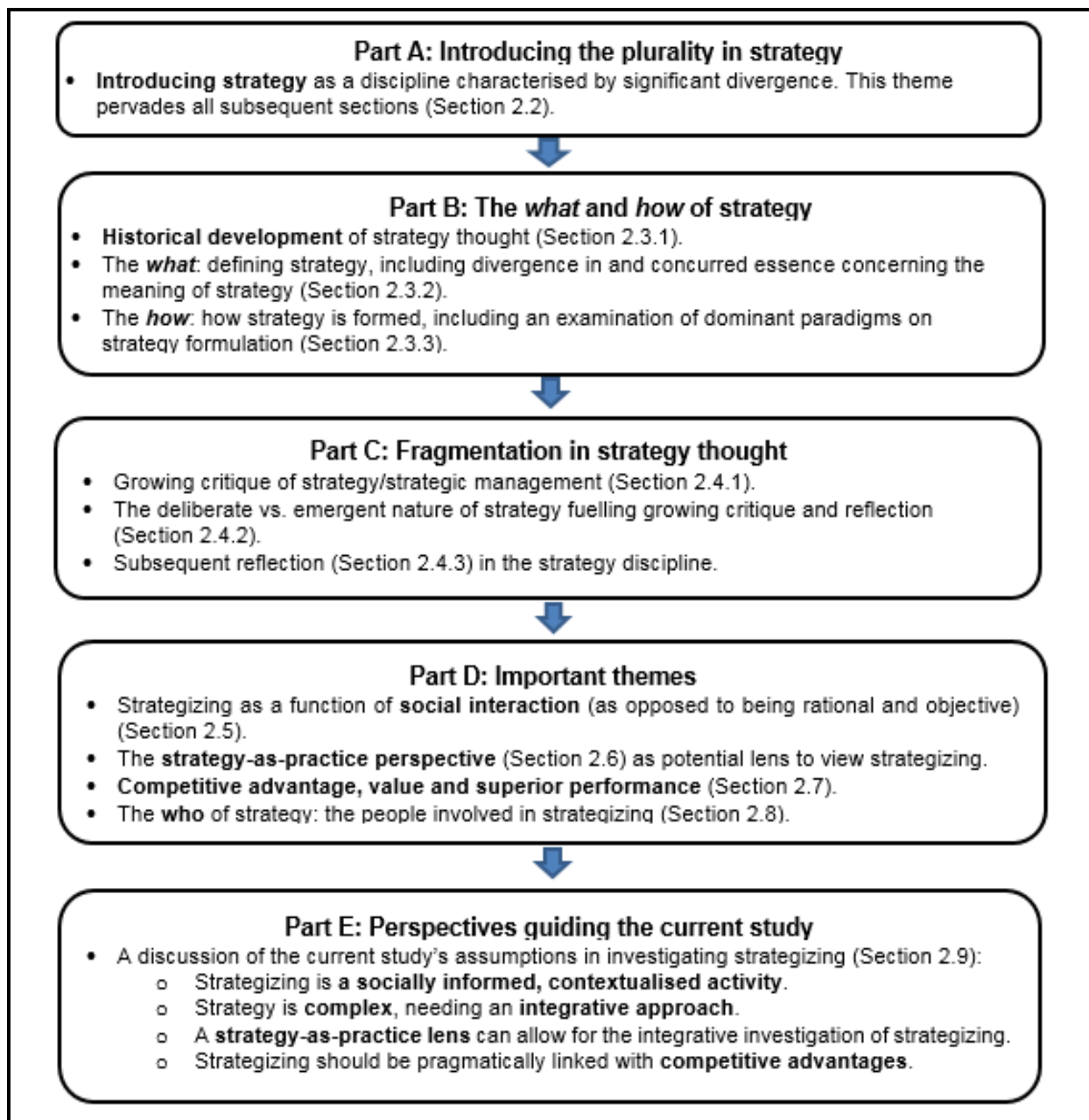


Figure 2.2: Literature review path for Chapter 2 (own compilation)

As discussed throughout the review in this chapter, the field of strategy is characterised by significant divergence regarding its definition and approaches in investigating strategy and strategy-making. Part A, depicted in Figure 2.2, consequently introduces strategy/strategic management as a field of study characterised by divergence and ambiguity. This theme of plurality pervades all the subsequent sections of Chapter 2. Part B distinguishes between *what* researchers deem strategy is and *how* strategies are formulated (strategizing). An attempt is made to delve into the main schools of thought and developments within this field regarding

the *what* and the *how*, respectively. This includes an investigation of the significant divergence between the main approaches to strategy research, as well as convergence between these perspectives regarding the essentials of strategy. Part C investigates critique regarding the legitimacy and the lack of reflexivity in the strategic management discipline. The objective of part C is to facilitate an understanding of the factors and the events leading to current strategy thought, as well as newly pursued research avenues. Part D contains an investigation of the important themes; and it also explores recent important avenues of strategy research, including aspects in need of further exploration.

Parts A to D allow for a well-informed choice of perspectives regarding strategy and strategy making that guide the current study, as described in part E. The review of this chapter thus revolves around presenting the main perspectives (as depicted in Figure 2.2 and described in Section 2.9) of the current study. The review may seem quite elaborate; but the researcher deems it necessary to aptly justify this study's adopted perspectives that diverge from traditional scholarly thought. These chosen perspectives are then further explored in Chapter 3.

2.2 THE PLURALITY OF STRATEGY

It seems that it is not that easy to succinctly coin strategy and strategy-making. Watkins (2007) suggests that many managers appreciate the importance of having strategies and to know the theory; but they struggle with the specifics of the actual strategizing process. Ronda-Pupo and Guerras-Martin (2012:163) agree; and they state: "Although strategy is one of the most taught and studied concepts, it is paradoxically also one of the least understood."

Mintzberg's article: "The Fall and Rise of Strategic Planning" (Mintzberg, 1994), signified an era of reflexivity in strategic thought. Today, various authors (as discussed throughout this chapter) that question dominant logic, offer their diverse ideas and theories. This significantly problematizes a common description of strategy. Cummings (2008:185) points to a shift towards a "plurality of views and the need for individualized practice... towards a 'postmodern' phase". Guerras-Martín, Madhok and Montoro-Sánchez (2014:70) refer to the 'eclectic and multi-disciplinary nature' of

strategy. Baum and Lampel (2010:xiii) observe a ‘concerning’ trend of fragmentation and rivalry in strategic thought. One may question the use of the term *concerning*; since fragmentation and rivalry may be viewed as a sign of necessary reflection in the evolution of strategy thought. To understand this plurality in strategy thought, one needs to investigate different ontologies (what is strategy?) of and subsequent epistemological approaches (how strategy is formed and how strategy should be studied) in the concept of strategy and strategy-making; as discussed in the following sections.

2.3 THE *WHAT* AND *HOW* OF STRATEGY

This section (part B, see Figure 2.2) will firstly briefly explore the evolution of strategy thought. The second part will investigate different views on the meaning of strategy (the *what* of strategy), followed by, in part three, an examination of dominant approaches in the study of strategizing (the *how* of strategy).

2.3.1 The evolution of strategy thought

Authors, like Clegg *et al.* (2011:6), and Stacey (2011:6), refer to people linking strategy to ancient philosophers and war commanders like Sun Tzu, Heraclitus, Pericles and the more recent Hobbes, Machiavelli and Clausewitz. Clegg *et al.* (2011:9), and Stacey (2011:9), however, view the phenomenon of strategy; as it is taught at business departments, rather than having its origins in large United States (US) firms from the period that followed the Second World War. These firms, according to the above authors, based their strategic practices on the US military’s precision planning efforts in World War II. Candy and Gordon (2011:71) suggest that strategic management, considered as synonymous to the term ‘strategic planning’, implies applying ‘military strategy principles to business competition’. Stacey (2011:9) specifically points to the development of rational techniques and tools, like linear programming and cost accounting, during the war that permeated through to strategic theory development. The above author notes the development of MBA programmes, based on financial and quantitative analysis in the 1960’s and the emergence of specialised strategy consultants, including the Boston Consulting Group in the 1960’s and the 1970’s. Likewise, in mentioning that the works of Chandler (1962), Ansoff (1965) and Andrews

(1971) gave impetus to its formation, Pettigrew, Thomas and Whittington (2002:5) propose that the modern-day field of strategy has its roots in *US academia and practice*.

Stacey (2011:9) notes that the launching of the Strategic Management Journal in 1980 and the establishment of the Strategic Management Society in 1981 signified the recognition of Strategic Management as a distinct field of study. In 2020, as stated on its website, this society had about 3000 members in over 80 countries. Baum and Lampel (2010:xii) mention that the development of strategy thought has emerged in North America and then spread to the rest of the world. These authors contend that, whereas in the past, strategy research was led by North America, research communities outside the continent are almost on par today regarding strategy research output.

2.3.2 Defining Strategy: the *what* of strategy

An investigation of the literature regarding the meaning of strategy soon reveals a plethora of descriptions and varying opinions surrounding this phenomenon. Within these sometimes-divergent views, there however seems to be some concurrence surrounding the essence of strategy. The following sections will subsequently explore the divergence in defining strategy. This will be followed by an investigation of conformity, regarding the essence of strategy.

2.3.2.1 Divergence in defining strategy

Drawing on the vast literature on strategic management, Chaffee (1985:89) concludes that the multi-dimensional character and 'situatedness' of strategy problematize consensus regarding a definition for strategic management. The above author contends that, because strategy has to be situational, its definition will vary, as industries differ. She states that constantly changing environments means that strategies are *unstructured, un-programmed, non-routine and non-repetitive*. Chaffee (1985:90) identifies a further problem hampering consensus by noting that authors have developed views and consequent definitions of strategy, based on three distinct and, sometimes conflicting, *mental models, namely: linear, adaptive and interpretive*.

De Wit and Meyer (2010:4) concur; and they suggest that, even if scholars expect a concise description of strategy, the lack of consensus between researchers and practitioners has resulted in numerous and widely varying descriptions of what strategy is. This makes this very difficult. The above authors postulate that strategy can only really be understood by embracing the ‘diversity of insights’ provided by ‘prominent thinkers’ in the field.

Guerras-Martín *et al.* (2014:69), claim that scientific strategy research exhibits the investigation of an increasing range of diverse topics, as well as the increasing employment of diverse research methodologies. Nag, Hambrick and Chen (2007:935) add that the youthful age of the field, its name changes from ‘business policy’, and its overlap with fields, like economics, finance, marketing, organisational theory, psychology and sociology problematize a single definition of the strategy concept. Thomas, Wilson and Leeds (2013:1119) refer to the ‘ambiguous’ and ‘contested’ field that overlaps with other disciplines; and they question the noticeable lack of critique of strategic management, despite these “shortcomings”. The following section explores influential authors’ (as identified by Ramos-Rodríguez & Ruíz-Navarro, 2004:989; Guerras-Martín *et al.*; 2014:70,71), ideas on the meaning (the *what*) of strategy, as depicted in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Influential authors’ views on the meaning of strategy paradigms and their main assumptions (own compilation)

Author	Main assumptions
Porter	Strategy is essentially about differentiation ; ‘performing different activities than those of rivals’, or performing the same activities differently’ (Porter, 1996:3).
Rumelt	Strategy entails reacting to challenges emanating from its operating environment; a type of problem-solving. ‘Good strategy’ entails ‘focusing’ and ‘co-ordinating’ actions to handle these challenges (Rumelt, 2011:2-5).
Barney	Strategies comprise of strong organisational resources (VRIO-internal resources that are valuable, rare, inimitable and organised) leading to competitive advantages (Barney, 1995:50; 2011:4).
Mintzberg	Strategy is ‘a pattern in a stream of actions ’ (Mintzberg & Walters, 1985:257). Strategy can be regarded as a ‘ plan ’, ‘ ploy ’, ‘ pattern ’, ‘ consistency in behaviour ’ or a ‘ perspective ’ (Mintzberg, 1987:11-18).

a. Porter

Porter (1996:3) contends that, in the search for superior performance, strategy is essentially about differentiation; 'performing different activities than those of rivals', or performing the same activities differently, in order to ultimately secure a competitive position built on differences that can be preserved. He continues to suggest that operational effectiveness entails performing activities better than rivals do (facilitated by tools like total quality management), which may provide temporary profits, but that these are not sufficient for long-term survival. He thus concludes that operational effectiveness is not a strategy; and that organisations can only outperform rivals – if they can preserve their differentiation.

b. Rumelt

This author built his ideas on the seminal work of Wernerfelt on the resourced-based view (RBV). Rumelt (2011:2-5) focuses on an organisation's reaction to challenges emanating from its operating environment, as a type of problem-solving. He postulates that the essence of 'good strategy' entails identifying and acknowledging the important challenges that an organisation faces; 'focusing' and 'co-ordinating' actions to handle these challenges. He explicitly states that strategy is not 'exhortation', observing the growing trend where strategy is wrongly equated with "... ambition, leadership, "vision", planning, or the economic logic of competition...". Thus, contrary to the notion that strategy is static and entails developing visions and missions with long-term objectives, stipulating rules for implementation.

Rumelt (2011:5,6) postulates that strategy is dynamic, defining it as "... a coherent set of analyses, concepts, policies, arguments, and actions that react to a high-stakes challenge." (Rumelt, 1993:2).

c. Barney

Along with Prahalad and Hamel, as well as Rumelt, Barney is a notable proponent of the resource based view of strategy (RBV) (with Wernerfelt, 1984 as the seminal author of this approach) that has alternated in popularity with the industrial organisation theory of strategy (IO) of Porter and others; he likened this to the swing of a pendulum (see Section 2.3.3). Barney (1995:50) has developed a model to assess

the internal 'resources' and 'capabilities' of organisations, in order to address the lack of research around the internal strengths and weaknesses, as opposed to the abundant research on the opportunities and threats in the external-operating environment of an organisation. According to the above author, this VRIO (value, rareness, imitability and organisation) model revolves around assessing the organisation's resources and capabilities by means of questioning the four issues of value, rareness, imitability and organisation (to exploit the resources and capabilities). Like Porter and Rumelt, Barney (2001:4) acknowledges the importance of creating competitive advantages by stating that a good strategy, built on strong internal resources, should be aimed at creating a competitive advantage for the organisation. He subsequently defines strategic management as: "The strategic management process is a sequential set of analyses and choices that can increase the likelihood that a firm would choose a good strategy that generates competitive advantages."

d. Mintzberg

Mintzberg (1978:934) deliberately describes strategy as: "... a pattern in a stream of decisions..." in order to allow for a broad description of the phenomenon; acknowledging the intended and emergent nature of strategy. Mintzberg and Walters (1985:257) later changed *decisions* to the more radical term *actions*, in order to accentuate the complex and emergent nature of strategy. Mintzberg believes that the strategic management discipline cannot depend on a single definition; thus, within the ambit of the above broad description, Mintzberg (1987:11-18) offers five definitions of strategy: firstly, strategy as a 'plan': deliberately devising a course of action in dealing with a challenge. Secondly, strategy as a 'ploy': a specific tactic or manoeuvre employed to outwit a competitor. Thirdly, strategy as a 'pattern' (this definition could probably encompass all the others as indicated in the first sentence of this paragraph): a 'consistency in behaviour'. Fourthly, strategy as a 'position': relative to competitors in the external environment (linking up with the previous authors of this section's ideas of competitive advantage). Fifthly, strategy as a 'perspective': the disposition (way of doing things) of the organisation.

It is important to note that Mintzberg stresses the importance of acknowledging/considering all of the above definitions, when engaging in strategy research or praxis.

From the above discussion and Table 2.1, it becomes evident that in the above strategy research, sages differ significantly in their descriptions of what strategy is. It is notable though that the above authors do agree that the purpose of strategy relates to facilitating superior performance in the face of competition through the creation of competitive advantages. The current study favours a broad definition of strategizing that alludes to its purpose: Strategizing refers to the actions impacting on the performance of organisations within their operating environments. Even though various different viewpoints exist concerning the meaning of strategy, there are certain essentials of strategy, as explored in the next section, with which researchers seem to agree.

2.3.2.2 The concurred essence of strategy

Nag *et al.* (2007:937), stress the importance of collective identity and shared purpose in strategy in guarding against legitimacy concerns and subsequent theoretical and practical attacks from other overlapping study fields, like economics and sociology. They firstly believe that researchers wrongly launch inquiry and develop a theory without acknowledging what strategy really means. Secondly, they postulate that researchers focus on the divergence of the field, instead of focusing on the essentials thereof.

Rumelt *et al.* (1994:2), concur and call for the identification of the core issues in strategy, as opposed to striving for a united paradigm. This links with the idea of Cox, Daspit, McLaughlin and Jones (2012:33) that researchers should 'mop up' – clarify paradigms, rather than engaging in numerous new theories. Even though they recognise significant divergence in strategic thought, Nag *et al.* (2007:935), do however, note a strong, implicit consensus regarding the essence of the field. Guerras-Martín *et al.* (2014:70), agree, observing the increasing consensus among researchers regarding the 'basic notions' of strategy. Nag *et al.* (2007:944), offer a consensus definition, based on the comprehensive content analysis of a large body of articles on strategy, spanning 20 years: "The field of strategic management deals with the major intended and emergent initiatives taken by general managers on behalf of owners, involving the utilization of resources, to enhance the performance of firms in their

external environments.” The above definition includes the key concepts that researchers seem to essentially agree upon: the purpose of strategic management seems to be the enhancement of performance. Furrer, Thomas and Goussevskaia (2008:6) concur; and they do so by identifying *performance* as the most prevalent keyword from a comprehensive content analysis of 2125 articles published over 26 years in four top-tier scientific journals on strategy.

The link between the above definition and the definitions offered by the strategic management sages in the previous section is obvious. In addition to performance, the definition refers to the intended and emergent nature of strategic initiatives (Mintzberg, as discussed in Sections 2.3.2.1 and 2.4.2); the utilisation of resources (comparable to the RBV-approach, as discussed in Section 2.3.2.1) and the external environments (comparable to the IO-approach, as discussed in Section 2.3.2.1). Ronda-Pupo and Guerras-Martin (2012:180), using a different research methodology, namely co-wording, have identified the same key concepts as those described by Nag *et al.* (2007:944). Sigalas and Pekka Economou (2013:61) cite numerous authors, claiming that, in seeking enhanced organisational performance, the central goal of strategy research is to explain the reasons for differing organisational performance.

From the preceding sections, it becomes evident that numerous definitions of strategy exist. Strategy is complex, diverse and multi-disciplinary in nature. A simple, narrow definition of strategy should, therefore, probably give way to a broad description thereof, encompassing and acknowledging all the components making up the meaning of this phenomenon. Rather than focusing exclusively on one component of strategy and opposing other authors' views (focusing on other parts), researchers should embrace the different views that contribute towards and describe the essence of strategy, namely; actions impacting on the performance of organisations within their operating environments. In continuing from the different ontologies, or *what* of strategy in this section, the next section will investigate different epistemologies; the *how* of strategy in the literature.

2.3.3 An overview of dominant strategy paradigms regarding the *how* of strategy

While there is a general consensus among most researchers that the purpose of strategy is to help organisations create competitive advantages, Henry (2018:4,15) suggests that the big disagreement exists around how these competitive advantages are created. Table 2.2 provides an overview of dominant strategy paradigms (from a plethora of writings and viewpoints) and those of their original proponents, as adapted from Melé and Guillén Parra (2006:2-4), Clegg *et al.* (2011:15-19), and Parnell (2014:6,7).

Table 2.2: Dominant strategy paradigms and their main assumptions (adapted from Clegg *et al.*, 2011:15-19, Melé and Guillén Parra, 2006:2-4 and Parnell, 2014:6, 7)

Dominant strategy paradigm	Main assumptions
Structure follows strategy (Chandler)	Strategy drives structure and strategy requires rational planning
Rational planning (Ansoff) Strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats SWOT-process (Humphrey)	Strategy as a planning process Strategy to be developed by top management Three levels of interaction, namely operational, administrative and strategic
The theory of the firm and strategy (Edith Penrose) Resource-based view (Wernerfelt)	The organisation as an object of economic analysis, viewing it as a collection of resources, including people Performance is viewed as a function of the firm's ability to employ their resources (resource-based view)
Industry analysis/ industrial organisation (Porter)	Industry structure will determine profitability A firm's financial performance is dependent on the industry's success
Contingency theory (Woodward)	Successful organisations develop <i>beneficial fits</i> with their external environments. This provides some sort of middle ground between the industry-analysis perspective and the resource-based view

From Table 2.2; and based on the work of Clegg *et al.* (2011:15-19), Melé and Guillén Parra (2006:2-4) and Parnell (2014, 6-7); a few observations are provided in the following section:

Chandler (1962) contends that structure follows strategy. This theory proposes that strategy drives structure and that strategy requires rational planning, including the development of long-term goals with matching plans to reach them. Ansoff views strategy as a planning process. He proposes that strategy should be developed by top management; and he identified three levels of interaction, namely; operational, administrative and strategic. Ansoff is also known for developing a product-market matrix, categorising strategies for growth. Cummings (2008:186) suggests that Ansoff's model is a simple extension of the micro-economic theory. Within this framework, Humphrey's strengths-weaknesses-opportunities-threats (SWOT) process is still popular today.

Penrose originally developed the theory of the firm and strategy. Penrose (1959) identifies the organisation as an object of economic analysis, viewing it as a 'collection of resources, including people'. Within this framework, Wernerfelt (1984) developed the resource-based view (RBV) of strategy, suggesting that strategy is concerned with the management of an organisation's internal resources. Within this perspective; performance is viewed as a function of the firm's ability to employ their resources.

Porter postulates that industry structure will determine profitability. As a sub-field of microeconomics, this IO-perspective advocates that a firm's financial performance is dependent on that of the industry in which the firm operates, and the success thereof. In advocating a process view of strategizing, Porter, an exponent of *competitive advantage*, also contends that an organisation's superior performance of activities contributing towards its value chain form the basis of competitive advantage (1985:33-52).

The Contingency theory, originally developed by Woodward, proposes that successful organisations develop *beneficial fits* with their external environments. This perspective provides a sort of *middle ground* between the previous two mentioned perspectives, advocating the link between a firm's resources and its operating environment. This view acknowledges the existence of numerous internal and external (situational) factors that may impact on an organisation. The contingency view posits that, because each situation is different and because of their perpetually changing environments,

organisations cannot devise long-term generic plans. As discussed in Chapter 1; the above section pertains to the dominant stream of, or the approach to strategic thought; linking strategy to rational thinking, rules and linearity, which are mostly anchored in economic philosophy (Verity, 2012:1-4).

Authors, like Cox, *et al.* (2012:29), as well as Furrer, *et al.* (2008:4), provide a simpler classification – by acknowledging the existence of two main approaches to strategy, namely: the resource based view (RBV) and the industrial organisation view (IO), as discussed above. It is noteworthy that these authors, like the authors referred to in Table 2.2, choose to focus only on the rational, linear and economics-driven schools of thought on strategy-making. Furrer *et al.* (2008:15), liken the evolution of theory in the field of strategy to the swings of a *dual pendulum*, with periods where an internal environment view (RBV) is favoured over an external environmental view (IO) and *vice versa*. Mintzberg *et al.* (1998:100), observe that the IO approach is fundamentally the design or rational planning school that is applied to the industry or operating environment of organisations. These authors contend that the opposing RBV approach is less prescriptive and more descriptive than the IO approach.

Sheehan and Foss (2007:450) concur and mention the critique of RBV concerning the approach's 'lack of prescriptiveness'. They postulate that, while RBV describes the criteria for resources or capabilities (VRIO questions, see Section 2.3.2.1) in facilitating superior performance, it does not guide managers as to *how* these resources contribute to competitive advantages and the subsequent superior performance. IO proposes that superior performance is only realisable through two generic strategies: cost leadership or cost differentiation (Porter, 1985:11-25). In explaining how organisations reach superior positions through the above strategies, Porter (1985:33-52) suggests that they should analyse all (instead of a general overview) the activities that are performed (in the value chain) in ultimately creating value to the customer.

2.3.3.1 An integrative approach to strategy

After reviewing about 2000 literature items and strategy in practice, Mintzberg, Ahlstrand and Lampel (1998) provided a comprehensive discussion of 10 different schools of thought on strategy formation, as depicted in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3: Different schools of thought on strategy formation (Adapted from Mintzberg, Ahlstrand & Lampel, 1998:3)

Classification	Schools of strategy	Description - Strategy formation as a:
Prescriptive	Design school	Process of conception
	Planning school	Formal Process
	Positioning school	Analytical process
Describe how strategy are formed	Entrepreneurial school	Visionary process
	Cognitive school	Mental process
	Learning school	Emergent process
	Power school	Process of negotiation
	Cultural school	Collective process
	Environmental school	Reactive process
Integrative; combines other schools	Configuration school	Process of transformation

From the table, and based on Mintzberg *et al.* (1998), the following observations are relevant:

The first three schools depicted in the table are prescriptive in nature, prescribing how strategy should be formulated. These schools are significantly favoured in the teaching of strategic management, as well as its research and conception in practice (see also Mintzberg, 1990:171). The second six schools are more concerned about describing how strategy is actually formed. The last school advocates the integrative combination and clustering of the prescriptive schools and the ‘practice of strategic change’ into distinct ‘stages or episodes’. Mintzberg *et al.* (1998:373), duly calls for the comprehensive, integrative investigation of the complicated ‘strategy formation beast’: “And we need to be more comprehensive - to concern ourselves with process and content, statics and dynamics, constraint and inspiration, the cognitive and the collective, the planned and the learned, the economic and the political. In other words, in addition to probing its parts, we must give more attention to the whole beast of strategy formation.”

Chaffee (1985) links the development of strategy thought to three 'mental models' of strategy. From an extensive strategy literature study, she suggests that authors have anchored their description of strategy, based on three distinctive, sometimes conflicting 'mental models': Firstly, the 'linear model broadly' refers to the sequential steps of strategy planning; formulation and the implementation thereof. Secondly, the 'adaptive model' entails matching the organisation's resources with the opportunities and threats in its operating environment. Lastly, the 'interpretive model', in contrast to the previous models, favours a 'social contract' view of strategy; the organisation consists of a number of 'cooperative agreements' between individuals. This interpretive model (Chaffee describes it as a new model in 1985) posits that reality is socially constructed, thereby negating the ideas advocated in the first two models that strategy-making is objective, or detached, from the people conceiving and implementing it.

The first two models described by Chaffee may be comparable to the dominant paradigms depicted in Table 2.3, as well as the first three (prescriptive) schools depicted in Table 2.3. Extending from the early ideas posed by Mintzberg and various proponents of the interpretive model, as described by Chaffee (1985), recent literature displays increasingly support for the notion that strategy formation is not always rational and linear, but irrational, non-linear and messy; and it is based on social theory and anthropology (Verity, 2012:1-4; Rasche, 2008:1; Critchley, 2012:168-169, see Chapter 1). Strategic management, as a function of social interaction, will be investigated further on in this chapter.

The above section reveals the main paradigms prevalent in strategic thought from the initial prescriptive linking of strategy to rational planning (Chandler and Ansoff), followed by the IO theory (Porter) and RBV (Penrose, Wernerfeld and other proponents, like Barney and Rumelt) and the contingency view (Woodward). It seems that the order of paradigms listed in the previous sentence represents a gradual move away from prescriptive, generalised planning, to a more descriptive, integrative approach towards strategy. This idea is furthered by Mintzberg *et al.* (1998), with their integrative configuration school and Chaffee (1985) with her interpretive model, where the focus is placed on the acknowledgement of numerous factors that may impact on

strategy; inclusivity rather than exclusivity. Furrer *et al.* (2008:16), postulate that this integrative trend in strategy enquiry will probably continue for years to come.

It seems that operating environments are volatile, and that organisations' resources and the employment thereof vary distinctively. Add to this a plethora of external and internal influences and it becomes clear that strategy and its formation is a very complex concept that does not allow for simple descriptions and ready-made generic recipes. While there seems to be some sort of consensus regarding the outcome or purpose of successful strategizing, *how* this should be achieved remains a hotly contested issue. According to Rumelt *et al.* (1984:3), most researchers agree that the study of strategy is concerned with identifying factors that ensure organisational success, but that the path to be followed is unclear. This concludes the exploration of *what* strategy is and *how* it is formulated.

Instead of converging towards commonality, recent times have seen an increase in divergence in the discipline of strategic management. The merits of strategic management, as a science, are even being questioned. Following on from the initial introduction of the plurality of strategy, the next section (part C, see Figure 2.2) will explore fragmentation in strategy thought. This is done, in an attempt to understand the undercurrents shaping current strategy thought.

2.4 A FRAGMENTED DISCIPLINE

Strategy is a much criticised and contested field of study. Mitigating the significant rivalry between scholars and the fragmented ideas in strategy thought, Pettigrew *et al.* (2002:5), theorise that 'truth' and the subsequent enquiry in a discipline are shaped through social struggles between their scholars. The above authors continue to propose that many aspects of the development of the young field of strategy correspond with other social and management fields. Pettigrew *et al.* (2002:5), refer to the kaleidoscope metaphor used by Foucault (1966), where developments in a field ultimately display an untidy mosaic; patterns of thought or theories are merely present, whether they are true or not. This, according to these authors, stands in contrast to the supposed rational and cumulative linear progression in the natural sciences. The

following section will explore different viewpoints within and the extensive critique of this fragmented discipline.

2.4.1 Critique of strategy as a field of study

There seems to be a growing critique of the dominant rational and deliberate approach to strategic thought. Clegg *et al.* (2011:xxiv), elucidate this notion: “(the economics discipline) ...may be seen as profoundly blinkered, creating science-fictions spun from the entrails of deliberately limited assumptions. ...Strategy emerged as a macho, testosterone-charged younger brother of economics.” Critique of the classical, prescriptive stream of strategy thought, is being driven to new levels, following the recent worldwide financial crisis (Glegg, *et al.*, 2011:xxiii, 35). These authors ask that, if strategic processes were in place, why did nobody foresee the crisis? Stacey (2011:4, 5) even enquires whether the failure of organisations during this time was because of an unreliable body of strategy knowledge, or because of the negligence of top management. The above author concludes that, in the light of the 2008-2012 financial crisis and the failure of numerous industries, it is not rational to ignore legitimate concerns about the reliability of the dominant body of knowledge of strategy. Mintzberg (2015) openly criticises Harvard Business School’s classical approach to strategic management qualifications, by citing the failure of the majority of their supposed best past students.

a. A reductionist approach to strategy

Gregory (2007:1) argues that strategic management process failures may be ascribed to the dominance of various reductionist approaches to strategic management. Likewise; Stacey (2011:235-260) questions the linearity of dominant strategic discourse; proclaiming that the social sciences have borrowed ‘Newtonian’ laws (of linearity) from the natural sciences. A proponent of the complexity sciences; the above author, then continues by suggesting that, even in the natural world, systems cannot be reduced to linear, fixed laws that can be controlled by humans. He describes the theories of ‘mathematical chaos’ and ‘dissipative structures’, thereby positing that a system, even in the natural world, is characterised by non-linear interaction between its components, leading to infinite possible outcomes that cannot be predicted.

A system thus consists of much more than the sum of its parts. This ‘uncertainty’, Stacey (2011:243) suggests, stands in stark contrast with the natural and social science’s preoccupation with equilibrium and stability; and he explains: “If this were to apply to an organisation, then decision-making processes that involved forecasting, envisioning future states, or even making any assumptions about future states, would be problematic in terms of realising a chosen future. Those applying such processes in conditions of stable instability would be engaging in fantasy activities.”

b. No common agreed definition of strategy

Thomas *et al.* (2013:1119), contend that, even though it seems to command recognition within organisational theory and practice, strategic management does not display a common agreed, distinct definition, or convincing evidence of a positive correlation between strategic management practice and superior organisational performance. The above authors thus suggest that strategic management has not really proven itself as a science or as being pragmatically valuable to organisations. The researcher has encountered the above indictments (or nuances regarding it) in different readings on this field of study; and it is discussed throughout this chapter.

c. The rationality and prescriptiveness of traditional strategy thought

In their critique on the prescriptive, rational, school of thought on strategy-making, Mintzberg and Walters (1985:257) posit that planned strategies create a separation between the *formulation* and the *implementation* with centrally developed plans, programmes and procedures passed down along organisational hierarchies. Mintzberg *et al.* (1998:33), suggest that, with the above modus operandi; the “thinkers are separated from the doers”. Citing psychologists’ studies (for example that of Kiesler, 1971), Mintzberg and Walters (1985:257) propose that the articulation of intentions of planned strategies hinders the flexibility and the willingness to change among employees. In critiquing strategic planning, Mintzberg (1994:107) submits that, as implemented in the prescriptive fashion of conventional strategy-making thought, planning (analysing) actually impairs strategic thinking.

The importance of vision, creativity and the art of strategic thinking, are dismissed. Likewise, De Wit and Meyer (2010:7) claim that some authors believe that strategizing is more ‘intuitive’ and ‘creative’ than to being rational in nature. They propose that

instead of being a linear, formulation-implementation recipe, strategy-making is an iterative process, incrementally emerging as organisations go along. The above authors further contend that creating a comprehensive, well-coordinated strategy is very difficult because, 1), different sections within organisations face different challenges and timeframes; and, 2), the prevailing organisational culture, politics, habits and traditions possibly result in inertia or resistance to change. They conclude that strategizing is thus rather 'gradual' and 'fragmented' than 'radical' and 'coordinated'. The growing critique on conventional strategic thought was possibly sparked by Mintzberg and Walter's (1985) work on the emergent nature of strategies. In the following section, the deliberate versus the emergent nature of strategies will be investigated.

2.4.2 The deliberate versus the emergent nature of strategies

Clegg *et al.* (2011:118), state that: "Strategy at Google emerges from a web of interactions that are neither planned nor centrally controlled." This quote from the business giants Google, indicates the important role of emergent strategies in organisations. In a comprehensive study comparing intended and realised strategy, Mintzberg and Walters (1985:257) question the traditional notion that strategies are centrally formulated and then implemented. Investigating how strategies are formed, the above authors propose that the strategy formation process should be viewed from a much wider perspective, considering multiple ways in which strategies can be shaped. These authors conclude that, as indicated in Figure 2.3, intended strategies may lead to realised strategies (through deliberate actions) or unrealised strategies. They further state that sometimes strategies "emerge in spite of, or in the absence of intention".

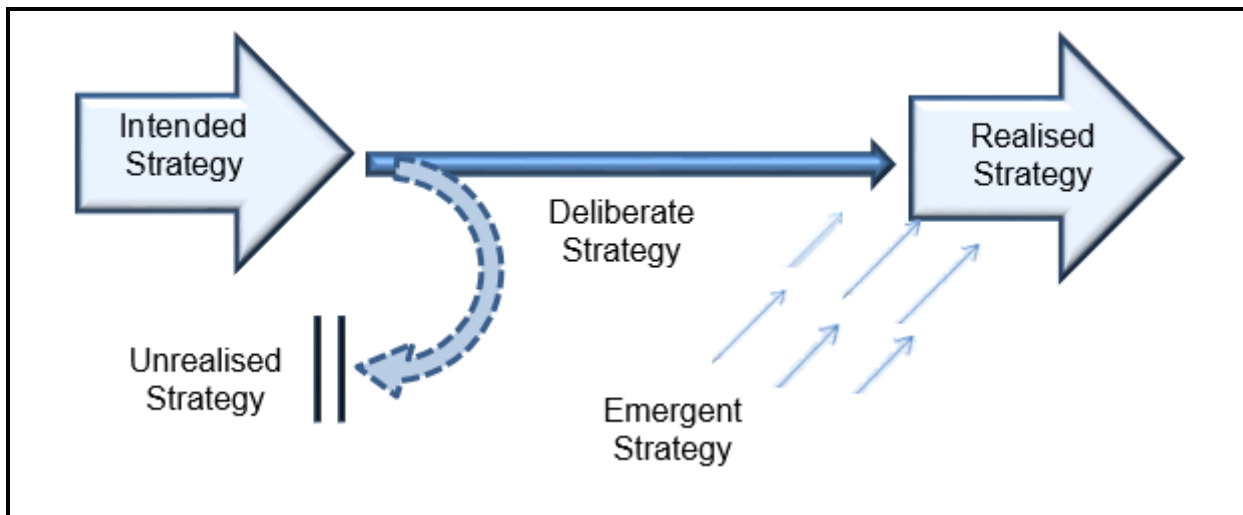


Figure 2.3: Types of strategies (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand & Lampel, 1998:12)

Mintzberg and Walters (1985:257) thus claim that strategies represent patterns of consistent activities that may evolve in the absence of deliberate intent; many strategies are thus *emergent*. The above authors propose that strategy-making should be studied as ‘patterns in streams of actions, and not as decisions; since decisions imply intention too’. The emergence theme may be viewed as a precursor to the recent, much publicised, strategy-as-practice movement (Whittington, 2015). The above authors conclude that no strategies are exclusively deliberate or emergent; but rather they tend to lean towards one of the opposing sides (deliberate or emergent) on a continuum.

Organisations require a mixture of both types of the above strategies; an ‘umbrella’ strategy consisting of a broad, deliberate outline, allowing the emergence of details along the way (Mintzberg, *et al.*, 1998:11). As proclaimed in his keynote address at the 2015 Academy of Management’s annual meeting, Mintzberg is still a proponent of the emergent-deliberate theory today; and he still advocates finding a balance between both strategy-approaches. Similarly, Maritz, Pretorius and Plant (2011:101) acknowledge the existence of deliberate and emergent strategies in organisations; and they note the increased prevalence of emergent strategy-making in organisations today.

As posed in the preceding sections, it seems that Mintzberg’s work heralded the beginning of reflexion in the field of strategy, with many authors questioning the

dominant stream of strategic thought, which largely recognise only deliberate strategy-making. The following section investigates this call for reflection.

2.4.3 Reflexivity in strategy research

Mintzberg *et al.* (1998:ix), articulate the call for reflexivity: “For as we argue throughout, the field of strategic management needs to be opened up, not closed down; it needs reconciliation among its many different tendencies, not the isolation of each.” The above quotation of Mintzberg *et al.*, alludes to the need for a more holistic approach to studying strategy. Thomas *et al.* (2013:1123), maintain that, like with most disciplines, many scholars of strategy choose to ignore the impact of social and political context on the production and consumption of academic discourse. These authors question this significant lack of reflexivity among researchers in ignoring or modulating social and political influences, offering knowledge as the ‘truth’ based on rigorous, ‘value-free’ research.

In a comprehensive overview of Mintzberg and his colleagues’ research during the preceding years, Mintzberg *et al.* (1998:18), reiterate that most strategic thought and teachings revolve around rational, clear, prescriptive phases of formulation, implementation and control. Mintzberg and Lampel (1999:26) openly criticise Porter’s views that the strategy process is exclusively deliberate and deductive. The above authors submit that Porter, like most strategy researchers, focuses only on one part of the strategy process; and he chooses to ignore all the other components that shape the beast of strategy formation. Concurrently, Pettigrew *et al.* (2002:3), mention that researchers deliberately limit their scope of strategy studies; because they are wary of the old saying that you might end up seeing nothing – if you attempt to see everything. Mintzberg and Lampel (1999:26) duly call for a more balanced, comprehensive view of the field with specific consideration of the non-rational/ non-prescriptive schools of thought. Pettigrew *et al.* (2002:3), echo these sentiments and note that researchers from the other social sciences, like economics, history and psychology also, like strategy, investigate aspects, such as organisational performance and direction. The above authors call for inclusive ‘open and reciprocal relationships with the social sciences and humanities’ through ‘intellectual bridging’

and the 'transfer' between different fields to facilitate the development of all management fields.

Mintzberg was probably the first researcher to successfully challenge conventional strategic thought (Jeve & Lee, 2012). It must be noted though that Chaffee (1985:92) did, already in 1985, identify numerous authors supporting a 'social contract' view of strategy (the interpretive model; see Section 2.3.3). Wolf and Floyd (2013:2) submit that, ever since Mintzberg's critique of strategic planning in the eighties and nineties, there has been a steady drop in strategic planning research in favour of more reflexive studies from a sociology perspective. Clegg *et al.* (2011:13), concur by identifying the significant importance of practice/process, as the fastest growing concern in strategy research today. Furrer *et al.* (2008:16), suggest that the more descriptive resourced based view (RBV) of strategy has allowed for the identification and development of 'complex social resources', thereby signifying a diminishing contradiction between the behavioural and the economic sciences. The above authors, however, calls for a more balanced, integrative view of strategy. This contrasts with the economics-driven RBV that reduces strategy to various components that need to be analysed. In supporting Mintzberg's views, numerous scholars ask for reflexivity in strategy research, pleading for a socialised perspective and *situatedness* (linking with the idea of strategy emerging from patterns) in strategy (Baum & Lampel, 2010:xiii-xviii; Clegg *et al.*; 2011: xxiii-xxv; Critchley, 2012:168-169; Cummings, 2008:182-192; Rasche, 2008:1-36; Stacey, 2011:2-22). Stacey (2011:12) notes that the criticism of corporate planning already started in the 1980s, following the global oil crisis in the 1970s. He claims that since then, the effectiveness of strategy has always been challenged.

The classical, economics-based, rational, formal strategic planning view has been, 1), criticised for over 30 years, 2), no clear evidence links company performance with formal strategic planning (Falshaw & Glaister, 2006:9-30; Stacey, 2011:4,14, Thomas *et al.*, 2013:119) and, 3), the 2008-2012 worldwide economic crisis questions its reputation. This may lead one to ask why it is still the dominant strategic school of thought today. The answer may lie in the notion that scholars favour the dominance of a certain paradigm, thereby ruling out the confusion of pluralism (Rasche, 2008:46). Perhaps it is because of strategy's roots in post-war, large US firms, developing rational, quantitative tools and techniques (see Section 2.3.1).

Thomas *et al.* (2013:119), as well as De Wit and Meyer (2010:xviii), claim that the discursive construction of strategic management history revolves around the interests of the presenters of this history and ensuring the growth of the study field, providing legitimacy to the field of strategy. De Wit and Meyer (2010:xviii) add that it could also be that publishers favour the 'locking' of strategy literature into an unopposed set of broadly accepted practices. Stacey (2011:3) postulates that readers of strategy textbooks expect a "...set of tools and techniques, which can be applied to an organisation to yield strategic successes and avoid failures...".

De Wit and Meyer (2010:xviii) concur, denoting the distinct 'industry recipe' found in most textbooks on strategy; and they mention that textbooks have changed very little since the inception of strategy as a field of study. The above authors further state that almost all textbooks share common characteristics, including "few differing perspectives", a "step-by-step structure", "no primary material"- scientific articles are reworked by the author, as well as a "domestic orientation", as supposed to an international orientation. Parnell's (2011) work on strategic management serves as a good example of a typical strategy textbook for students at business schools (See also Stacey, 2011:3). Even though Parnell acknowledges the existence a social stream of strategic thought, he subscribes to the classical view of strategy, summarising the steps of strategic management as: 1), external analysis, 2), internal analysis, 3), strategy formulation, 4), strategy execution, and, 5), strategic control.

Cox *et al.* (2012:25), cite numerous authors that question the legitimacy of strategy or strategic management as an academic discipline. Cox *et al.* (2012:25), note that these authors claim that strategy displays many divergent definitions. It does not possess its "own unique theory"; and it is lacking in practical applicability. Applying Biglan's (1973) requirements for academic disciplines, Cox *et al.* (2012:32,33), however, conclude that strategic management should be regarded as an academic discipline. The above authors base their conclusion (as prescribed by Biglan) firstly on the premise that strategic management displays two overarching paradigms (RBV and IO; see Section 2.3.1) that guide scientific inquiry. Secondly, they cite various studies confirming the practical application of strategy theory. In addition to the above justifications offered, Cox *et al.* (2012:33), observe the existence of professional strategic management

bodies facilitating a significant amount of research literature, as well as the existence of numerous worldwide strategy-related education programmes.

Nag *et al.* (2007:937), note the flourishing strategy field seen in the proliferation of scientific writings and available tenures for strategic management scholars. The above authors initially find it puzzling that the strategy field of study thrives, despite an obvious lack of consensus regarding its definition and the various diverse approaches. They conclude that the answer to the above puzzle is that there is consensus among researchers regarding the meaning (essentials) of strategy; a *collective identity* with a distinctive strategy lexicon (see Section 2.3.2.2). Cummings (2008:6) maintains that, in order for the study of strategy to be acknowledged as a reputable science, scholars should:

- Adopt a more pragmatic mind-set, recognising different approaches to strategy research, including the classical and the new emergent views;
- embrace the paradox of strategy, rather than adopting an either-or stance; and
- focus less on a single definition for good strategy.

Vaara (2010:29) calls for a "...multi-faceted inter-discursive approach that can help to go beyond simplistic views on strategy, as unified discourse; and these should pave the way for new research efforts."

The above section alludes to the growing criticism of a narrow, prescriptive, rational and linear view of strategy and strategy formation. For various authors (as mentioned in the preceding sections), the failure of organisations during the recent worldwide financial crisis, and other earlier crises, serve as a serious indictment of the above approach to strategy. Despite its apparent shortcomings and a significant drop in its popularity in academic enquiry, it seems that most strategy textbooks and strategy education programmes persistently offer generic prescriptive strategy guidelines to ensure superior performance. The resourced based view (RBV) of strategy has relaxed the shackles of prescriptiveness. Even though the seminal work of Wernerfelt (1984) favours a rational, economics-orientated perspective, this more descriptive way of depicting strategy (of RBV) has allowed for enquiry into new areas or issues (including social issues) that may impact on strategy formation and, ultimately,

superior performance (see for example the works of Barney and Rumelt), an avenue that the current study intends to pursue. Authors are increasingly calling for a more comprehensive view, acknowledging a wide variety of possible factors that may impact on strategy formation.

Referring to the dominant narrow view of strategy formation that disregards the existence of other possible influences, Mintzberg (2010:32) asserts that business schools are equipping students with ‘an incomplete toolkit’. If one is to comprehensively consider all of the possible influences or actions that may impact on the eventual emergence of strategy, *à la* Mintzberg, one may ask whether it is even possible to truly determine how strategy is formed, and then to determine how it may impact on organisational performance. One may then ponder over how broadly inclusive or narrow the study of strategy should be, in order to truly determine how strategy impacts on performance. This *how* of strategy (how it is formed and how it impacts on performance) is certainly not agreed upon; and the debate around it may continue for a long time to come. The current study intends to add to the debate, exploring the strategy-making process and how it shapes competitive advantages.

The above section also alludes to the growing enquiry into social theory; a social contract view of strategy. Introducing an exploration of important themes in the field of strategy research (Part D, see Figure 2.2) the next section will contain a brief investigation of the above phenomenon.

2.5 STRATEGIZING AS A FUNCTION OF SOCIAL INTERACTION

Smircich and Stubbart (1985:724) observed, already in 1985, an ‘interpretive sociology’ view of strategy among researchers: “...environments are enacted through the social construction and the interaction processes of organized actors.” This viewpoint posits that, in contrast to the notion that strategy entails seeking congruence between independent external environments and the internal organisational environments, organisational members shape their environments through social interaction. The above authors then suggest that failures of strategic management can be ascribed to the lacking acknowledgement of the ‘social nature’ of strategy formation. Chaffee (1985:89) concurrently observes the existence of an integrative

mental model in approaching strategy. This model, the above author submits, advocates a 'social contract' view, where the organisations comprise several 'cooperative agreements' between individuals. Bryant, Darwin and Booth (2011:842) observe the evolution of strategy from a 'portfolio of businesses' (IO) to a 'portfolio of capabilities' (RBV) to the contemporary 'portfolio of relationships' (social view of strategy formation).

Today, authors like Rasche (2008:1), Clegg *et al.* (2011:13), Stacey (2011:235-260) and Critchley (2012:169) criticise the dominant managerial-economist strategy theories that subscribe to de-humanised rational decision-making. The above authors call for the scholarly inquiry strategy to be an 'empirically informed social science' (Clegg *et al.*, 2011:13). Godwyn and Hoffer Gittell (2012:xi) refer to the central assumption of sociology that society has a 'non-rational basis'. The above authors argue that, contrary to dominant strategy thought, reasoning is based on non-rational, emotional processes between people. rather than on rational processes. Jarzabkowski, Kaplan, Seidl, and Whittington (2015:9) determine that strategic practices cannot be viewed independently; since they are significantly influenced by the people that perform them.

It seems that researchers are increasingly acknowledging that strategy is essentially shaped by human beings with subjective feelings and realities, as well as their interactions with other human beings. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Critchley (2012:168-169) postulates that the concept of organisation merely represents continuous interaction between organisational actors, resulting in shared meaning. Despite growing research into this field of strategy research, an interpretive sociology perspective of strategy formation needs more exploration. The alleged failures of conventional strategic management and the calls from authors (as discussed earlier in this section) for a more integrative view of strategy seem to strengthen this call for social enquiry. The current study heeds the call for a social perspective on strategy and strategy-making by investigating social interaction, including its complexities and nuances. Chapter 3 consequently contain an in-depth investigation of the impact of social interaction on strategy-making.

The strategy-as-practice perspective represents a relatively young branch in the field of strategy enquiry. It could provide a lens through which social interaction in strategy-making may be investigated. The next section is subsequently devoted to a brief overview of the strategy-as-practice perspective.

2.6 THE STRATEGY-AS-PRACTICE PERSPECTIVE

An investigation of the works of authors, like Jarzabkowski (2005); Johnson *et al.* (2007); the Strategy-as-Practice International Network (2010); Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl and Vaara (2010); Vaara and Whittington (2012), as well as Whittington (2015) reveal the following basic assumptions about strategy-as-practice:

- a) Strategy-as-practice is a relatively recent approach that probably has its historical roots in the early 1990's work of Henry Mintzberg; it focuses on the micro-level, socialised activities that make up strategy-making;
- b) it serves as a link between contemporary strategy thought with practice-focused organisational studies;
- c) it provides for a more comprehensive, in-depth analysis of all activities that deal with strategy, thus investigating the proverbial "black box" of strategy work;
- d) it encourages theoretical pluralism in strategy research, pragmatically setting very broad research parameters, including an integrative study of strategic practitioners, practices and praxis;
- e) in contrast to contemporary research theory attempting to provide tools and models on how to effectively strategize, it focuses on what strategy practitioners actually do; and
- f) it is linked to the overall *practice turn* in contemporary social sciences; this turn is visible in many areas of social sciences research.

From the above, it seems that the strategy-as-practice perspective provides for an integrative view of strategy and strategizing. This view recognises the actual activities (praxis) of strategy actors (practitioners) within the context of intra- and extra-organisational influences (practices) (Jarzabkowski, *et al.*, 2015:3-17). This approach provides for a lens through which to view the social interactions between strategy practitioners and how these interactions influence strategizing within an organisation.

Subsequently, in Chapter 3, together with social interaction, the strategy-as-practice perspective will be explored. Special attention is given to how this perspective can provide a platform for the investigation of social interaction in strategizing (see Figure 1.1 in Chapter 1).

It is noticeable that the strategy-as-practice perspective does not explicitly endeavour to link strategizing activities to some sort of performance measurement. Whittington (2007:1578) refers to the process approach to strategy that promotes the linkage of strategizing to strategic outcomes. The above author suggests that the strategy-as-practice perspective differs from dominant strategy approaches by rather focusing on a deeper understanding of strategic activities, rather than on performance. Jarzabkowski *et al.* (2015:10,11), propose that strategic practices need to be understood – not just because of their possible advantages, or disadvantages, for performance. These authors propose that the legitimisation and subsequent reinforcement of practices, even if they turn out to be detrimental to performance, necessitate its close scrutiny even more. Regnér (2012:195-196), however, calls for the use of a strategy-as-practice perspective in efforts to understand the emergence of competitive positioning. The above author proposes that scholars should consider linking practitioners, practices and praxis to outcomes in a more concrete way. Regnér (2012:195-196) thus requests a narrowing of the gap between the institutional performance approaches (traditional strategy studies) and the activity-based approaches (for example a strategy-as-practice perspective).

In the current study, Regnér's (2012) call for a strategy-as-practice view that connects more with the traditional view of strategy-making, is heeded. Even if significant divergence on how strategy is formed and how the study of strategy should be approached is evident, many researchers seem to agree on the essential meaning of strategy (see Section 2.3), as well as the purpose thereof. Whether scholars subscribe to the IO; RBV; integrative; or any other approach for that matter; they still need to pragmatically link strategy to superior performance. The following section will subsequently be dedicated to the above-mentioned concept.

2.7 COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE, VALUE AND SUPERIOR PERFORMANCE

This section reveals the importance of competitive advantage in the strategic-management vocabulary. In exploring social interaction, the current study aims to pragmatically link this interaction with superior performance. As indicated in Section 2.3.2.2, after conducting comprehensive studies, researchers (Nag, *et al.*, 2007:944; Furrer, *et al.*, 2008:6; Ronda-Pupo & Guerras-Martin, 2012:180), have identified performance, or the enhancement thereof, as the most prevalent issue across numerous strategy studies. Drawing on Rumelt, Schendel and Teece (1994), Sheenan and Foss (2007:450-451) conclude that the field of strategy's growth depends on the discipline successfully addressing the questions of why certain organisations outperform others; how organisations get in a position to outperform others; and how they can maintain that position. Powell, Rahman and Starbuck (2010:313) concur and postulate that the strategic-management field exists because organisations perform differently from one another.

It is evident from the literature (as discussed in the preceding sections) that the dominant paradigms in strategy research agree on the purpose of strategic management. The respective proponents of the industrial organisational theory (IO, see Porter, 1980; 1985; 1996) and the resource-based view (RBV, see Prahalad & Hamel, 1990; Barney, 1991, 1995, 2001; Rumelt, *et al.*, 1994; Rumelt, 2011) agree that the purpose of strategy entails the creation of superior performance through competitive advantages.

The foremost proposition contends that superior performance derives from competitive advantage (Sigalas & Pekka Economou, 2013:62). From the above authors' studies, it becomes apparent that the difference in the IO and RBV approaches revolves around how competitive advantages are developed (the sources thereof). IO postulates that competitive advantages derive from a firm's position in the market (relative to other companies in the same industry); while RBV advocates that an organisation's resources and capabilities (that differ between organisations) create competitive advantages. Powell *et al.* (2010:314), as well as Sigalas and Pekka Economou (2013:73) agree that competitive advantage is the *core theme* in contemporary strategy research. Powell *et al.* (2010:314), further agree with the above

description of differing views between IO and RBV. They further add an evolutionary view of competitive advantage. This evolutionary view, according to them, maintains that superior performance originates from an organisation's 'entrepreneurial innovation or opportunism'; exploiting market opportunities.

2.7.1 Opposing views on how competitive advantages are realised

There seems to be no clear, agreed-upon definition of competitive advantage and how it is achieved (Sigalas, Pekka Economou & Georgopoulos, 2013:320). These authors call for the development of valid measure of competitive advantage, in order to facilitate the empirical testing. Before this can happen, they maintain that a single and unambiguous operational definition of competitive advantage is imperative. The following sections will explore competitive advantage, as approached by the two dominant paradigms.

2.7.1.1 An industrial organisation view of competitive advantage

In his book on competitive advantage and based on his original work on competitive strategy in 1980, Porter (1985:1) contends that competitive strategy refers to an organisation's 'search for a favourable competitive position in an industry'. He further discusses (p.1-3) two underlying central issues that influence competitive strategy. The first issue deals with the varying profit potential of different industries; while the second issue deals with the relative position of organisations within an industry. The profit of an organisation is thus, according to Porter (1985:1), supposedly determined by the profit potential of the industry in which it operates, as well as the organisation's competitive position relative to other organisations within that industry. With this 1985-publication, Porter attempts to provide organisations with the know-how to create and sustain competitive advantage in their industries. Attempting to address the question of how to achieve competitive advantages, Porter introduces the *value chain* and *activities-based view* (1985:33-52).

The value chain, Porter posits, represents all the activities that organisations perform in ultimately delivering a valuable offering to the client. He further postulates that these activities (that become the unit of analysis within the value chain), in creating value for

customers, are the sources of competitive advantages in two generic areas: cost leadership or differentiation.

2.7.1.2 A resourced based view of competitive advantage

In contrast to Porter (1985), and in drawing on the seminal work of Penrose (1959) and Wernerfelt (1984:171), Barney (1995:50) advocates the significant importance of the 'resource position' (*strengths and weaknesses*) of an organisation. As discussed in Section 2.3.2.1, Barney (1995:50) suggests that an organisation's competitive advantages arise from its internal 'resources' and 'capabilities'. His VRIO model proposes that the resources and capabilities' characteristics regarding their value (V), rareness (R), imitability (I) and organisation (O) will determine their potential in creating sustainable competitive advantages for an organisation. Although the above description may represent a simplistic view of RBV (Barney, 2001:648 alludes to the different viewpoints of RBV), it refers to the essence of RBV. Building on their earlier work on RBV of 1991 and 1993, respectively, Peteraf and Barney (2003) attempt to offer clearer descriptions regarding the basic assumptions of RBV. These authors (page 311) suggest that competitive advantages arise from scarce resources that organisations employ superiorly; enabling the firm to reduce costs (they allude to the importance of efficiency vis-à-vis economic theory) and/or creating value for the customer. Heterogeneity between resources, according to the above authors, thus leads to difference in performance between organisations. Hinterhuber (2013:796) laments the RBV for its inability to explain or predict competitive advantage; contending that the RBV can only describe it *ex post*.

Peteraf and Barney (2003, 312) acknowledge that analyses on levels; and rather than the enterprise (RBV), they contribute in explaining variance in performance. These authors then continue to recognise the importance of industry-level analysis; while they admit that RBV cannot replace IO, but it should rather be used to complement industry-level analytical tools. In concurrence with Porter; Peteraf and Barney (2003:314) lastly advocate the view that competitive advantages create superior value for the customers.

2.7.2 Convergence regarding competitive advantages

A comprehensive investigation of the works of established authors (as discussed in the above sections) favouring IO and RBV respectively, reveals significant convergence. Although these approaches focus on different levels of analysis, both do acknowledge that organisations operate in competitive environments. They also maintain that organisations, in their search for superior performance, seek to create sustainable competitive advantages. Heterogeneity between the activities (for IO; in terms of cost leadership or differentiation drivers) or resources (for RBV; in terms of scarcity or the employment thereof) of different organisations explain varying performance among organisations. This alludes to the importance of considering competition in both views. Sminia (2014:8) claims that competitiveness stands central to strategy and that competitive advantage is most commonly used by strategy researchers to explain superior performance and, ultimately, success. Concurrently, proponents of the social-based view of strategy (as discussed in Section 5) like Clegg *et al.* (2011:48), acknowledge competitive strategy as a “central aspect of a strategist’s work”. Even though proponents of the social view of strategy lament Porter’s oversimplified, outside-in view of competitive strategy, neglecting to recognise the importance of numerous internal organisational influences, he apparently still provides valuable insights into the purpose of organisations (Rasche, 2008:77-78; Rindova, *et al.*, 2012:147-148).

Agreeing with Porter, Clegg *et al.* (2011:52), as proponents of the social view of strategy, state: “Scholars agree that the primary purpose of strategic management is to guide the organisation in achieving superior organisational performance; as it develops a sustainable competitive advantage in the environment in which it operates.”

2.7.3 Competitive advantage and value creation

Drucker, in Watson (2002:56) states: “Financial people believe businesses make money. In reality, businesses make products for customers. Money is a consequence earned by products delivering value that customers are willing to purchase.” This quote links up with the convergent assumption in major strategy paradigms that competitive

advantages relate to the activities (IO) and resources or capabilities (RBV) of organisations that create superior value for its customers. In as early as 1776, Adam Smith claimed that satisfying the needs of consumers should dictate the needs of organisations (NetMBA, 2012). In an interview with Gregory Watson in 2001, Drucker reiterates his postulation of 1954 that the purpose of enterprises revolves around creating and keeping customers by stating: “There is only one valid definition of business purpose: to create a customer.” (Watson, 2002:55). Drucker amplifies this comment by contending that all organisational activities represent cost centres and only the organisation’s paying clients can be regarded as profit centres (Watson, 2012:57).

In layman’s terms, regarding the business of private higher education in South Africa where these organisations rely heavily on their main stream of income (unlike their public counterparts, privates do not receive any government subsidy; see Chapter 4); *bums on seats* will ultimately determine organisational performance. The works of researchers like Drucker and Levitt (1960) signified the growing importance of placing the customer at the centre of the organisational focus (Safarnia *et al.*, 2011:133; Brijbal Paramasur & Roberts-Lombard, 2014:355). The marketing concept and the subsequent development of relationship marketing thus posit that businesses exist solely because of the customers with needs (Venter, 2009:9; Safarnia, *et al.*, 2011:135).

Citing a host of authors, Woodruff (1997:141) calls for organisations to orient their strategic endeavours towards ‘superior customer-value delivery’. He amplifies his argument by stating that organisations should not question the *need* for customer-value delivery, but rather *how* to deliver it. Venter (2009:12) concurs by stating that delivering continuous superior customer value is the only alternative in realising long-term competitive advantages. Value essentially refers to a comparison, by the customer, between the tangible and the intangible benefits and the perceived cost of using a certain product (Kotler & Keller, 2009:54).

Customers perceive value; organisations cannot determine it (Woodruff, 1997:141). Kotler and Keller (2009:59) claim that moving towards a marketing philosophy from a sales philosophy will provide organisations with better opportunities to outperform their

competition. These authors contend that customers are “value-maximizers”, seeking out superior alternatives. Clegg *et al.* (2011:150), extend this notion by stating that marketing should stand central to strategy, and that organisations have failed if they cannot convince customers that their offerings provide superior value. Within the ambit of competitive strategy, it makes sense that an organisation should direct its strategy effort at its current and potential customers; their patronage after all secures its survival. It could thus be claimed that customer-centric philosophies should not be viewed as a part of a separate marketing function. They should rather be viewed as the core philosophy that permeates all organisational activities, including strategic management. The researcher submits that one can only truly describe competitive advantage; as it is perceived by an organisation’s customers; since they ultimately evaluate a firm’s value propositions. Thus, within a context of superior customer value, competitive advantages are meaningless if they do not deliver superior value to the customer (Lamb, Hair, McDaniel, Boshoff, Terblanche, Elliott & Klopper, 2010:22-28).

Lamenting the lack of an unambiguous, agreed-upon definition of competitive advantage, Sigalas *et al.* (2013:321), question its (competitive advantage) operationalization possibilities, and consequently its scientific value. Addressing the distinct lack thereof (because of the *fuzzy* and varying descriptions of competitive advantage), these authors provide a comprehensive definition of competitive advantage and its subsequent measurement. By their own admission, this measurement is positivistic in nature, providing measurement restrictively bound to their proposed definition of competitive advantage. The researcher questions the merits of this prescriptive and narrow measurement in terms of its ability to really address the complexities of strategy and its contexts. The question arises whether it is possible or needed to, in a positivist fashion, measure competitive advantage. After decades of investigating strategy, Mintzberg (2015) criticises scholars’ preoccupation with measurement. The researcher agrees and tends to favour a more pragmatic philosophy of science (describing and predicting) view of competitive advantage.

Sagalas and Pekka Economou (2013:62) propose that, in investigating the reasons for differing performance, researchers should study the relationship between distinctive resources, the capabilities or activities (the sources of competitive advantage – the independent variable) and performance (the dependent variable),

with competitive advantage as the mediating variable. Building on this proposition (but not in a positivist way; rather pragmatically), as well the value proposition discussed in the previous section, the researcher favours a value-perspective on competitive advantage and subsequent performance (Kotler & Keller, 2009:54-59; Clegg *et al.*, 2011:150; Du Plessis, 2012:5; Brijbal, Paramasur & Roberts-Lombard, 2014:355): By procuring, creating, developing and employing idiosyncratic resources, capabilities and activities, organisations aim to, in a cost-effective way, present distinctive product offerings that provide meaningful superior value to targeted customers. This could lead to the creation of meaningful competitive advantages, ultimately leading to superior performance. Meaningful competitive advantage, within this context, can thus be regarded as an attribute/ benefit or feature unique to a product offering (in relation to competitors' offerings; something that they cannot copy) providing superior meaningful value to customers. Instead of prescribing steps in creating competitive advantage, the focus should rather pragmatically be on describing and predicting meaningful competitive advantage within its unique and complex context. McGee (2015) alludes to the supposed incompatibility of an IO-aligned market-based view with an internally focused RBV-view of competitive advantage. He refers to critics lamenting the market-based view's disregard of the role of organisations' internal resources and capabilities in creating competitive advantages. As explained in this section, the researcher subscribes to an integrative social based view of strategizing and favours a pragmatic consideration of both IO and RBV to create a better understanding of competitive advantage.

2.8 THE *WHO* OF STRATEGY

As the purpose of the current study is to explore social interaction in strategizing, it is necessary to investigate who is involved in strategizing. Senior management is traditionally considered to be responsible for its strategic direction (Kotler & Keller, 2006:43; Clegg *et al.*, 2011:216; Vrba, 2013:201; Parnell, 2014:10-11). Although the top management team is ultimately responsible for strategic decision-making, Parnell (2014:11) maintains that involving several capable strategy practitioners, for example functional managers, would increase the quality of strategic decision-making. Jarzabkowski *et al.* (2015:5), submit that strategy practices are developed and

employed by strategy practitioners, like senior and middle managers, as well as strategy consultants.

Linking up with the notion that strategies are emergent; Jarzabkowski (2005:8) postulates that strategy emanates from the social interactions between numerous people. These, according to the author, include interactions between all the internal employees on different levels, as well as external people, like consultants and consumers. This broader description typifies social approaches to strategy, like the strategy-as-practice perspective, proposing that strategizing isn't always a top-down process (SAP-IN, 2010). The above author however acknowledges the importance of senior management in strategic decision-making by completing a case study based on their interactions (within a university context). Davis (2013:99-120) proposes that the importance of middle managers in strategizing does not only lie in their role of strategy implementation. Drawing on numerous studies regarding the role of middle managers in strategizing, the above author suggests that middle managers, each within the influential confines of his organisational context, are able to influence strategy by means of the various different strategic roles they fulfil within the organisation. Mintzberg (2015) submits that strategizing does not always represent a linear, top-down process; strategies sometimes originate from creative ideas from people, rather than from management. Suominen and Mantere (2010:211) contend that strategic management is generally accepted in all business; and that managers are generally expected to employ aspects thereof. They conclude that, even though managers are coerced to subscribe to strategic management principles; they digest this in innovative and resourceful ways. The above supports the strategy-as-practice notion that strategy practices are significantly shaped by the practitioners developing and employing them (Jarzabkowski, *et al.*, 2015:9). Mintzberg (2015) agrees and advocates that strategy practitioners need to learn through 'experience' (as opposed to 'evidence') to improvise and creatively strategize.

From the above discussion, it is apparent that, even though all organisational members, consultants and even consumers may be involved in strategizing, it can be accepted that the senior and middle management of organisations are mainly responsible for strategy-making. This does not necessarily mean that these managers are not considering the inputs from other personnel, consultants or even customers.

Even though strategy may sometimes emerge without measured planning; strategy-making does also certainly exist in organisations as a deliberate process (Mintzberg, 2015) that is mainly coordinated by top and middle management. Even though accepting the fact that any individual within an organisation may influence the strategy-making process, the current study intends to focus on top and middle management as the main custodians of strategizing.

2.9 THE STRATEGY PERSPECTIVE GUIDING THIS STUDY

The significant divergence in strategy enquiry necessitates the explicit choice of a specific school of thought with its assumptions, in order to guide studies within this field. Based on the above review of the strategy body of knowledge, this section (part E, see Figure 2.2) provides a discussion of the perspectives of strategy enquiry that are guiding the current study.

From the review of relevant literature in the preceding sections, the significant variance on strategic thought becomes evident. Modern strategic enquiry and application seemingly originated in large US firms that based their strategic practices on the US military's precision planning efforts in World War II. From these roots, dominant traditional paradigms developed, advocating a macro-organisational approach, based on rational, economic decision-making. The industrial organisational perspective and the resource-based view represent the most recognised paradigms within this stream of strategy thought. These paradigms are criticised by some researchers, as being superfluous and discounting the importance of context and the human being in the strategizing process. Various researchers are consequently calling for a more integrative view of strategy and strategy-making. This perspective posits that individual elements impacting on strategy could be investigated; but the impact of its context (on a micro-, as well as on a macro-level) cannot be discounted.

Building on this integrative approach, proponents of the social view of organisational behaviour promote the consideration of human beings with their irrational behaviour in strategizing. This view posits that strategy-making is shaped by the strategic actors within organisations (each with their unique contexts) and their relationships with each other. In addition to being deliberately generated, strategy can be looked upon as

emergent, resulting as patterns from the actions and interactions of the members of an organisation. Increasing calls for a more integrative and socialised view of strategy and strategizing, as well as the apparent inability of conventional strategy reasoning in addressing variable organisational performance, necessitate further enquiry into strategy within the social context. The strategy-as-practice perspective provides a framework for researchers to, through a sociological lens, investigate the activities of the actual strategy practitioners; and this should thus facilitate strategy enquiry from a social viewpoint.

The literature review reveals that, despite the existence of numerous divergent views on how strategy is formed and should be studied, most approaches basically agree on the purpose of strategic endeavours. Proponents from IO and RBV, as prescriptive schools of thought, as well as proponents of the social view of strategy acknowledge that, within a competitive environment; strategizing aims to facilitate superior performance through the creation of competitive advantages. Despite the differing views on the sources and definition thereof, researchers acknowledge the importance of creating superior value for consumers within a competitive environment. Through strategizing, organisations thus strive to create sustainable competitive advantages that are recognised as meaningful by consumers, in other words, providing them with superior value.

Even though the creation of competitive advantage, as the purpose of strategic management is acknowledged within the social perspective of strategy, there seems to be a lack of studies that relate strategizing to competitive advantage and subsequent superior performance. Pragmatically linking social interactions with the actual sustainable, meaningful competitive advantages of an organisation, as identified by consumers, could be crucial in providing a deeper understanding of strategizing in organisations and the emergence of competitive positions. As called for by Regnér (2012:195-196), a strategy-as-practice perspective may be employed in the current study to assist in understanding the emergence of strategy outcomes. While certain scholars favour the exact measurement and subsequent prescription in a positivist manner, others question whether the complexities of the internal and external organisational context allow for the exact measurement of competitive advantage.

These authors favour a pragmatic philosophy-of-science view; and, instead of prescription, they focus on the description and prediction of competitive advantage.

Relating to the above discussion, the current study subscribes to the notion that strategy and strategy-making are complex concepts that do not allow for simplistic, one-dimensional prescription, as advocated by the dominant strategy perspectives. The current research thus subscribes to an integrative, context-based, socially informed view, recognising the role of the strategic actor in shaping strategy and in strategizing. The current research recognizes that the strategy-as-practice perspective provides a lens through which social interaction in strategy-making may be investigated. The current research acknowledges the deliberate and emergent nature of strategizing, recognising both modes. The current study favours a broad definition of strategizing that alludes to its purpose: Strategizing refers to the human actions and interactions impacting on the performance of organisations within their operating environments. In seeking superior performance within a competitive environment, organisations aim to create competitive advantages that deliver superior value to consumers. Even though the idea of precise measurement of strategizing in a positivist fashion is not supported, the current study heeds the calls for a deeper understanding of the relationship between social interaction and strategizing, and ultimately competitive advantage, and superior performance within a competitive environment. A pragmatic, philosophy-of-science approach is followed, focusing on description and prediction, rather than on prescription.

With the current study, the researcher not only heeds the call for more research into the human side of strategy-making, focusing on an in-depth investigation into what strategists do; but it also investigates how this shapes the competitive position of an organisation. For this study, on a meta-level, the researcher thus investigates strategy from a situational, sociological and nuanced viewpoint, linking it to the dominant logic of competitive advantage and value.

2.10 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter has included a review of strategy and the strategy-making literature. The diversity in ontological and epistemological stances has been explored, as well as

conformity regarding the essential meaning of strategy. Fragmentation within the study field was examined. The critique of and calls for the reflexivity of strategic thought were both reported. Strategizing as a function of social interaction, as well as the strategy-as-practice perspective were briefly investigated. The review also looked at who is responsible for strategizing within an organisation. The concepts of competitive advantage, value and superior performance were scrutinised. Lastly, Chapter 2 included a qualification of the current study's specific approach to strategy enquiry.

Because the current study favours a social perspective on strategy enquiry, Chapter 3 is dedicated to an in-depth investigation of social interaction that impacts on strategizing, as well as on the strategy-as-practice perspective as the lens for viewing this interaction.

CHAPTER 3: STRATEGIZING AS A FUNCTION OF SOCIAL INTERACTION

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Following on the research orientation provided in the initial phase of the current study (Chapter 1), Chapters 2, 3 and 4 address the second phase, namely the literature review. The literature review provides a theoretical framework and research context that informed the current study's third empirical research phase (Chapter 5). The fourth and final phase include an analysis of the research data gathered in the third phase, as well as a presentation of the subsequent findings in Chapter 6. The fourth phase and, ultimately this study, ends with the conclusions and recommendations offered in Chapter 7.

In commencing with the literature review phase of the current study, Chapter 2 provided a comprehensive and critical view of the different approaches to studying strategy and strategizing. The favoured rational approach to strategy research was questioned. The growing prominence of the irrational, non-linear nature of decision-making within organisations was documented, with this researcher favouring an “empirically informed social science perspective” (Clegg, *et al.*, 2011:13). As indicated in Chapter 2, this study subscribes to the notion that strategy and strategy-making are complex concepts that do not allow for simplistic, one dimensional prescriptions as advocated by the dominant strategy perspectives.

The current study thus supports an integrative, context-based, socially informed view, recognising the role of the strategic actor in shaping strategy and strategizing. The current research further recognises that the strategy-as-practice perspective provides a lens through which social interaction in strategy-making may be investigated.

Figure 3.1 depicts the relative position of Chapter 3 within the overall research project, as well as the structure of this chapter.

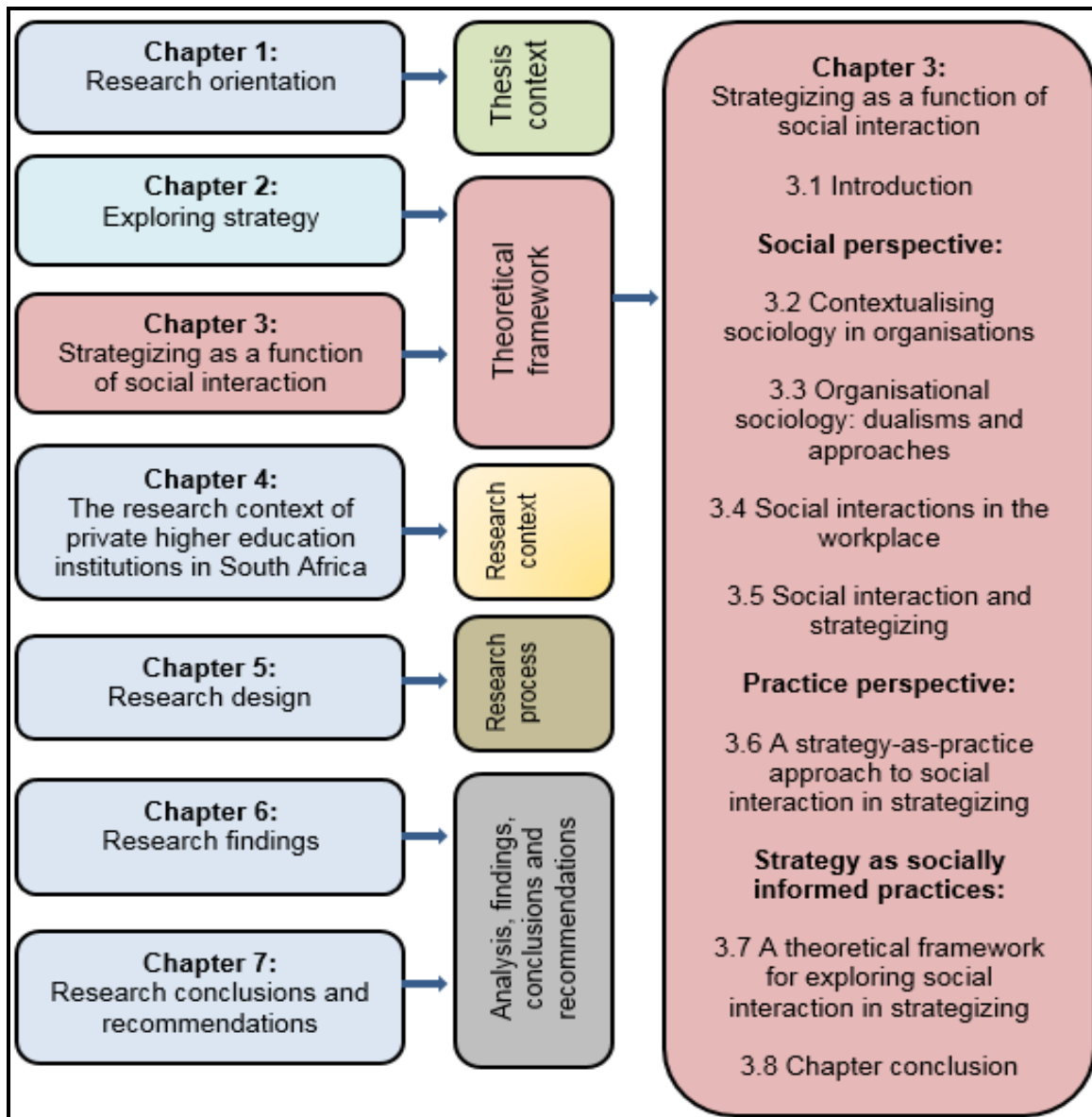


Figure 3.1: The structure of Chapter 3 (own compilation)

As depicted in Figure 3.1, Chapter 3 continues with the pervasive theme of the current study; and subsequently, it investigates the literature related to strategizing, as an empirically informed social science practised by strategy actors. In building on the notion that organisations basically exist and function as a group of people creating shared meaning through perpetual social interaction, this chapter contains an in-depth investigation of the impact of this social interaction on strategy-making within an organisational setting. To do this, Chapter 3 firstly includes an exploration of social interaction within an organisational context (Part A: a social perspective). The second section contains an investigation of the strategy-as-practice perspective (Part B: a practice perspective). A strategy-as-practice perspective provides for a lens to

comprehensively view the impact of social interaction on strategizing within organisations. While an effort is made in this chapter to cast the net wide, in order to cover a broad range of themes related to the main constructs of this chapter, it is by no means exhaustive.

The goal of the literature-review phase in Chapters 2 and 3 is not to identify a turnkey theory to be tested in the empirical phase of the current study, but rather to construct a theoretical framework to inform or guide further exploration. Section C subsequently describes the research avenue that the current study explores. This is followed by the provision of an integrated theoretical framework that informs, but not directly, further investigation (Part C: a socially informed practice perspective).

Part A: a social perspective on strategizing

In aligning to the strategizing as an empirically informed social science practised by strategy actors-narrative of the current study, Part A (3.2 to 3.5) firstly examines social interaction and contextualises it within organisational studies. The study of social interaction is positioned within the behavioural science of sociology; a study field concerned with how people influence each other in their relationships. Organisational sociology is subsequently classified within the broader field of the organisational behavioural studies.

The section secondly explores the different dualisms and approaches within the field of organisational sociology. The current study acknowledges the rational-irrational dualism in organisational studies: the non-rational basis of group interaction contextualised within rational, formal organisational structures. While acknowledging the importance of organisational systems on individual behaviour and their relationships, the current study also supports the idea that organisational systems are products of the interactions between people (relational viewpoint). From four main approaches to sociology, the current study is subsequently contextualised within an interactionist paradigm.

The sub-processes of social interaction, as proposed by Turner (1988), which informs the current study, is examined next. These phases, including the individual motivation

to interact, the actual interaction, as well structuring, provide an applicable framework for investigating social interaction within the parameters of the current study. Part A next explores the importance of the context in which social interactions take place. The 'duality of structure' refers to the notion that, while structures constantly change through member-interactions, these organisational structures at the same time shape these interactions. The significant influence of organisational context on workplace-social interaction is thus acknowledged in the current study. Social interaction is lastly related to strategizing within organisations. Part A concludes that strategizing and its outcomes are shaped through social interaction. The strategy-as-practice perspective is presented as a pragmatic lens through which social interaction's impact on strategizing and its resulting outcomes can be explored.

3.2 CONTEXTUALISING SOCIOLOGY IN ORGANISATIONS

To eventually explore social interaction and how it impacts on strategizing, it is necessary to contextualise it within the broader field of organisational studies, organisational behaviour and, ultimately, the field of sociology in organisations. As indicated in Figure 3.2, the discipline of organisational studies can essentially be divided into the fields of organisational theory and organisational behaviour (Çakir, 2012:7).

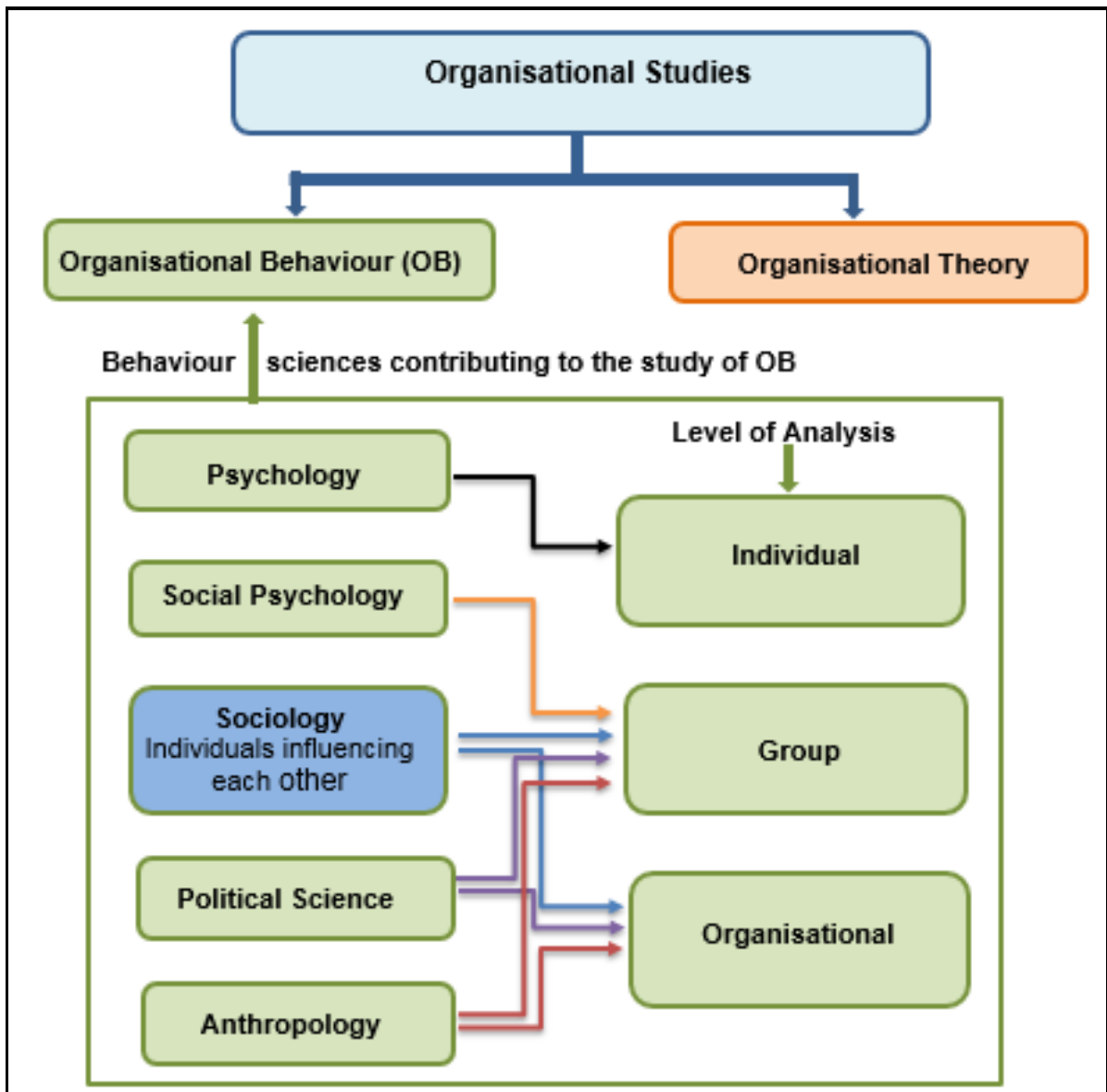


Figure 3.2: Sociology contextualised within organisational studies (adapted from Çakır, 2012:7, Gibson, et al., 2012:5-7 and Robbins and Judge, 2015:46,47)

Whereas the organisational theory mainly focuses on organisations as a whole (macro-level), Çakır (2012:7), Gibson, Ivansevich, Donnelly and Konopaske (2012:5), as well Robbins and Judge (2015:43), agree that organisational behaviour is mainly concerned with how individual and group behaviour within organisations (micro-level) influence organisational performance. Gibson *et al.* (2012:5,6), maintain that organisational behaviour studies are guided by the ‘principles of human behaviour’, with organisational performance significantly influenced by human behaviour on three levels, namely, individual, group and organisational.

They further assert that organisational behaviour acknowledges that 'organisations are social systems', in which group interaction shapes individual behaviour. Gibson *et al.* (2012:5,6), advance that contextual factors within the organisation, as well as the external environment, shape organisational behaviour. Robbins and Judge (2015:47,48) highlight the importance of 'contingency variables'; the complexity of human behaviour and the significant influence of different situations (context) on this behaviour.

In agreement with Robbins and Judge (2015:46), Gibson *et al.* (2012:7), claim that organisational behaviour is multi-disciplinary in nature, drawing upon behavioural sciences, such as psychology (individual level of analysis), as well as sociology, social psychology, anthropology, and political science (group and the organisational level of analysis). Sociology examines the relations between people within specific environments; social environments and culture (Gibson *et al.*, 2012:7; Robbins & Judge, 2015:47). Hinings and Tolbert (2008:473) suggest that sociology seeks to understand the nature of the make-up and the rules of groups, as well as its impact on behaviour. Linking with the idea of rules, Watson (2012:7) refers to the omnipresence of 'social organisation' throughout the history of mankind: Sociology studies how people organise themselves; and how they are organised by other people within societies through relationships which are shaped by the patterns of interaction.

In summary, it can thus be suggested that organisational studies, from a behavioural viewpoint, draw upon various behavioural sciences, including sociology; and that sociology is concerned with the interaction between people. This social science discipline thus represents a broad framework for studying the impact of social interaction on behaviour within different contexts, including organisations (social systems). It also represents the broad framework for the current study. Social enquiry within an organisational context, framed within the study field of organisational sociology, is consequently further explored in the next section.

3.3 ORGANISATIONAL SOCIOLOGY: DUALISMS AND APPROACHES

Different viewpoints of and approaches to the study of sociology exist. This section explores some of the prominent opposing viewpoints of sociology, as well as the four

main paradigms guiding this study field, while relating it to an organisational context. The interactionist paradigm is identified as the main school of thought within the discipline of sociology guiding the current study.

Scott (2004:1) posits that, since gaining prominence in the 1950s, sociology has been widely used in the study of organisations. Scott (2004:2) mentions that the 1930s and the 1940s saw sociologists enter the workplace, questioning the mechanistic view of organisations, identifying 'informal patterns' of intricate motives, shared values, conflict and cooperative human behaviour within organisations. In addition to investigating the 'actors' and the 'processes' in organisational sociology studies, Scott (2004:5) maintains that organisations are viewed as 'open systems', with the environment in which organisations operate, significantly influencing behaviour. The following section will commence with a brief overview of different dualisms and approaches to sociology studies in organisations. It will also delve deeply into the interactionist approach, as well as how it guides enquiry regarding organisation, control and conflict in organisations.

3.3.1 Dualisms in organisational sociology

As with most other disciplines, various differing approaches exist to studying sociology within organisations. These stances exist within two dualisms that will be briefly discussed in the following section.

a. Rationality versus irrationality

The main dualism in the field of sociology seems to be between rational human behaviour within formal organisational structures and irrational behaviour within informal structures (Scott, 2004:3).

Comte, regarded as the father of modern sociology, advocated the employment of rational (observable and measurable) research methods from the natural sciences in studying societies (Halfpenny, 1982:13; Babbie, 2008:36). Gouldner (1958:ix) posits that this is an enduring misconception; as Saint-Simon's theories on sociology and positivism preceded that of Comte). This positivistic philosophical approach still guides most organisational studies today (Halfpenny, 1982:15, Clegg & Hardy, 2005:2;

Knights & Willmott, 2011:2; Godwyn and Hoffer Gittell, 2012:xi). In describing the 'deceit of rationality', Verity (2012:71-83) mentions that researchers (in the spirit of positivist philosophy) frown upon the idea that decisions are based on, among others, instincts, emotions and heuristics. These proponents of the rational view, according to Verity, lament this irrational behaviour for leading to unsatisfactory outcomes; and they maintain that it should be restricted in favour of rational thinking. Verity (2012:71) remarks that this view (the supremacy of rational decision-making) still persists, even in the light of uncertainty and complexity in business environments, as well as the failure of prognostications.

Drawing on authors, such as Goffman (1959,1967), Godwyn and Hoffer Gittell (2012:xi) postulate that rational theories disregard the glue that binds societies, namely mutual identification and strong emotional attachments, fashioned and enforced through rituals. The above authors acknowledge the non-rational basis of society; and they maintain that supposedly rational formal organisations are characterised by social organisation; shaped by unique relationships and rituals within different social contexts. Scott (2004:2) refers to authors, like Barnard and Selznick, who, already in the 1950s, emphasised the mutual reliance of the above conflicting formal and informal modalities (rationality vs. irrationality).

Scott posits that most contemporary researchers recognise this rational-irrational dualism, anchoring their studies somewhere on a continuum between these opposing poles. Thus, while focusing, for example, on social interaction and its irrational peculiarities, it is thus imperative not to disregard the significant influence of rational, formal structures within organisations.

b. Sociology of systems versus sociology of social actions

Eldridge and Crombie (1974:16) refer to two paradoxical assumptions regarding society, the individual and relationships. The first proposes an external view, in which the system, created first, determines individual behaviour and relationships. The second view advocates the notion that systems are products of individuals' behaviour and their interactions. Scott (2004:4) claims that the structure of the organisation (the first view) has been the primary focus of organisational sociology, but that the relational viewpoint (the second view) has enjoyed an increased popularity among

contemporary researchers. The following section will explore the different approaches to sociology research, each positioned somewhere within the above dualisms.

3.3.2 Interactionism and other sociology paradigms

Godwyn and Hoffer Gittell (2012:xii) identify four sociological approaches that inform organisational sociology studies, namely the rational, the interactionist, conflict, as well as the functionalist paradigm, as depicted in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Sociology paradigms (Adapted from Godwyn & Hoffer Gittell, 2012)

Paradigm	Main proponent	Main focus
Rational paradigm	Weber	Rational-legal authority
Conflict paradigm	Marx	Constant rivalry and powerplay
Functional paradigm	Durkheim	Functionality of behaviour (consensus)
Interactionist paradigm	Parker Follet	Continuous interactions and evolving relationships

The following section provides a concise description of Godwyn and Hoffer Gittell's (2012:xii) introductory discussion of the four sociological approaches, as depicted in Table 3.1. The interactionist paradigm is examined in more detail; since it represents the paradigm that guides the current study.

a. The rational paradigm

In simplistic terms, the rational approach, pioneered by Weber, posits that an organisation is established as an instrument to attain goals that are not possible to realise by individuals alone. Sharing a reliance on rational choice and exchange theories, this rational-bureaucratic, or 'rational-legal authority' (Hinings & Tolbet, 2008:477) approach favours mechanistic, objective and unemotional decision-making in organisations, which is aimed at maximising value. Social impulses, feelings and emotions are supposedly mitigated by autonomous bureaucracy; employees separate their work life from social norms and values, as well as their personal lives. Godwyn and Hoffer Gittell (2012:xii) note that, driven by a profound inner-conflict between a

rational-bureaucratic approach and the non-rational human spirit, Weber harboured significant doubts concerning the legitimacy of rationalism within organisations. Godwyn and Hoffer Gittell mention that, although Weber is regarded as the main proponent of the rational theory, his works are also connected with the conflict and interactionist paradigms (specifically, his work on *Verstehen*).

b. The conflict paradigm

This approach, with notable early proponent Marx, is based on the assumptions of constant rivalry and power play within and between organisations. Godwyn and Hoffer Gittell (2012:xvii) suggest that this paradigm studies the conflict of interests, where it is assumed that organisations perpetuate the undermining of the interests of certain individuals – for the benefit of others. This paradigm normally favours the viewpoint of these marginalised groups, advocating the fight against social injustice. Hinnings and Tolbert (2008:474) concurrently refer to this paradigm's preoccupation with 'exploitation' and 'oppression', as well as with the subsequent conflict and power play between classes. This stance, according to the above authors, focuses on the dynamics between classes (collective social actions) that transform societies.

c. The functionalist paradigm

In contrast to the conflict paradigm, the functionalist approach, with notable early proponent Durkheim (see also Hinnings & Tolbert, 2008:473), assumes that consensus between organisational members leads to stable, cooperative and constructive systems. With this paradigm, the viewpoints of the beneficiaries of these systems are favoured. This approach is regarded as conservative, following study methods used in the natural sciences. With its strong focus on the functionality of behaviour, this paradigm could be criticised for not denouncing social injustice, but rather acknowledging its functionality.

d. The interactionist paradigm

With this approach, organisations are viewed from a relational perspective. Organisations supposedly represent continuous interactions and evolving relationships (including negotiations) between individuals, resulting in shared meanings or reality, identity and connectedness. Urry (2001:7) states that, through an interactionist lens, society is viewed as '...the precarious social order negotiated and

renegotiated between its actors'. This is in line with the ideas of Rummel (1979), as discussed in Chapter 1, where he refers to social interaction as 'acts, actions or practices' with people attempting to influence or to consider (and be influenced) by each other. Concomitantly, Turner (1988:13,14) remarks that actors, during the process of interaction, attempt to influence each other. These interactions and resulting influences, according to Turner (1988:13,14), are shaped by observable, conceptual and physiological predispositions and manifestations. The above author adds that social interaction represents the most basic level of analysis of sociology.

Drawing on the work of Follet (1918,1924), regarded by them as the founder of the interactionist paradigm, Godwyn and Hoffer Gittell (2012:xvi) postulate that this relational paradigm qualitatively focuses on the subjective experiences of actors. Intra-organisational symbols (for example language) are used to construct a negotiated reality between these organisational actors. The self is supposedly shaped through interactions with others; the self-and-others give way to the self-in-and-through others. Rooted in philosophical pragmatism, the interactionist approach focuses on the social process of interaction, rather than on the structure of the organisation that has been the principal focus of organisational sociology (Scott, 2004:4, also see Section 3.2.1).

Godwyn and Hoffer Gittell (2012:xvi-xvii) further note that interactionism rejects the dualisms between subject and object, as well as those between the individual and society. It subsequently rejects the rationalist notion of separating work life from personal life. In conclusion, social interaction thus constitutes a perpetual social process, with subjective actors attempting to influence each other through interactions and evolving relationships. These interactions and relationships include negotiations and renegotiations – resulting in shared meanings, or a shared reality, between the members interacting. This process, specifically within a strategy-making context, is the focus of the current study.

It should be noted that the above approaches (a – d) should not be viewed as antithetical. This point is illustrated by the contributions of notable authors ranging across the different approaches to the study of sociology, as described in the preceding section. Eldridge and Crombie (1974:16) warn that researchers should guard against, in a 'logico-deductive theorist' fashion, reducing organisational

sociology to a parsimonious theoretical framework. In linking with the notion that strategy requires a holistic view, as discussed in Chapter 2, Follet's interactionist approach calls for an integrated consideration from different points of view (Feldheim, 2004:341). Whereas the conflict paradigm focuses primarily on interaction, as perpetual rivalry and powerplay, Follet also recognises the merits of 'constructive conflict' within organisations (Feldheim, 2004:347). The interactionist paradigm thus seems to be the natural choice for the current study, as an integrative view of social interaction; since the primary determinant of organisational behaviour stands central to this school of thought.

The current study proposes that social interaction ultimately shapes organisations and the decisions they make, but these interactions are influenced by the context in which they occur. Thus, while the current study is guided by the interactionist paradigm, it still acknowledges the importance and influences of rational thought, conflict and functionality in investigating social interaction. Having contextualised social interaction within the field of organisational sociology and with an interactionist perspective informing the current study, the next section explores social interaction within the workplace.

3.4 SOCIAL INTERACTIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

Smircich and Stubbart (1985:724) refer to an interpretive viewpoint of sociology (as described in the previous section) in which organisational members construct shared meaning through perpetual social interaction. Organisational environments are thus not products of an objective reality; they are enacted through the social interaction of its members. Critchley (2012:168) agrees by referring to organisations as the products of the continuous interaction of their members. This stands in contrast to the traditional thinking of organisations in terms of brands, buildings and symbols. In pursuing organisational objectives, instead of directing, the manager is tasked with facilitating and preserving the shared meaning of organisational members (Smircich & Stubbart, 1985:724). This is in line with the early ideas of Follet (1918) and Barnard (1938), as mentioned in Robbins (1998:A-7), who advocate the power of group effort. As indicated, the current study favours an interactionist approach. Godwyn and Hoffer Gittell (2012: xv) maintain that various researchers explain social interaction through

different processes or dimensions, including ‘symbolic interaction’, ‘social psychology’, ‘interpretive sociology’, ‘ethnomethodology’ and ‘dramaturgy’. Turner (1988:15) adds two further dimensions, namely ‘exchange’ and ‘interaction rituals’.

3.4.1 Three sub-processes of social interaction

Turner (1988:15,16) divides social interaction into three inter-related sub-processes that require separate theory consideration, namely “motivational processes”, “interaction processes” and “structuring processes”. These processes are depicted in Figure 3.3.

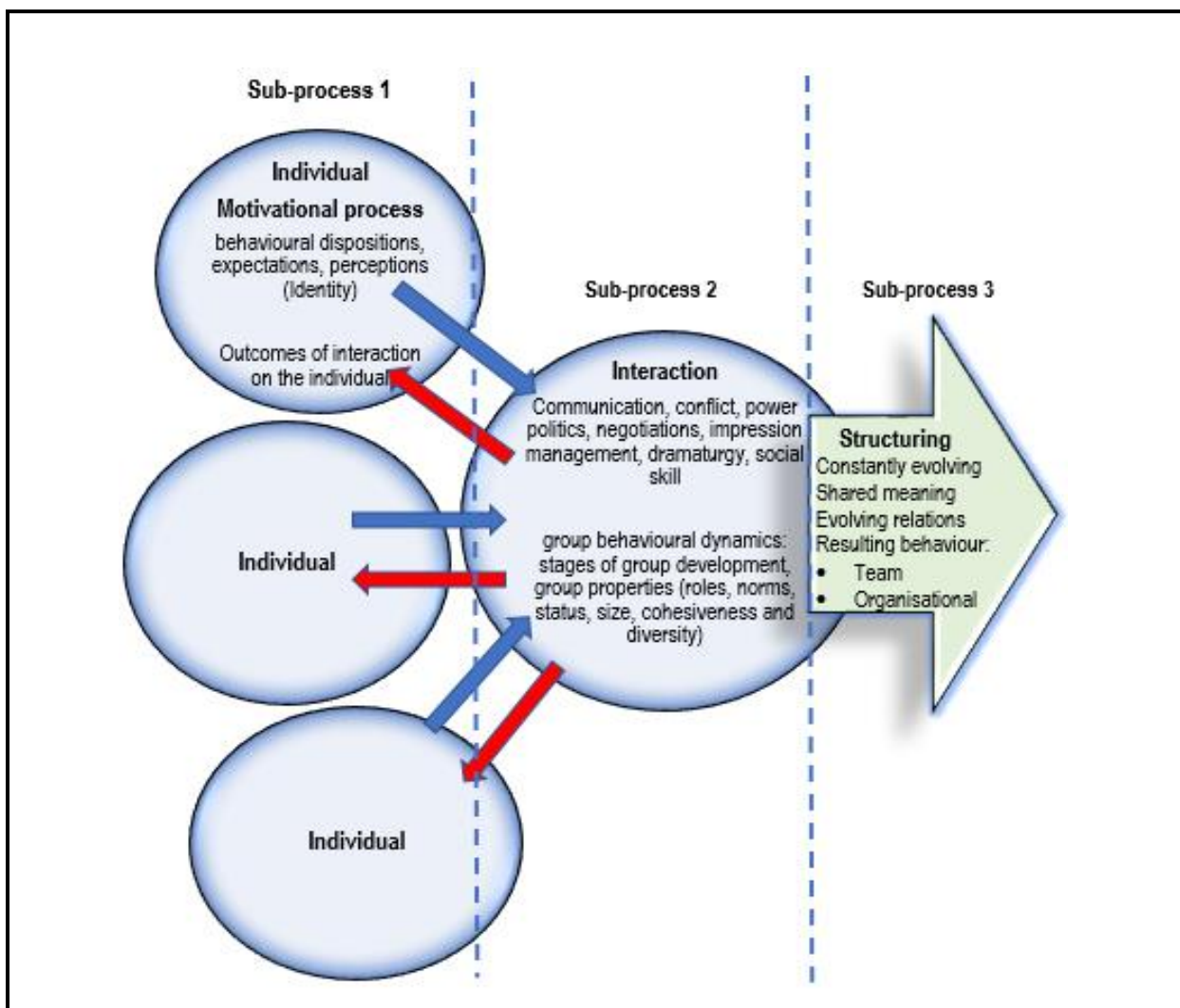


Figure 3.3: The three sub-processes of social interaction (Adapted from Turner, 1988)

This section provides a discussion of the three sub-processes of social interaction, as displayed in Figure 3.3. These three-stages approach also inform the current study. The idea is that actors have a certain predisposition and energy; motivation (willingness to interact) to interact in a situation (motivational process). The actual interaction (interaction process) will then be repeated over time, leading to mutual understanding and an organised structure (structuring process). Turner (1988:16) suggests that these different stages cannot be explained, according to one theory only. Symbolic interactionism may, for example, adequately explain actual interaction; but it would then neglect the motivational aspects thereof, just as it would fail to adeptly address structuring.

3.4.1.1 Motivational processes

As indicated in the previous section, human beings as actors, will influence and are influenced by social interactions. Actual interactions are influenced by the predispositions of the individuals, as well as the situation or context of the interaction (Turner, 1988:16). Comparable to Turner's proposition that the actual interactions consist of much more than the interaction that can be observed, Rummel (1979) suggests that the manifestations, or the actual interactions that can be observed, are manipulated by 'latents'. These latents are, according to Rummel (1979), the intentions or undercurrents creating a socio-cultural space for the interaction to take place. Individual-based latents, Rummel (1979) contends, include behavioural dispositions; expectations and perceptions of each other, as well as the perceived occasion, Snyder and Swann, Jr. (1978:160-161) allude to the impact of people's perceptions of others on subsequent interactions. They maintain that people have certain perceptions of others; and they may then conduct interactions in a way that would confirm their expectations of these others.

Knights and Willmott (2011:213-215) refer to the centrality of identity in interactionist thinking. This alludes to the idea that the 'mediation' between the individual and the group are shaped through the process of the individual's identification with this outside entity. The way in we see ourselves, see others, or are seen by others in the group, will thus shape these interactions.

As discussed in Section 3.2, researchers in the field of organisational behaviour offer comprehensive writings on individual behaviour and how it may impact on group behaviour, and, ultimately, on organisational performance. In a comprehensive study of the works of numerous organisational behaviourists, Strydom (2013:20) provides a list of the most frequently identified individual variables (in order from most to least frequently identified): motivation, attitudes, personality, perception, individual decision-making, job satisfaction, individual behaviour, values, emotions, stress and job performance. In addition, Robbins and Judge (2013:39-68) allude to diversity factors that could also impact on interaction, namely biographical diversity (for example differences in age, sex, race, disability and religion).

From the above, one could argue that a plethora of individual variables account for Rummel's behavioural dispositions, expectations and perceptions of each other, comparable to identity, as mentioned by Knights and Willmott. Relating to Turner's three sub-processes of social interaction, this current study elevates motivation; and it then suggests that various behavioural predispositions, expectations and perceptions (and subsequent identity) will impact on an individual's motivation to interact, as well as on the way in which he/she would interact.

3.4.1.2 Interaction processes

As indicated in Section 3.4, interactionists explain social interaction through different relational dimensions, namely 'symbolic interaction', 'social psychology', 'interpretive sociology', 'ethnomethodology' and 'dramaturgy', 'exchange' and 'interaction rituals'. (Turner, 1988:15; Godwyn & Hoffer Gittell, 2012: xv).

From a broader organisational behavioural viewpoint, the actual interaction between different individuals is mostly described through group and team dynamics, where, within these groups or teams, factors like communication, conflict, power and politics, as well as negotiations enjoy particular attention (Strydom, 2013:27-28). Robbins and Judge (2013:271-334) discuss group and team behavioural dynamics, as 'stages of group development', 'group properties' ('roles', 'norms', 'status', 'size', 'cohesiveness' and 'diversity') 'group decision-making' and 'types of teams'. In addition to communication, the above authors (page 411-537), as well as authors like Gibson *et*

al. (2012: 261-311), give considerable attention to the issues of conflict, power and politics in workplace interactions. Clegg *et al.* (2011:34), likewise emphasise the importance of power and politics. The above authors postulate that, even though latent issues like power and politics should stand central to strategic-management studies, they are largely absent in scholarly writings within this discipline.

French and Raven (1959: 259-269) have identified six bases of power related to the way in which people interact, namely 'coercion', 'reward', 'legitimacy', 'expert', 'reference' and 'informational'. The last base was added by Raven in 1965 (Raven, 1965: 371-382). Power-related inquiry in organisational behaviour studies seem to revolve around the above typology of French and Raven. Power is generally described from an organisational viewpoint; and it is linked to leadership, informed by Weber's (bureaucracy) and Marx's (conflict) theories (Knights & Willmott, 2011:141-143). In contrast to the idea that power is owned, is top-down, and revolves around conflict between management and employees, Foucault, proposes that power (and resistance to power) are relational and omnipresent in (and thus stands central to) all interactions (Peach, Jr. & Bieber, 2015:27-28). Peach, Jr. and Bieber further subscribe to Foucault's belief that power is not just owned by the 'privileged few' (Marxist view), but that all the members of social systems exert power through their interactions with others, irrespective of their positions, with these power relations constantly changing, as the members interact.

Drawing on authors like Goffman, Robbins and Judge (2015:245) refer to the importance of 'impression management' in interaction. Robbins and Judge mention that impression-management proponents maintain that this social skill of constantly presenting different 'social fronts' and validating others' fronts goes further than behavioural attributes in comprehending social interaction. Accordingly, Fincham and Rhodes (2005:243) maintain that 'dramaturgy' and 'impression management', as well as 'social skills', are the principal issues in social interaction.

3.4.1.3 Structuring processes

As discussed in Section 3.4.1, the interaction process gets repeated over time, resulting in shared meaning between group members and the subsequent structuring

of relationships in the group, how things are done, and what courses of actions are to be taken. Through interaction, the group's actors create knowledge and share facts (Shen, 2013:71). Gibson *et al.* (2012:399), refer to the viewpoint that organisational structure is represented by activities of "patterned regularity". Granovetter's (1985) social network theory of "the strength of weak ties", views the social relations between actors as central to organisational behaviour. Organisational activities of patterned regularity are thus informed by the evolving structuring between interacting group members. Granovetter 1985 (490) refutes traditional social network theories that subscribe to structuralism; the idea that environments will determine social networks, irrespective of the individuals. According to Granovetter's theory, different individuals will form different social networks – even if the environment stays the same. Social relations and subsequent social structures are further viewed as dynamic (Shen, 2013:65); the structuring process is thus constantly evolving. This links with Foucault's writings on power exchanges between group members in producing knowledge; a battle to create *truth* or the rules in creating shared meaning (Peach, Jr. & Bieber, 2015:27-28).

From an organisational behaviour viewpoint, Robbins and Judge (2013:25-29) refer to the outcomes of interactions on an individual, group and organisational level. In addition to individuals' 'attitudes', 'satisfaction' and 'performance', the group's 'cohesion' and 'functioning', and ultimately, the organisation's 'profitability' and 'survival' are all shaped by repeated interactions and subsequent structuring processes (Robbins & Judge, 2013:25-29).

3.4.2 Context of interactions

As indicated in the preceding sections, while subscribing to the notion that interactions between individuals ultimately shape outcomes, the current study does not disregard the significant influence of exogenous factors on the actual interactions. In agreement with social theory (see Section 3.2) Kramer (2010:126) proposes that context, thus each unique organisational setting, significantly influences the actual interaction between people.

Various authors identify certain contextual issues that influence social interaction. Linking with the previous section on structuring, Hinings and Tolbert (2008:484) refer to 'duality of structure,' where structures can constrain interaction, but that structures can be adapted by its members. As discussed in Chapter 1, Su *et al.* (2007:131-135), identify connectors that create different contexts in which interactions take place. The above authors offer a range of connector types, including 'work home', 'company', 'common work role', 'social', 'private', 'professional' and 'formal community of practice' in providing a context for interactions. Clegg *et al.* (2011:135-136), identify the importance of organisational culture in providing a context for workplace interaction and strategy-making. Organisational culture, according to Clegg *et al.* (2011:135-136), consists of the shared beliefs and meanings of organisational members regarding how they perceive the organisation and its environment. Concomitantly, Gibson *et al.* (2009:30-31), refer to Schein's Three Layer Model that offers organisational culture (the way things are done in the organisation) as perspective to view group interaction. Each organisation's culture thus creates a unique context for workplace-interaction and strategizing.

While recognising the influence of organisational structures and processes in rationalising behaviour and interaction, the current study supports the notion that organisations are ultimately shaped by unique, non-rational and emotional relationships and rituals within different social contexts. This relates to Follet's 'law of the situation', where group behaviour results more from perpetual interactions and evolving relationships than from formal authority structures (Feldheim, 2004:345).

With social interaction contextualised within organisational sociology and organisational behaviour study, and the social interaction process examined within the workplace, the next section specifically relates social interaction to strategizing within organisations.

3.5 SOCIAL INTERACTION AND STRATEGIZING

Heeding the call for social enquiry into strategizing in Chapter 2, the preceding sections of Chapter 3 explored social interaction within the workplace. To continue

with the current study, social interaction now needs to be related to strategizing in this section.

As discussed in Chapter 1 and 2, various authors including Rasche (2008:1), Clegg *et al.* (2011:13), and Critchley (2012:169), criticise the dominant managerial-economist strategy theories that subscribe to de-humanised rational decision making in strategy-making. The above authors call for the scholarly inquiry strategy to be an 'empirically informed social science' (Clegg *et al.*, 2011:13). Jarzabkowski (2005:92), a proponent of the strategy-as-practice movement, describes interactive strategizing as "...purposive face-to-face interaction between top managers and other members of the organisational community in order to shape the flow of strategy". Even though Jarzabkowski acknowledges other modes of interactive strategizing, she focuses on the importance of purposeful, face-to-face interactions (2005:100). She also asserts (p. 92) that interactive strategizing is important in creating a "framework of meaning and normative controls". Groups thus create shared meanings and also consign legitimacy to activities. She further notes that, in order to maintain long-lasting frameworks of meaning in strategizing, constant interaction is needed.

If organisations are regarded as creations of the continuous interaction between its members (as discussed in the previous sections), the same should apply to strategizing. Wang, Luo and Hong (2016:177) state that: "Strategic practice is inherently a social practice shaped by the immediate social context". As discussed in Chapter 2, most researchers agree that the overall purpose of strategic management is the creation of sustainable competitive advantages. It could then be asked how strategy making and the subsequent creation of sustainable competitive advantages are shaped through the continuous interaction and constantly evolving shared meaning between organisational members. In addition to providing a more integrative view of strategic management (see Chapter 2), the strategy-as-practice perspective provides for a lens through which social interaction in strategizing can be investigated.

Concluding remarks on Part A: a social perspective on strategizing

Based on the discussions in Sections 3.2 to 3.5, the main assumptions that the current study subscribes to regarding social interaction within organisations include:

1. Social interaction within organisations is framed within the social science of sociology. This is, in turn, contextualised within organisational behaviour studies.
2. Organisational sociology, from an interactionist perspective, can be viewed as an integrative and pragmatic perspective on how people interact or relate to each other within organisations (each with its own peculiar processes) and within a broader extra-organisational or cultural context (the way things are done).
3. The social interaction process consists of three phases, namely individual motivation to interact, the actual interaction and the structuring process.
4. Within these interactions or relationships, strongly guided by irrational and emotional behaviour, people influence (or attempt to influence) each other. These interactions and subsequent relations lead to the creation of shared meaning between organisational members. These evolving relations and shared meaning ultimately shape organisations, including how they eventually perform.
5. If organisational activities are basically described as groups of people that interact to create shared meaning, the activity of strategizing should be no different.

Part B: a practice perspective on strategizing

If strategizing and the resulting competitive advantages are supposedly shaped through social interaction, the question is: how can these social interactions in strategizing be examined? Part B proposes that the strategy-as-practice perspective aligns with the integrative and pragmatic nature of the interactionist paradigm of organisational sociology, by providing an integrative and pragmatic lens through which to view social interaction in strategizing. Resuming from the preliminary discussion of the strategy-as-practice perspective in Chapter 2, the following section (3.6) contains a more comprehensive exploration of the roots and the main ideas of the strategy-as-practice perspective, as well as its relevance to social interaction and strategizing. Part B includes a look into the origins and the development of the strategy-as-practice perspective. Next, this perspective's divergence from the traditional strategy schools of thought is investigated; and the main themes of the strategy-as-practice movement are then described. The contribution of the strategy-as-practice perspective to the strategic management discipline is studied next, followed by a look at the reflexive and integrative nature of the strategy-as-practice perspective. Part B lastly scrutinises different meanings assigned to the term 'practice' in strategy studies, after which future

research avenues are explored. Special attention is paid to linking organisational outcomes to the strategy-as-practice perspective. This is done to legitimise this perspective in terms of its ability to improve organisational performance.

3.6 A STRATEGY-AS-PRACTICE PERSPECTIVE ON SOCIAL INTERACTION IN STRATEGIZING

A practice lens is anchored in sociology; and this is used to study social issues. Feldman and Orlikowski (2011:1242) state that: “Central to a practice lens is the notion that social life is an ongoing production; and thus, it emerges through people’s recurrent actions... such a lens can be used for analysing social, technological, and organizational phenomena.”

It seems that the strategy-as-practice perspective evolved from the general practice turn of sociologists in organisational studies. It further seems that this perspective’s core focus on the practices of strategic actors have been significantly influenced by the earlier *strategy as emerging from actions* - research of Mintzberg, as well as his (and other authors’) call for a more integrative view of research. Lastly, the alleged inability of traditional strategy thought to address or improve organisations’ chances to successfully face environmental volatility, seems to have necessitated the strategy-as-practice avenue of enquiry.

3.6.1 The beginnings and growth of the strategy-as-practice perspective

Unlike the field of strategy research that originated in North America, the strategy-as-practice perspective has European roots (Rouleau, 2013:548). Strategy-as-practice was introduced by name about two decades ago: in a foundational theoretical paper in *Long Range Planning*, Whittington (1996:731). This author then introduces the emerging action approach to strategizing as the strategy-as-practice perspective. In this foundational article (Rouleau, 2013:553; Golsorkhi, *et al.*, 2015:4), Whittington (1996:731) contends that this emerging approach regards strategy as a ‘social practice’. The above author contends that, in contrast to the broader directional concern of conventional strategy perspectives, this approach focuses on the activities and the interactions of the individual strategic practitioner in the strategizing process.

Whittington (1996:732) refers to the strategy-as-practice perspective as a logical progression from sociologists' turn to the study of the practices of organisational members. Vaara and Whittington (2012:4) concur, referring to the broad 'practice turn' in the social sciences.

Johnson *et al.* (2007:ix-x), refer to three workshops of European Group for Organisational Studies (EGOS), initiated by Pettigrew and Krogh in 1999, 2001 and 2002. These workshops, according to Johnson *et al.* (2007:ix-x), mainly revolved around the activities of strategy making, leading to the eventual launching of a special edition of the *Journal of Management Studies* in 2003. The above authors also mention research discussions at the 2001 conference of the European Institute for Advanced Studies in Management (EIASM), leading subsequently to various research papers contributing to the above-mentioned special edition dealing with strategizing activities.

The strategy-as-practice perspective, according to the above authors, gained momentum from there. Vaara and Whittington (2012:6) agree by suggesting that this perspective's 'distinctive' character started to develop during the early years of the 20th century. The strategy-as-practice perspective has attracted increasing interest and research in this field with significant growth; the Strategy-As-Practice International Network (SAP-IN) boasts 1290 affiliates in more than 150 countries (SAP-IN, n.d.).

3.6.2 The roots and divergence of the strategy-as-practice perspective

The strategy-as-practice perspective is rooted in practice theories. Golsorkhi *et al.* (2015:1), advance that 'practice' stands central to the linkage of people's actions and organisational practices, with broader social systems and cultures. Drawing on the works of the social theorists responsible for initiating the 'practice turn', Whittington (2006:614) identifies the main themes of practice theory. These themes include, a), society that contextualises, b), the individual activities or practices of, c), different actors. The above author uses these themes as the foundation for the conceptualisation of an integrative framework for studying strategy from a strategy-as-practice perspective (discussed in a later section). As alluded to in Chapter 2, and also suggested by authors like Feldman and Orlikowski (2011:1243); Rouleau (2013:549);

as well as Whittington (2015), Mintzberg's writings significantly influenced early developments in the strategy-as-practice perspective (see Mintzberg and Walter's (1987:257) reference to strategy as 'patterns in streams of actions').

Jarzabkowski (2005:4) refers to the 'action school' of Mintzberg; the idea that strategy emerges unintentionally (in addition to intentionally) from certain actions. Jarzabkowski (2005:3) maintains that the strategy-as-practice perspective represents a distinct divergence from dominant rational, economics-informed strategy thought. This departure from traditional strategy thought follows, as discussed at length in Chapter 2, widespread critique of the strategy discipline and the subsequent calls for a more socially informed perspective that focuses on the actions of individual strategy actors.

Johnson, Melin and Whittington (2003:4-5) submit that, within contemporary volatile market environments, where resources are 'easily tradeable' and 'transparent' (because of the information age), the 'micro activities' within various organisations could hold the key to sustained competitive advantages. The above authors further allude to 'hypercompetition' typifying contemporary market environments. This necessitates more frequent strategizing dispersed among new levels of management; managers that work more directly with customers. Identifying and improving the strategy-making skills (the how) of strategy-practitioners, rather than prescribed generalised strategies (the what). This should thus be the focus of strategy inquiry. Jarzabkowski (2005:1) concurs by stating that, in investigating the actual strategizing activities, the strategy-as-practice perspective is subsequently more concerned with who does strategy and how it is done. In addition to narrowing the gap between strategy theory and practice, managers want answers to the above questions, in order to become more skilled strategy practitioners (Jarzabkowski, 2005:1). The call of Mintzberg (1998) and other authors, like Chaffee (1985) and Furrer *et al.* (2008:16), for a more integrative view of strategy has further been heeded by the strategy-as-practice perspective. Mentioning the impact of 'situatedness', as well as intra and extra-organisational influences on activities, Vaara and Whittington (2012:4) advise that a practice perspective rejects a reductionist approach of 'methodological individualism'. This integrative view of the strategy-as-practice perspective will be addressed further on in this chapter.

While the strategy-as-practice perspective represents a distinct divergence from traditional strategy thought, it is at the same time rooted in the popular approaches within the broader discipline of strategic management. Whittington (1996:732) compares the strategy perspective with the process approach in strategy. He postulates that, in contrast to focusing on the outcome (the strategies), both perspectives are concerned with the 'how' of strategy; strategizing (the strategy making process). However, whereas the process school of thought focuses on organisational level, Whittington suggests that the strategy-as-practice perspective focuses on the actual strategizing activities of managers. Parallels can also be drawn with the resource-based view (RBV, see Chapter 2), in which a strategy-as-practice perspective deals with the uniquely situated activities, processes and skills within organisations, as possible sources of competitive advantage (Jarzabkowski, *et al.*, 2015:2).

Rouleau (2013:553) identifies foundational articles for this field, based on their Google Scholar citations. These include articles by Whittington (1996), Johnson *et al.* (2003), Balogun and Johnson (2004), Jarzabkowski (2004), Whittington (2006), as well as Jarzabkowski, Balogun and Seidl (2007). Rouleau (2013:553-556) suggests that the above articles contain various 'pre-existing metaphors' (strategy jargon) endemic to different existing schools of strategy thought. This, according to the above author, has bridged the gap between the original approaches and the strategy-as-practice perspective, subsequently facilitating the acceptance and growth of the new perspective. Even though a practice perspective anchors the strategy-as-practice perspective, Vaara and Whittington (2012:6) acknowledge the importance of, among others, decision-making, planning, sense-making and middle management strategizing approaches in its evolution. Golsorkhi *et al.* (2015:1), contend that this perspective's focus on the activities, processes and practices that shape strategizing allows for the linkage of current strategy research with practice-informed organisational studies. The next section will explore certain core themes of the strategy-as-practice perspective.

3.6.3 Main themes of the strategy-as-practice perspective

Although numerous studies have seen the light within the broader ambit of strategy from a practice perspective, exploring a wide range of issues (true to the reflexive nature of a practice approach), certain core themes are evident, as discussed in the following section.

a. A socially informed activity perspective

Paroutis *et al.* (2013:10), maintain that the strategy-as-practice perspective is concerned with the everyday activities of strategy actors; the nitty gritty that eventually leads to strategy. Johnson *et al.* (2003), concur by alluding to the growing call, even from strategy scholars in business schools, for a micro activity perspective on strategy-making. Jarzabkowski (2005:1) postulates that strategy is not something that an organisation owns; but it consists of what people in the organisation do. This calls for, according to the above author, further questions regarding what the strategy-as-practice perspective should essentially focus on: who does strategy; and how it is done? Jarzabkowski *et al.* (2015), also criticise research that focus exclusively on the 'what', neglecting the 'who' and the 'how'. Johnson *et al.* (2007:3), add that, in addition to investigating how strategizing takes place, the strategy-as-practice perspective asks how these strategy-making activities influence strategic outcomes.

Vaara and Whittington (2012:3) submit that, while the strategy-as-practice perspective is concerned with actual practices, it is committed to 'social theories of practice'. These authors further suggest that the strategy-making practices (or praxes) of people are 'embedded in a web of social practices'. Vaara and Whittington (2012) place significant focus on the social embeddedness of strategy practice, using terms like 'social actions' (instead of just *actions*) 'social worlds', 'social life' and 'strategy as a social practice'. Linking with Mintzberg's (1987) ideas of emergence, Vaara and Whittington (2012:293) maintain that strategizing practices within a social context may be deliberate or emergent. In discussing emergence, the above authors contend that, in the 'urgency of action' incremental changes are unconsciously made. Jarzabkowski (2005:1) similarly refers to strategy as a 'socially accomplished activity'. Jarzabkowski, *et al.* (2007:5), point to the mandate of the strategy-as-practice perspective, as a practical perspective, to 'humanise' organisational research.

b. Situatedness

Feldman and Orlikowski (2011:1240) postulate that linking situated activities with their social milieu is critical within a practical perspective. Whittington (1996:732) questions the universal application of 'textbook' strategies, postulating that, instead of being lectured in general strategy principles, practical strategizing competencies develop within the unique structure and 'routines' of each organisation. Vaara and Whittington (2012:2) propose that the strategy-as-practice perspective focuses on how intra-organisational and broader societal factors (practices) enable or constrain strategy practitioners in strategizing. Authors like Johnson *et al.* (2007:7), as well as Jarzabkowski *et al.* (2007:6), agree and promote the importance of 'context' in strategizing. Vaara and Whittington (2012:4) concurrently posit that strategy actors are never separated from context. Paroutis *et al.* (2013:10), further refer to these practitioners' interaction with the 'social and physical features of context'.

Jarzabkowski *et al.* (2015:4), warn against overvaluing practices *per se*, neglecting the significant role that context plays in shaping these activities. Whittington (1996:732) promotes the comprehensive investigation of all the activities of strategists and submits that strategists in different positions within organisations fulfil different roles, each with its own distinctive activities and required skills. Whittington (1996:731-735) sets the foundation for further research by identifying this reflective (instead of descriptive) 'social practice' perspective, as being based on the real actions and interactions of 'strategy practitioners' within unique organisational settings.

c. An integrative framework for strategy-as-practice

Even though, strictly speaking, practices refer to the actions of people, Whittington (2006:618-619) refers to a social theory-informed view that considers practices as shaping and being shaped by activities. Johnson *et al.* (2007:5-6), allude to the traditional assumption that strategies are resultant from single decisions. The above authors advance that, in contrast to the above assumption, a practice perspective acknowledges the complex process of strategizing with a multitude of factors impacting thereon. Paroutis *et al.* (2013:5), concur by also denoting the complex strategizing process by multiple organisational strategy actors. Whittington (2002:c1-c6) conceptualises theoretical foundations for the approach, by providing an integrative *three Ps framework* for studying strategy practice. As depicted in Figure

3.4, Whittington (2006) discusses this framework, adapted from the three core themes of practice theory (discussed earlier in this section) and initially submitted in a conference paper in 2002, more comprehensively in 2006: a) 'praxis' refers to the actual actions of and the interactions of, b), strategy 'practitioners' or strategy actors, contextualised within, c) 'practices' – the tools and institutionalised techniques or procedures used in strategizing, influenced by intra- and extra-organisational factors.

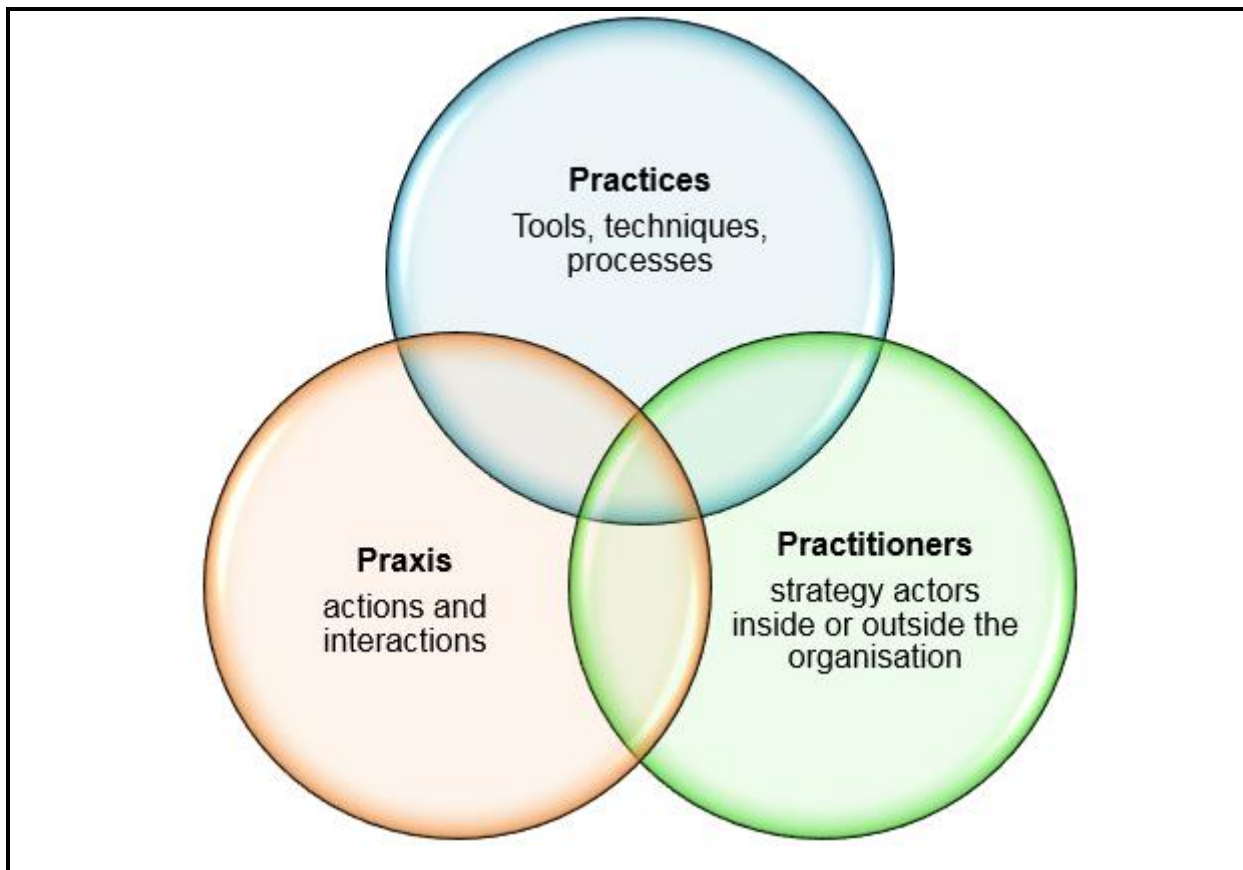


Figure 3.4: An integrated framework for a practice view of strategy (adapted from Jarzabkowski, 2005:11).

Strategy practitioners include all people involved in conceptualising, shaping and implementing strategies. Strategizing is thus not considered solely the domain of top management (Whittington, 2006:619). In addition to referring to all the activities of strategy actors, Whittington (2006:620) suggests that these activities take place within 'episodes or sequences of episodes', for example, board meetings or strategy workshops. Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009:82) point to an overt, as well as implied, multi-faceted and inter-related 'social', 'material' and embedded (the way things are done in a specific organisation) 'bundle of practices'.

Jarzabkowski *et al.* (2015:4), advocate the necessity of integratively combining of the 'what', 'who' and 'how' (practices, practitioners and praxis, respectively) when using a practice lens in strategy studies. In concurring with Whittington (1996 and 2002) and with the ideas of Mintzberg (as discussed in Chapter 2), Jarzabkowski (2005:7) questions the 'either-or' stance of traditional strategy theory. She contends that, rather than polarising different viewpoints, for example, 'content vs. process' and 'planned vs. emergent', the above *three Ps framework* allows for the embracing of all these, so-called 'dichotomies' in strategy research.

3.6.4 The contribution of the strategy-as-practice perspective

Vaara and Whittington (2012:291-293) articulate the evident (from numerous practice-based studies that the current study consulted) contributions of the strategy-as-practice perspective towards the broader field of strategic management. The above authors identify four ways in which the strategy-as-practice perspective enriches the field of strategic management. They include, a), introducing a new theoretical perspective (social theory of practice), b), broadening an understanding of performance (by identifying additional outcomes), c), extending the range of organisations to be studied (for example, various types of non-profit seeking organisations), and, d), facilitating new methodological approaches (especially qualitative, as opposed to traditional quantitative methods).

Golsorkhi, *et al.* (2015:3), pragmatically add that this perspective allows for a more direct (less abstract) investigation of micro activities and its creation within a real-world social context. These authors further contend that a practice perspective allows for investigating the connection between 'social action' and 'structure and agency'. This ties in with the observations of Feldman and Orlikowski (2011:1240), who maintain that practice-based investigations in different disciplines of management are increasing. These authors suggest that this growing popularity is fuelled by the ability of practice-based approaches to describe how the practices of organisations and in broader society enables or constrains actions within organisations. Regnér (2012:185) advocates the strategy-as-practice perspective's value in exploring competitive positions. From the above, it is evident that the strategy-as-practice perspective

exhibits a definite potential to contribute, in various areas, to the overall body of knowledge of strategy research.

3.6.5 Reflectivity in the strategy-as-practice perspective

In the spirit of practice theory that advocates critical reflection (Vaara & Whittington, 2012:5), the relatively young strategy-as-practice perspective has already seen various reflective works (Johnson *et al.*, 2007; Jarzabkowski, *et al.*, 2009; Vaara & Whittington, 2012; Rouleau, 2013; Seidl & Whittington, 2014, Golsorkhi *et al.*, 2015; Jarzabkowski, *et al.*, 2015). The distinct prevalence of conceptual articles in the early years has been replaced by a host of empirical studies (Vaara & Whittington, 2012:6). The empirical testing or implementation of theories and frameworks has led to substantial critical reflection. These reflective works typically investigate theory and then relate it to various empirical studies. In seeking to enhance the robustness of this approach, these reflective processes result in the identification of research needs, eventually opening up various new research avenues within the strategy-as-practice perspective.

3.6.5.1 Different approaches in researching strategy through a practice lens

A diverse range of studies, focusing on practices in strategy, display different interpretations of the term *practices* and the subsequent different approaches to studying practices. Rouleau (2013:548-552) identifies five main different views on the meaning of 'practices' from a broad range of practice-related strategy studies. The first two, namely 'practice as managerial action' and 'practices as a set of tools' are comparable to Whittington's 'praxis' and 'practices', respectively. The third view, 'practice as knowledge', alludes to the iterative process of strategizing, leading to shared meaning (Rouleau, 2013:551). While referring to procedures and routines and competencies, comparable to Whittington's (2006) 'practices' in the *three Ps framework*, the fourth view, namely 'practices as organisational resources' also points to how these practices lead to competitive advantages. The final view, 'Practices as a global discourse' relates to the extra-organisational influence of global strategy discourse on strategy practitioners. Rouleau (2013:556) notes that the above should not be regarded as opposing views; this embracing of plurality in strategy-as-practice

is the key to this perspective's successful growth. Golsorkhi *et al.* (2015:3), concur, suggesting that these multiple approaches provide for a richer understanding of the complex nature of socially embedded activities.

Orlikowski (2010:23-27) discusses three ways of conceptualising or engaging with practices in management (including strategy) research, namely practice as a 'phenomenon', as a 'perspective', or as a 'philosophy'. The first mode focuses on the actual practices. The second mode focuses on constructing theories of practice from considering the outcomes of repeated actions (praxis) by practitioners within social contexts and practices. The third and most radical mode regards perpetual practices as the building blocks of an ever-evolving social reality. Orlikowski (2010:30) maintains that all three practice modes of research provide for knowledge contributions to the field of strategy research.

The Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009:74) group practice-informed strategy research into, 1), praxis and practitioners-studies, as well as, 2), practice-related studies. These authors proffer a typology of nine research domains, based on scholars' conceptualisation of strategy practitioners (different types and individuals versus groups of practitioners) and the level of praxis-analysis. According to the above typology, practitioners are regarded as either internal (within the organisation), or external (outside the organisation, for example, strategy consultants), as well as individual or aggregate (group classes like middle managers). Praxis is analysed either on a 'micro-level' (actions and interactions within episodes of praxis), a 'meso level' (group or organisational level, for example strategy patterns) or on a 'macro level' (praxis on an organisational level, within an industry or broader society). Jarzabkowski and Spee further (2009:82-86) categorise practice-related research as: 1), discursive studies, studying the various modes of strategizing (episodes of praxis, for example workshops), and, 2), empirical studies of practices in strategizing and how they shape praxis.

Vaara and Whittington (2012:291) applying Feldman and Orlikowski's (2011) description of the three research approaches, namely: 'empirical', 'theoretical' and 'philosophical' (comparable to Orlikowski's (2010) typology of 'phenomenon', 'perspective' and 'philosophy' discussed in the previous paragraph), in using a practice

lens in research. Vaara and Whittington (2012:291-292), describe an empirical approach within a strategy-as-practice perspective, as suitable for studying the everyday strategizing activities, possibly without a consideration of practice theory. The above authors contend that a theoretical approach employs practice theories, describing processes like the production, reinforcement and change, as well as the outcomes of strategizing practices. This approach, according to Vaara and Whittington, allows for the connection between the micro-strategizing activities (empirical approach) with macro-institutional processes. They lastly suggest that a philosophical approach relates to an “ontological commitment to the primacy of social practices”. Subscribing to a practice philosophy thus advances that reality is constructed through everyday activities; practices.

Golsorkhi *et al.* (2015:8-9), echo the ideas of Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) and link the above ontological perspective (practice as philosophy) with the “dwelling worldview”, as described by Chia and Rasche (2015). A “building worldview”, favoured in strategy research (even within the strategy-as-practice perspective, according to Chia and Rache, 2015:41, who regard the individual as a “discrete bounded entity”, separated (or being able to act separately) from his or her social context. This logic-based worldview further supports the idea of predetermination; action is preceded by intention (Chia & Rasche, 2015:34). The dwelling worldview, according to Chia and Rasche (2015:35), conversely regards the individual as being significantly shaped by social interactions and practices. Vaara and Whittington (2012:291) emphasise the importance of all three practice engagement modes of empirics, theory and philosophy in realising the potential of the strategy-as-practice perspective.

3.6.5.2 Future research avenues for the strategy-as-practice perspective

It seems that various authors agree that the strategy-as-practice perspective has the potential to contribute to the field of strategy, as well as within the broader field of social research. These authors identify different future avenues (as described in this section) of research that should facilitate the realisation of this potential.

Rouleau (2013:557) suggests that, while the main drive of the strategy-as-practice movement was initially to differentiate it from other trains of strategy thought, the

challenge is now to produce useable knowledge (testable theories) and methodological growth (extending ethnographic research and/or exploring a wider range of research methods). Vaara and Whittington (2012:286) concur by arguing that strategy-as-practice research is yet to reach its potential within a practice perspective, recognising a call for 'more epistemological and theoretical depth'. Throughout their study, Vaara and Whittington (2012) place significant focus on the notion that a broader societal context, in addition to organisational practices, shapes strategizing activities. These authors subsequently call for more research linking strategy-making activities with broader societal practices.

In addition to this, the above authors propose more future avenues for research from within the strategy-as-practice perspective. They firstly call for more enquiry into "agency within a web of practices". This refers to comprehensively investigating all the situated activities of strategists, even those not deemed strategic. This view acknowledges, in contrast to that of traditional strategy approaches, a more complex nature of agency in strategy-making. Secondly, Vaara and Whittington (2012:315-317) call for increased enquiry into emergence in strategizing; these 'unscripted' activities lead to the unplanned emergence of strategies. Thirdly, the role of non-human artefacts, like documents and technology, in strategizing practices needs further investigation. A critical analysis of the 'taken-for-granted' practices is fourthly called for. This refers to examining aspects like why certain practices are prevalent within organisations and how practitioners are influenced by them and react to them.

Authors, like Jarzabkowski *et al.* (2015:2), and Seidl and Whittington (2014:1408) warn against studying practices in isolation, ignoring practical and theoretical insights. Seidl and Whittington refer to 'micro-isolationism'; focusing solely on the praxes, ignoring macro-contextual factors that would enable or constrain strategizing activities. To broaden the empirical research scope of the strategy-as-practice perspective, while guarding against 'micro-institutionalism', these authors advise a subscription to 'flat' (strategizing constitutes a broad range of activities, positions and relationships) and 'tall' (micro-activities that are shaped by 'meso- and macro level structures and systems') ontologies. Agreeing with a subscription to 'tall ontologies', Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009:70) submit that the strategy-as-practice perspective has grappled with issues of connecting micro-level activities with macro-level contextual factors, and

linking a practice perspective of strategizing with outcomes and the subsequent call for more enquiry into these areas. Regnér and Zander (2011:823) advocate the impending role of the strategy-as-practice perspective in analysing micro-level activities and mechanisms in creating novel/heterogeneous knowledge that eventually leads to competitive advantages.

Golsorkhi *et al.* (2015:17), warn against the isolation of the strategy-as-practice perspective, subsequently calling for its empirical and theoretical strengthening, while maintaining links with other fields of strategy thought. The above authors acknowledge the strategy-as-practice perspective's contributory potential in social research. They, however, advocate novel theoretical and methodological applications in this perspective, in order to realise this potential. Golsorkhi *et al.* (20015:17-19), subsequently identify areas for future exploration. These areas include: 1) the link between structure and agency in strategizing (enabling and constraining of structure/context on the activities of practitioners); 2), transferring practice-based strategizing knowledge to new contexts, like governmental organisations and hospitals; 3), strategy-as-practice knowledge compared across nations: 4), 'longitudinal analyses'; 5), 'coping and resistance' in strategizing; 6), 'temporal and spatial dimensions of strategizing' (where and when strategizing takes place); 7), the role of 'emotions' in strategizing (this area seems quite relevant to social interactions in strategizing; the focus of the current study); 8), the role of technology in strategizing, as well as; 9), improving the accessibility of strategizing knowledge for practitioners.

- **Linking outcomes to the strategy-as-practice perspective**

As discussed in Chapter 2, the field of strategy research, to be legitimised, needs to contribute to the improvement of organisational performance. As discussed in the previous section, Golsorkhi *et al.* (2015:17-19), acknowledge that this mandate should apply to the strategy-as-practice perspective, avoiding the isolation of this perspective from other strategy approaches and from practitioners. The above authors consequently call for improving the accessibility of strategy knowledge. The legitimacy of the strategy-as-practice perspective, as a distinctive field of research, may thus be questioned if it cannot pragmatically propose ways of improving performance. Drawing on Jarzabkowski *et al.* (2007); Johnson *et al.* (2007); and Whittington (2007),

Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009:70) similarly acknowledge the growing call to develop outcomes.

The above authors advocate linking practice-based strategizing to outcomes, in order to firstly connect with traditional strategic management theory, which holds that the improvement of organisational performance is its main purpose. Outcomes should secondly 'inform practice'. Regnér (2012:182) similarly alludes to the lack of studies linking strategizing with outcomes. In contrast to the traditional theories that attempt to identify and prescribe universal 'mechanisms and processes' that would supposedly contribute to competitive advantages, Regnér advocates the strategy-as-practice perspective's ability to explore how situated mechanisms and processes are created. The above author maintains that the strategy-as-practice perspective's integrated nature allows for this enhanced understanding by linking micro-level activities of strategy practitioners with the broader, macro-level factors.

The integrative nature of the strategy-as-practice perspective seemingly problematizes the linking of strategizing activities with organisational outcomes or competitive advantages even more. Whereas traditional strategy research relies on extensive data on limited variables to explain performance, the strategy-as-practice perspective allows for rich, situated comprehension of strategizing (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009:84). Jarzabkowski *et al.* (2015:3), question the merits of explaining outcomes exclusively through strategizing (the 'what') practices; they advocate the inclusion of the strategy actors (the 'who'), as well 'how' it is done. It is, for example, not good enough to link a SWOT-analysis per se to company performance; one should also consider the practitioners involved and how they execute this strategy tool. Venkateswaran and Prabhu (2010:157) agree and argue that investigating firm level outcomes, the focus of traditional strategy research, is not enough within a strategy-as-practice perspective. They state that different outcomes can also relate to different individuals, groups and institutional levels.

Because there are so many factors on so many levels that may potentially influence outcomes (Regnér, 2008:567), the question arises whether it is possible to pinpoint the exact strategizing practices that lead to certain outcomes. Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009:85-89) propose that outcomes could firstly be explicated by the activities of

practitioners and ‘mechanisms’ in ‘constructing’ them. Secondly, variations in outcomes can be attributed to variations in the strategizing activities of practitioners. The above authors further differentiate between different units of analysis, resulting in five different levels of outcomes linked to their nine research domains on strategy practitioners (discussed in Section 3.6.4.1). Outcomes expounded by the construction thereof through strategizing activities, *or* variance in outcomes explained by variance between strategizing activities that construct them can, according to the above authors, be applied on each of these five different levels. These levels include ‘personal/individual outcomes’ (investigating strategizing activities, or variants thereof) of individuals at a micro-level), ‘group outcomes’, ‘strategizing-process outcomes’, ‘organizational outcomes’, and “institutional outcomes”. Jarzabkowski goes on to list various studies and notes that many span across different levels of outcomes.

Regnér (2008:565-588) links the strategy-as-practice and dynamic capabilities views in examining the creation of sustainable competitive advantage. Teece, Pisano and Shuen (1997:514-515) state that the dynamic capabilities perspective has developed from the resource-based view that posits that organisation-specific resources lead to the creation of competitive advantages. The above authors refer to the dynamic capabilities view, thereby heeding the call for the development of managerial capabilities, the accumulation of knowledge and learning within organisations in creating superior performance. They submit that *dynamic* refers to evolving competencies, adapting to a volatile business environment and that *capabilities* “... emphasize the key role of strategic management in appropriately adapting, integrating, and reconfiguring internal and external organizational skills, resources, and functional competences to match the requirements of a changing environment” (Teece, *et al.*, 1997:515). Unique dynamic capabilities create value for firms, and lead to sustainable competitive advantages. Regnér (2008:567) advocates the practice perspective’s potential contribution to the dynamic capabilities view. A practice approach allows for a socially informed, contextualised analysis of the explicit and tacit practices of multiple strategy practitioners in creating and recreating capabilities to assist in understanding how these capabilities are created; and how these capabilities lead to sustainable competitive advantages (Regnér, 2008:567; Regnér, 2012:185).

The focus is thus on how mechanisms and processes are created that eventually lead to competitive advantages. The current study heeds Regnér's (2008:581) call to explore, from a practice viewpoint, the evolving social interactions of strategy actors within an organisational context of (routinized) practices and tools and a broader societal context, and how resulting dynamic capabilities ('unique activity configurations' as organisational assets) shape outcomes.

Regnér and Zander (2011:822) further allude to organisations creating situated, heterogeneous and 'idiosyncratic' knowledge from the above-mentioned contextualised perpetual social interactions. Organisations thus learn through constantly creating, 'combining and recombining' knowledge; determining the combination of practices and resources to provide for competitive advantages. Concomitantly, Rouleau (2013:551) refers to the 'practice as knowledge' and 'practices as organisational resources' views (as described in Section 3.6.4.1). This refers to shared meaning resulting from ongoing strategizing between strategy actors. These shared meanings lead to unique practices and knowledge that can be a source of competitive advantages.

Regnér and Zander (2011:822) acknowledge the complexity of this process and propose that 'serendipity' (coincidentally doing the right things at the right time) probably plays a significant role. This seemingly links with Mintzberg and Walter's (1987) postulation that strategy emerges from "a stream of activities". This further links with Mintzberg's (2015) suggestion that superior performance arises from learning what works best in an organisation with its unique structures, actors and processes, rather than from generalised strategy prescription. Regnér (2012)

Concluding remarks on Part B: a practice perspective on strategizing

From the preceding investigation of the strategy-as-practice perspective, the following salient observations can be made:

1. The strategy-as-practice perspective emerged in Europe; and this action approach was coined for the first time about two decades ago by Whittington. The publishing of a special edition of the *Journal of Management Studies* in 2003, focusing on strategizing activities supposedly provided the impetus for

the growth of the strategy-of-practice perspective with the Strategy-As-Practice Network (SAP-IN, n.d.) boasting in excess of 300 members and numerous published works worldwide in 2020.

2. This perspective represents a logical progression from sociologists' turn to the study of practices of organisational members (the practice turn).
3. The writings of Mintzberg on the emergence of strategy (in contrast to the planned emergence thereof) influenced the early development of the strategy-as-practice perspective.
4. This approach regards strategy as a social practice; and it focuses on the activities and interactions of the strategy practitioner.
5. In contrast to traditional strategy theory that prescribes standardised organisational level strategies (the *what* of strategy), the strategy-as-practice perspective calls for a socially informed investigation of the micro-activities of strategy actors (the *who* and *how* of strategy).
6. The focus on the who and how of strategy extends to how strategy-making activities influence strategic outcomes.
7. This perspective does, however, exhibit links with certain main strategy theories: the process school of thought (shared focus on the process of strategizing) and the resourced based view (uniquely situated activities processes and skills).
8. The prevalence of existing strategy jargon in numerous published Strategy-as-practice articles proposedly facilitates the acceptance of this view within the strategic management fraternity.
9. This perspective includes the following main themes:
 - a. A socially informed practice: strategy consists of what people do in organisations that are embedded in a web of social practices.
 - b. *Situatedness*: the consideration of intra-organisational and broader societal factors.
 - c. An integrative framework: the complex process of strategizing is acknowledged: a) The praxis refers to the actual actions and interactions of, b), strategic practitioners (actors), contextualised within, c), practices – institutionalised procedures used in strategizing, influenced by intra- and extra-organisational factors.

10. The contributions of the strategy-as-practice perspective to the broader field of strategic management include, a), the introduction of a new theoretical perspective, namely the social theory of practice; b), broadening of an understanding of performance; c), extending the range of organisations that can be studied (various non-profit organisations); d), facilitating new methodological approaches, as well as: e), a more direct investigation of micro-activities in the organisational contextualised within a real world social context.
11. The term 'practice' within the strategy-as-practice perspective is interpreted differently by scholars. These interpretations include practice as managerial action; as a set of tools; as knowledge; as organisational knowledge and practices as a global discourse. The embracing of this plurality is encouraged, as this allows for a richer understanding of the complex nature of socially embedded activities.
12. Three ways of engaging with 'practices' also exist in research, namely: practice as a phenomenon (studying actual interactions); perspective (constructing theories of practice); or as a philosophy (building blocks of an ever-evolving social reality).
13. Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009:74) provided a typology of strategy-as-practice research that identifies nine possible research domains, based on the level of praxis-analysis (micro-, meso- or macro-level) and the type of practitioner (internal versus external, and individual versus aggregate).
14. Regarding future avenues for research, the challenges facing strategy-as-practice perspective are to produce usable knowledge (testable theories) and methodological growth. There is a call for theoretical and empirical strengthening of the strategy-as-practice field, as well as subscription to flat (strategizing activities across a broad range of activities and positions) and tall (analysis on micro-, meso- and macro-level) ontologies.
15. The strategy-as-practice perspective needs to be legitimised by pragmatically proposing ways to improve organisational performance. There is subsequently a growing call to link practice-based strategizing to organisational outcomes.
16. The strategy-as-practice perspective supposedly allows for the explication of outcomes (including improved organisational performance) by practitioners' activities and the mechanisms in constructing them. Variance in outcomes can concomitantly be explained by variance in strategizing activities.

17. In aligning with the resource-based view (RBV) that dynamic capabilities lead to sustainable competitive advantages, the strategy-as-practice perspective allows for socially informed, contextualised analyses of how strategic actors create and recreate. This can assist in understanding how these capabilities are created and how they lead to sustainable competitive advantages.
18. The a 'practice as knowledge' and a 'practices as resources' viewpoints within the strategy-as-practice perspective relate to the notion that shared meaning resultant from ongoing strategizing (from social interaction) between strategy actors leads to unique practices and knowledge that can be the source of competitive advantages.

Part C: Strategies as socially informed practices

The objective of Part C is to propose a theoretical framework that informs the empirical phase of the current study. Section 3.7 provides a concise description of the assumptions to which this study subscribes, and the subsequent empirical research, based on these views. A figure that depicts how strategizing and the subsequent competitive advantages are realised through the social interactions of strategy practitioners within episodes of praxis is also presented and discussed.

3.7 A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR EXPLORING SOCIAL INTERACTION IN STRATEGIZING

At this point, after the completion of the literature review, a theoretical framework that informs this study is graphically presented and discussed. As described in Chapter 5, this theoretical framework represents one of various elements of a conceptual framework that guides inquiry (Miles, Huberman & Saldanã, 2014:23; Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016:36).

It is stated in Chapter 2 that, for the current study, on a meta-level, the researcher investigated strategy from a situational, sociological and nuanced viewpoint, linking it to the dominant logic of competitive advantage and value. This sociological perspective on strategizing was further explored in Chapter 3. After an extensive literature study, the theory guiding this research has been identified.

The current study subscribes to the idea that an organisation is essentially a product of the ongoing social interaction between its members. While acknowledging the influences from rational, conflict and functional points of view, this study follows an interactionist perspective, focusing on interactions and relationships, including negotiations and renegotiations, resulting in shared meanings or a shared reality between organisational members. Simply observing interactions is not good enough in clarifying their role in shaping competitive positions. These interactions are complex; and they need to be understood in terms of the interacting actors and their motivation to interact, as well as the organisational and societal context of these interactions. The aim of the current study is consequently to explore how perpetual interactions create mutual understanding, resulting in unique mechanisms and processes, as sources of competitive advantage.

The strategy-as-practice perspective provides a lens through which to view social interaction in strategizing. This socially informed practice-based approach allows for an integrated exploration of the actual interactions (praxis) of strategy actors (practitioners), as well as the processes and tools of strategizing (practices). While the current study focuses on social interactions (practice as a phenomenon) of a group at an organisational (meso) level, it links this to individual (micro-), as well as broader societal (macro-) contexts, heeding the call for *flat* and *tall* ontologies. In addition to exploring *practice as a phenomenon*, the *practice-as-perspective* viewpoint is thus also embraced. The researcher further acknowledges that the *truth* is perpetually, subjectively and contextually negotiated and renegotiated through the praxis of interactions. It thus also subscribes to the *practice-as-a-philosophy* viewpoint and subsequently, a *dwelling worldview*-epistemology. The current study heeds the call by various researchers (see the previous section) for more research linking strategizing to outcomes.

Figure 3.5 depicts a theoretical framework informing the current study. This graphic representation cannot fully illustrate the complexity of social interactions within a strategizing environment; and it should not be viewed in isolation, but in the context of theoretical description.

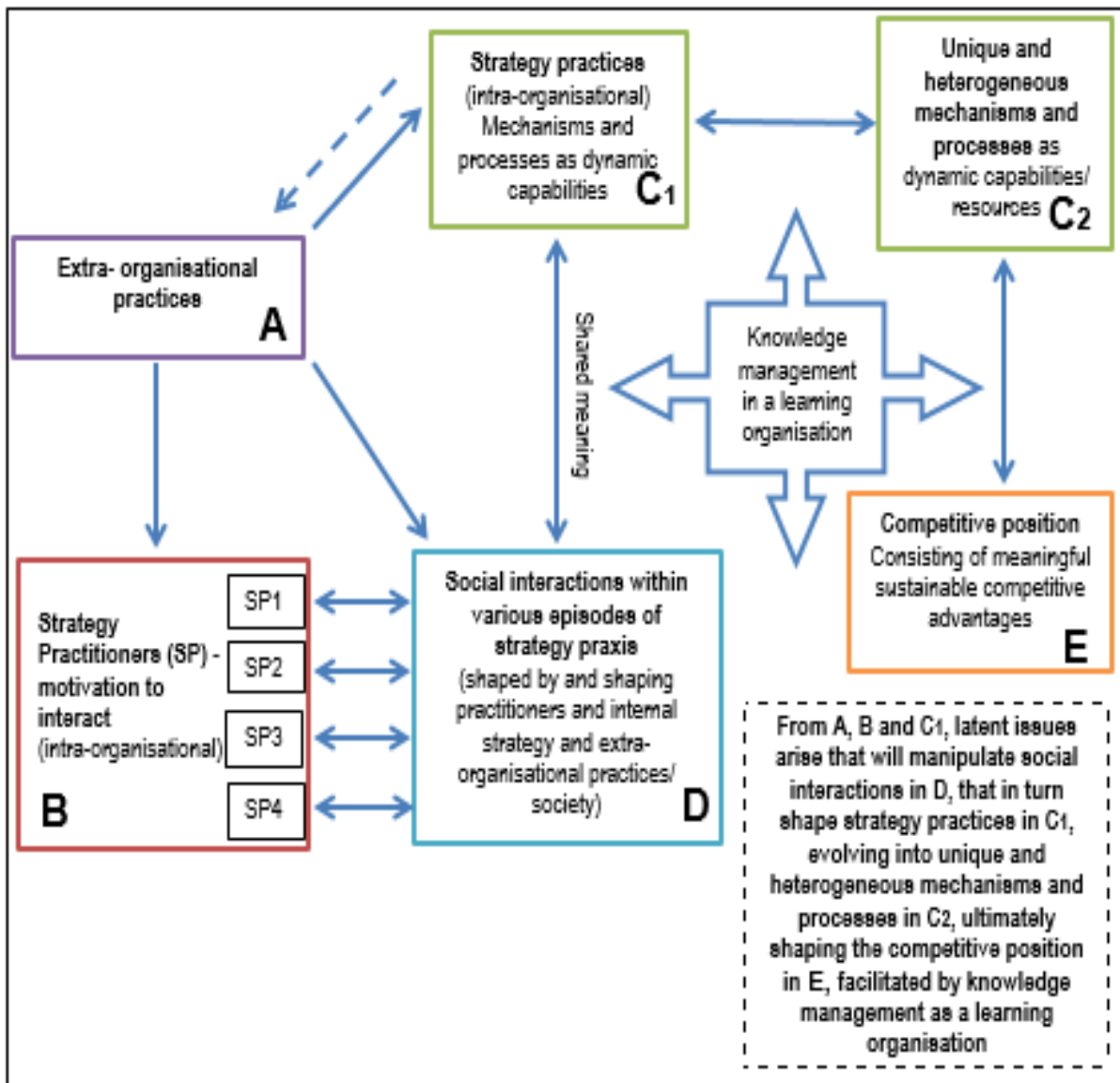


Figure 3.5: Interaction between strategy practitioners and the emergence of competitive positions; a theoretical framework (own compilation)

From Figure 3.5 it is evident that perpetual social interactions within various episodes of strategy praxis are influenced by different strategy practitioners with varying personal predispositions and subsequent motivations to interact, as well as organisational practices (tools or mechanisms and processes) and broader extra-organisational practices. Ongoing social interactions lead to negotiated and renegotiated shared and contextualised meanings, shaping unique organisational practices (the way things are done - *processes*, as well as the strategy tools that are employed and how they are employed – *mechanisms*). The ability to develop unique and heterogeneous mechanisms and processes refers to an organisation’s dynamic

capabilities. This is facilitated by a deliberate process of knowledge management, in which organisations learn which combinations of processes and mechanisms facilitate their competitiveness.

These unique and heterogeneous processes and mechanisms can be viewed as organisational resources, ultimately leading to sustained competitive advantages. Linking to Chapter 2; these competitive advantages are only real if they deliver value, not only to internal organisational processes and functions, but also to the organisation's consumers. Internal organisational knowledge generated (regarding mechanisms and processes (C1 and C2) that contributes to competitiveness) can then also inform society (A).

In short, the focus of the current study is to make sense of social interactions, and how they lead to the creation of unique and heterogeneous processes and mechanisms that ultimately lead to strategy outcomes. An in-depth understanding of this iterative process can inform *how* social interaction in strategizing should be approached, in order to facilitate the creation of unique and heterogeneous processes and mechanisms within unique organisational contexts. This stands in contrast to traditional strategy research approaches that aim to identify and prescribe generalised mechanisms and processes in creating competitive advantages; the *what* of strategy, instead of the *how* of strategy.

3.8 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter started with contextualising the study of social interaction within the fields of organisational studies and organisational behaviour. A discussion of four major paradigms regarding the study of social interaction was then provided. This included a reference to the rational-irrational dualism investigating social interaction within organisations. The current study favours an interactionist approach. The strategy-as-practice perspective, as the lens through which to view social interactions in strategizing was explored next. A theoretical framework that informs this study was lastly proffered. Chapter 4 explores the context for the empirical phase of the current study, namely selected private higher education institutions.

CHAPTER 4: THE RESEARCH CONTEXT OF PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The literature review in Chapters 2 and 3 aimed to identify, justify and describe the theoretical framework guiding the empirical phase of the current study. The *situatedness* of strategizing has been noted within the current study's research framework in the preceding chapters. It is therefore imperative to comprehensively investigate the specific context in which strategizing takes place. Chapter 4 subsequently provides a description of the research context of the current study. As explained in Chapter 1, the current study explores strategizing within the context of two private higher education institutions (PHEIs) in South Africa. The lack of socially informed research on the strategizing practices of strategy practitioners within the private higher education (PHE) sector in South Africa, as described in Chapter 1, firstly led to the choice of PHEIs as the research setting for the current study. More strategy enquiry within this specific context is secondly necessitated by the unique challenges facing PHEIs in South Africa, as noted in Chapter 1 and further examined in this chapter. Chapter 4 focuses on the external environment in which the two selected organisations operate, namely the South African PHE-landscape.

The internal environments of these organisations are examined in the empirical phase of the current study; as the strategizing praxes are inextricably linked to the peculiarities of the respective organisations. The internal environment of the two selected organisations will thus be comprehensively described in Chapter 6; as it represents the specific context of the cases (strategizing) investigated as part of the case study approach followed in the current study. Figure 4.1 depicts the relative position of Chapter 4 within the overall research project, as well as the structure of this chapter.

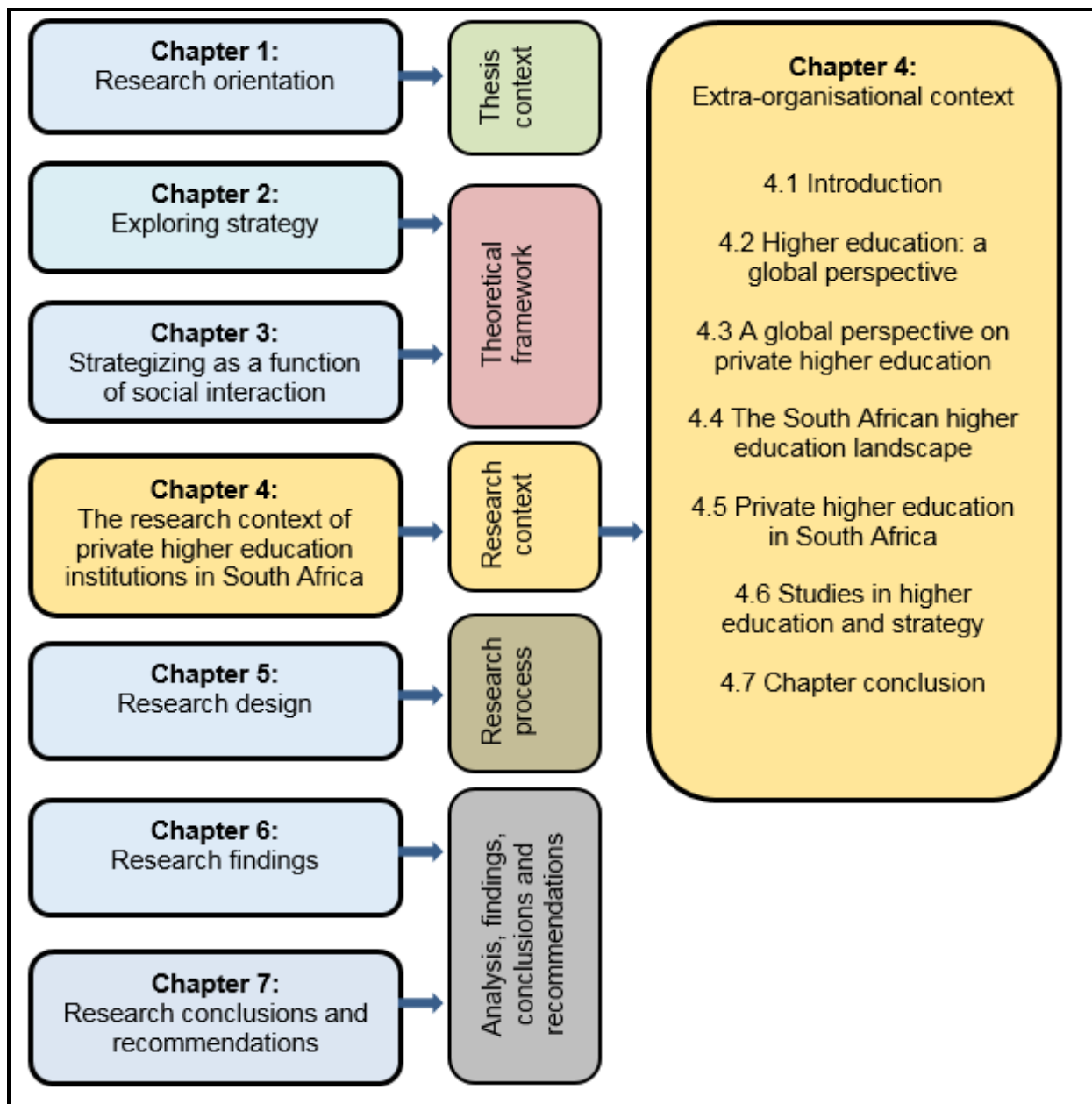


Figure 4.1: The structure of Chapter 4 (own compilation)

As depicted in Figure 4.1, the chapter starts with a global investigation of higher education (HE) in Section 4.2. The main changes in the nature of HE over the last five decades are discussed. This serves as a backdrop for the discussion of recurring themes within the global PHE-industry in Section 4.3. The chapter then moves to the South African HE-landscape in Section 4.4 that serves to frame the investigation into PHE-provision in South Africa in Section 4.5. The chapter concludes with a look at the existing studies within the existing strategic management studies within a PHE-related research setting in Section 4.6. Specific attention is awarded in this section to strategy-as-practice research within a PHE-context.

This chapter is, on a meta-level, framed by the debate around whether HE should be viewed as a public or private good; and consequently, who should pay for it. This current debate is specifically fuelled by the supposed gradual *marketization* of HE amidst increasing HE-demand. Another pervasive theme guiding this chapter's discussions and one that is linked to the public-private debate, is the notion of distrust and supposed lingering quality concerns towards private higher educational providers, especially within the South African context.

4.2 HIGHER EDUCATION: A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

To eventually explore the South African PHE-landscape, it should be contextualised within global private provision, which, in turn, should be framed within the global HE-landscape. This section subsequently examines the global nature of HE, with specific reference to changes in this field; and how these relate to PHE.

4.2.1 Global changes in higher education

The global neoliberalist movement in which HE is increasingly being regarded as a market-driven commodity that needs to conform to rational business principles (Giroux, 2010:185), has intensified the debate surrounding education as a 'private right or a public good' (the Council for Higher Education (CHE), 2016:12). Contemporary HE-institutions are challenged to find a balance between the need to compete in a market-driven, globalised environment, while maintaining their academic integrity (De Haan, 2014:44,45). Winkler (2018) postulates that neoliberalism has transformed the public good nature of HE to a commodity attracting private investment from students expecting higher future earnings. It is against this backdrop that the significant changes in HE on a global scale should be viewed. This section subsequently explores the changing nature of HE on a global level, eventually shaping the evolution of private provision globally and in different countries.

Based mainly on a global report on the changing nature of HE prepared for the United Nations by Altbach, Reisberg and Rumbley (2009), Bezuidenhout (2013, 53-63) identifies major global changes in HE over the last five decades. These major changes

have been cross-referenced with more recent sources in the current study to substantiate the continued significance thereof; and they are described below:

Massification

There is a global 'massification' of HE with demand exceeding supply by 20-50%. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2016:30,33) acknowledges the growth in HE-enrolment and suggests that this trend will continue. Field and Shah (2016:xxi) concur, alluding to the growing demand for HE, with the exception of certain European countries, like Italy and Poland, where an ageing population has decreased the demand for HE. Private providers are, according to Field and Shah, exploiting this 'demand-absorbing' opportunity. Sub-Saharan African countries have seen HE-enrolments grow from 2.7 million in 2000 to 7.8 million in 2016, with 12 million enrolments forecasted for 2021 (Caerus Capital, 2017:22).

Caerus Capital (2017:22,24) alludes to the fact that Sub-Saharan Africa has the youngest population with the highest growth rate worldwide; and that this will double in size to two billion in 2050, leading to one billion young people needing education by this date. Governments simply do not have the capacity to address this need alone (Caerus Capital, 2017:29).

Globalisation

The globalisation and internationalisation of HE is becoming an important reality. This student mobility is leading to new opportunities; but it also broadens higher education institutions' (HEIs) list of competitors to an international level. The University of Oxford (2015:5) notes that the total number of students moving to other countries to study increased from around two million in 2000 to five million in 2014. The OECD projects that this figure will rise to about eight million in 2025, with insufficient domestic capacity being the main driver of this student mobility growth (ICEF, 2015). While Asian countries (China, India and South-Korea) account for about 53% of the sending countries, The University of Oxford (2015:5) contends that the main receiving countries, namely the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK), are losing their market share to countries, like Germany, France, Australia and Canada. Oxford attributes these changing patterns in student mobility to demographic and political changes, such as new UK visa requirements. ICEF (2017) reports a

decline of around 7% in European Union foreign student applications in the UK for the 2017/18 cycle; the first decline in applications for many years.

ICEF submits that Britain's decision to leave the European Union (BREXIT) has undoubtedly contributed significantly to this decline. Altbach and De Wit (2017) concomitantly foresee a significant change in the student mobility landscape in the wake of BREXIT and the 'Trump-era': two events that will proposedly reduce Britain's and the United States' allure as HE-destinations. Regarding Africa, ICEF (2016) maintains that recent years have seen a decline in African student-enrolments in European countries, in favour of Middle Eastern and other African countries, with South Africa being the clear favourite country of choice in Sub-Saharan Africa. Student mobility percentages in Africa (outbound students to other countries) remains twice the world average, according to ICEF (2016).

Marketisation

The privatisation and *marketization* of HE is significantly growing. As alluded to in Chapter 1, globally, private provision is growing substantially. Marketization refers to the increasing need, in the light of the increasing privatisation of HE and dwindling state subsidies, for all providers of HE (including public providers) to be more entrepreneurial in nature. Brown (2015:4) notes the gradual intensification of marketization from the 1980s to the present. The above author mentions that, in addition to tying HE-provision to the market forces of supply and demand, governments expect HEI-management to function along 'corporate lines', in which performance measures like efficiency and value for money are paramount. The 'casualisation' of HE-staff might be viewed as a notable 'symptom' of the marketization of HE and the financial challenges facing HE. Casualisation refers to HEIs' increasingly employing casual/contract workers, as opposed to fixed-term employees to cut costs (Long, 2018).

Lewis (2018) reports that The UK University and College Union (UCU) estimates that up to half of the staff complement of UK-universities are employed on a part-time, short-term contract basis; thus, in so-called precarious or insecure jobs. Long (2018) calls the significantly higher number of casual workers, as opposed to fixed-term employees at universities across Australia, a 'national disgrace'. The HE-industry in

Australia is, according to Long (2018), among the worst industries regarding job insecurity. The industry is supposedly typified by universities' exploitative labour practices, in which academics are viewed as expendable input items in the production process (Long, 2018; Lewis, 2018). This exploitation of part-time faculty who have no job-security, according to Long (2018) and Lewis (2018), compromises the effective development and delivery of academic programme offerings to students. Long (2018) and Lewis (2018) further suggest that the academic profession is tarnished by these university practices. One cannot expect insecure part-time, fringe workers to focus on long-term research outputs and the development of academic disciplines (Long, 2018; Lewis, 2018).

Field and Shah (2016:xxi) contend that public providers are struggling to meet the increased demand for HE; a gap increasingly addressed by private providers. Gupta (2018:1) concurs, mentioning that HE's commodification means 'big business' for entrepreneurs.

Financial challenges/Funding

Financial pressures are increasing on governments and HEIs to provide for HE. HEIs are faced with accommodating ever-increasing enrolments with dwindling grants from governments. Jones (2018) reports on the suicide of an academic at Cardiff University in 2018, after repeatedly reporting his unbearable workload to the university. According to Jones (2018), the university planned to cut 380 jobs to address a budget deficit; but aimed to maintain student numbers or to even grow beyond the present number. This situation, in which the massification of HE-delivery is demanded within parameters of dwindling funds that leads to mounting workloads represents a pressing modern reality to academics. Citing numerous authors, Harley (2017:5) notes the ever-increasing workload of academics over the last three decades globally within neoliberalism-aligned or pressured universities that are not willing to compromise on quality, despite the growing work-pressure of academics. To illustrate her point, Harley (2017:6) refers to the workload-calculations of her own employer; a South African university: in 2013, 23 hours were assigned to assist an Honours-level student with his/her research report; this same assistance only carried a time-allocation of 15 hours in 2017. This growing workload leads to 'anxiety, depression and stress among academics' (Harley, 2017:7). The above author argues that mechanisms, like

increased monitoring, promotion-promises and research-incentivisation have numbed academics' willingness to oppose these new working regimes. Add to this the added dimension of high unemployment levels to subdue South African academics' opposition. One might ask: at what stage might academics decide to 'capitulate'; to grant students easy pass marks, in order to manage an unbearable workload?

Learners are also experiencing financial difficulties to pay for HE. The OECD (2016:180) remarks that governments' spending on HE is not keeping up with increasing HE-enrolments. The notion that the cost of HE should be paid by the beneficiaries thereof has seen the view of HE as a public good increasingly being replaced by a *HE as a commodity*-view (Williams, 2016:131-138). This privatisation of HE could motivate or serve as justification for governments to reduce public spending on HE and financial support for HEIs, thereby transferring the cost burden to the students.

Changing learners' needs

Learners' needs are changing; and HEIs need to adapt their programme offerings and delivery modes. Field and Shah (2016:xxi) also specifically refer to the recent growing need for online and distance learning programmes, creating new possibilities for private HE providers. In linking with the pervasive neoliberalism theme in HE, Winkler (2018) remarks that modern-day students invest in HE offerings and, like paying customers, expect a return on their investments, such as increased employability and a higher income potential. Bates (2015:32) postulates that tertiary education was traditionally reserved for a select few, but that the massification of HE has now led to more diverse HE student groups: previously excluded students, whether based on a lack of funds, or based on race, now has access to this once elitist endeavour. Bates (2015:33) and Thwala (2019) further allude to lifelong learning in contrast to the traditional notion, in which students finished studies after school within a few years and then left for the world of work for good. Bates (2015:34) also refers to the modern student's digitalisation need: the newest technology needs to be incorporated into the HE-experience. Viljoen (2018) agrees and similarly refers to the diversity of students. The above author contends that students do not consist of the typical 19 to 24-year-old cohort that enter tertiary institutions directly from school. She also, like Bates, suggests that many students supposedly choose to study at a later stage, or

intermittently. In addition to students' need for newest technology-use in HE, Viljoen (2018) further alludes to students' growing environmental conscience. Bates (2015:35) finally points to HEIs attitude-shift towards students: a student's success does not rest solely upon their shoulders anymore; this responsibility is now shared with the academic. Whereas programme-quality was validated by low pass rates in the past, a high student pass rate is an important metric of a successful programme and academia today.

Technology

Advances in technology are allowing learners to access, create and recreate content and to interact with each other. This signifies a power-shift in favour of the learners. Technology also allows HEIs to develop new and diverse ways of delivering their programmes. Blayone, Van Oostveen, Barber, Di Giuseppe and Childs (2017:1,2) report that, within an environment of 'globalised and digitized knowledge', over 40 million students worldwide are enrolled for at least one online programme. The University of Oxford alludes to the growing centrality of technology in HE and postulates that technology enables wider access to HE; new modes of and enhanced teaching; opening global access to research and open access to knowledge. Caerus Capital (2017:26) postulates that technology-use represents one of the main formative forces of HE in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Giroux (2010:184,185), is a critic of the above changes like the massification, globalisation, privatisation and marketization of HE. He argues that these changes supposedly relate to neoliberal ideologies; and he criticises the subsequent reducing of educational institutions to 'job-training sites' that engage in a 'bare pedagogy' that is set on creating standardised employees for business, instead of "educating students as critical citizens". Learning is thus becoming a means to an end, instead an end in itself. Winkler (2018) likewise laments the 'colonisation' of HE by neoliberalism as the most 'sinister assault on academic freedom' to date: decisions are not based on academics' expertise and experience, but rather on line managers' considerations of customer satisfaction, efficiency, profitability and other metrics of the business world. Rhoades (2017) further postulates that neoliberal policies of right-wing populist politicians and subsequent reduced HE-funding (transferring the cost burden to students) perpetuates the perception of universities as elitist institutions. Conversely,

Taylor and De Lourdes Machado (2006:154,155) criticize the *status quo* attitude of academia and argue that HE-institutions have a duty, like all other entities, to embrace sound business principles in reacting to new challenges like marketization and reduced funding.

Reporting on their study of 26 HEIs in eight European countries, Marini and Reale (2016:123) concur and conclude that an increasingly managerial (neoliberalist) culture that HEIs are required to adopt, does not inhibit collegiality; it actually facilitates it. Bates (2015:35) similarly remarks that the days when professors shared their knowledge with a select few devout students are over; academics need to accept the new reality, in which HE-access is opened to the masses and governments will evaluate them on their ability to ensure high completion rates within the parameters of the efficient use of scarce resources. Whether desirable or not, the above changes are clearly creating fertile grounds for the proliferation of private provision. It is within this context of HE-changes that the following section will explore private HE-provision from a global perspective – before moving on to the South African HE-context.

4.3 A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE ON PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION

This section aims to provide for a better understanding of what private HE-provision entails and to identify certain global trends and recurring themes related to PHE. As with the discussion of HE in the previous section, the discussion of private HE-provision is framed within the ambit of the global proliferation of demand in the HE-industry and particularly PHE, as well as the debate around HE as a public versus a private good.

4.3.1 Defining private higher education

Three common criteria in distinguishing between private and public provision include (Buckner, 2017:298) 1): legal ownership, government as opposed to private; 2), funding: by government or exclusively by private investment and student tuition fees and; 3), contribution to society: public or for private gain. The current study subscribes to using the above three criteria in differentiating between private and public provision. Following the above narrative, private HE-providers can thus be viewed as

organisations that are legally owned by private entities; that are privately funded and through student tuition fees; and that seek specific/individual gain, for example profit, or addressing a specific social cause.

Buckner (2017:296) further suggests that the proliferation of private provision signifies countries' shift in their perception of HE from viewing it as an 'essential public good' to regarding it as an individual/private good. As discussed in the preceding sections, this perception-change ties in with the emergence of neoliberalism in HE and the subsequent marketization thereof.

4.3.2 The proliferation of private provision

As indicated in the preceding sections, private provision is growing significantly on a worldwide scale. Dirkse van Schalkwyk (2011:32) concurs, suggesting that the private provision sector is so large in certain countries that it may even replace public provision completely. Levy (2015:8) describes the growth in private HE-provision over the last two decades as 'spectacular'; and he goes on to postulate that one in every three students worldwide is enrolled at a PHEI. Bezuidenhout (2013:59), as well as Field and Shah (2016:xxiii), agree in suggesting that the proliferation of the PHEIs, especially in developing countries, are seemingly driven by demand absorption; and that the global 'massification' of HE (as discussed in the previous section) has led to needs that governments just cannot meet. Likewise, Buckner (2017:296) labels private provision as the fastest-growing segment in HE; and he maintains that globally, private providers outnumber public providers. Based on a study of 15 129 PHEs worldwide, the above author concludes that the remarkable growth of PHE cannot solely be ascribed to increased HE-demand and governments' inability to cater for it. This growth can, in a big way, be explained by the notion that governments are increasingly accepting private provision as a 'preferred model' in delivering HE (Buckner, 2017:311).

4.3.3 Most private providers are profit-seeking

Dirkse van Schalkwyk and Steenkamp (2016:582) submit that most PHEIs are 'entrepreneurial' in nature, seeking profit for its stakeholders by offering flexible and

targeted programmes. The above author, like Giroux (2010:185) and Gupta (2018:1), alludes to the evolution of HE (private and public alike) from an altruistic nature to being business-like, with this evolutionary process supposedly already starting in the early 20th century. Bezuidenhout (2013:57) concurs and maintains that factors like economic pressures emanating from reduced government funding, as well as competition from other providers, nationally and internationally, has forced even public HE providers to foster an entrepreneurial approach. Levy (2015:8) similarly remarks that, even though certain PHEIs are also established to cater for a specific religion or social cause, most are founded to exploit profitable opportunities in absorbing a growing demand for HE. Referring to large companies increasingly investing in PHE, Levy (2015:8) states: “Clearly these companies are in it for profit; and they do not claim otherwise”.

4.3.4 Global trends and recurring themes in private higher education

Levy (2015:8) contends that surprisingly, many HE-patterns are replicated across many countries; and it is therefore possible to identify certain global trends that pertain to private higher education provision. These trends include:

- The continued growth of PHE worldwide, except for the Middle East.
- PHEIs continue to be much smaller than public providers.
- PHEIs are founded to serve a religious purpose or a specific social need, but most are established to profit by absorbing the growing demand for HE.
- Most PHEIs are privately funded and/or funded through fees.
- Management at private providers tends to be more hierarchical than at their public counterparts, resulting in more limited academic agency and less student participation.
- PHEIs continue to have a narrow focus; limiting their programme offerings to selected fields, mostly in commerce.
- Many private providers forge lucrative collaboration agreements with foreign providers or governments.

A comprehensive study of PHE in 17 regions and countries (Australia, China, Europe, Ghana, Hong Kong, Kenya, India, Latin America, Malaysia, Oman, Saudi Arabia, the

United Kingdom and, the United States of America) published in 2016, identified four main recurring issues in the field of private provision (Field & Shah, 2016:xxi), as depicted in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Recurring themes in private provision (adapted from Field & Shah, 2016)

Theme	Discussion
Quality and regulation	The proliferation of private HE providers leads to quality concerns and subsequent regulation within governments' overall HE-frameworks.
Financing	<p><u>Developing countries:</u> mostly students' or their families' own finances. Access is restricted to affluent students. Limited government funding leads to higher course fees than at public HEIs.</p> <p><u>Developed countries:</u> various financing options, including government-based student loans.</p>
Demographics, geographic location and admission standards	Access is increased for female students. International students constitute a significant portion of the PHE-students of certain countries. Private provision tends to converge around populous areas.
Employment outcomes	Research on the employability of private provision graduates is limited but is growing in this field. Private HE tends to focus on a limited range of popular programmes, for example, in management, economics and computer sciences (except countries like India and Malaysia, which offer a broader range of qualifications).

Field and Shah (2016:xxii) mention that the unique private provision character of different countries and, subsequently, the unique nature of recurring issues discussed in Table 4.1, are shaped by the historical, political and social context of the respective countries. The recurring issues described in Table 4.1 relate to universal challenges that PHEIs and their registered students face within their respective countries' national HE-framework. These issues are also prevalent in the South African private HE-

landscape, as discussed in Section 4.5. Xiaoying and Abbott (2016:1-10) concur with Field and Shah; and they allude to regulatory constraints and persisting quality concerns, as well as funding challenges in PHE.

According to the above authors, these funding challenges of private providers, emanating from reduced or no government backing, increase the risk of financial failure. In addition to risking the failure of securing employment (quality, and regulatory concerns) in studying at a private provider with limited or no government-backing, students thus risk paying for a programme that might never be completed (Xiaoying & Abbott, 2016:9). These authors further refer to 'systematic instability': the financial failure of one private provider causing reputational damage to all other PHEIs.

The next section looks at the South African HE-framework, with specific reference to its influence on private provision in South Africa. The main themes include the strict regulation of HE and the major challenges facing HE-authorities.

4.4 THE SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

Whereas the previous sections examined global HE followed by an examination of subsequent global PHE-issues, the following section delves into the South African HE-framework, as the context for private provision in South Africa. In addition to examining the challenges faced in HE, the discussion also addresses the regulatory framework that governs HE-provision in South Africa.

As with many other facets in South African society, the evolution of the HE-landscape has been significantly influenced by racial segregation. It is therefore not surprising that the current national HE-framework is shaped by efforts to address such inequalities and the inadequate delivery that has resulted from a fragmented educational system divided along racial lines before 1994 (Ellis, 2012:13; Bezuidenhout, 2013:20,21; Meko, 2018:227). The post-Apartheid HE-landscape has subsequently undergone comprehensive institutional and regulatory changes (Davis, 2013:167).

4.4.1 Challenges facing higher education in South Africa

Higher Education South Africa (HESA, renamed to Universities South Africa (USAf) in 2015) (2014:1-13), as well as Meko (2018:228) note that significant advances have been made since 1994 in transforming a racially driven, incoherent institutional HE-system, into a differentiated framework better suited to the HE-needs of all South Africans. HESA, as well as Meko, however, highlight certain challenges that still inhibit the effective delivery of HE. Table 4.2 depicts the major challenges facing the South African higher education fraternity, as identified by various authors and comprehensive reports, including HESA (2014); Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard (2015); the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) (2016a & 2017); Cloete (2016) for the Centre for Higher Education Trust; Meko (2018), as well as Thwala, (2019).

Table 4.2: Major challenges facing higher education in South Africa (Adapted from HESA, 2014; Cloete, Mouton & Sheppard, 2015; Cloete, 2016; DHET, 2016a & 2017; Meko, 2018 & Thwala, 2019)

Challenge	Discussion
An enduring legacy of the pre-1994 HE-landscape	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistent racial inequality in providing opportunities for success • An intellectual 'colonisation' and 'racialization' legacy
Ineffective throughput rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systemic internal HE- ineffectiveness • Postgraduate enrolments and outputs remain low
Decreasing funds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A gradual decrease in government-subsidies • The National Student Financial Aid Scheme's (NFSAS) inability to recover debts
An inability to handle the upsurge in HE-demand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate facilities in public provision exacerbated by decreased government-spending • An acute shortage of skilled academics
Student protests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Triggered by limited access: higher tuition fees and limited subsidised space at public providers amidst a pressing demand for HE

A more comprehensive discussion of the challenges described in Table 4.2 is presented in this section.

The enduring legacy of the pre-1994 HE-landscape

Regarding the first challenge as listed in Table 4.2, HESA (2014:1-5) firstly comments that the racialised pre-democracy HE-landscape still lingers through persistent inequality. This inequality, HESA contends, still runs along racial lines and entails unequal HE-opportunities, as well as unequal success rates, with this problem seemingly evolving into one based on social class-inequality. HESA (2014:15) acknowledges that, regarding access, the percentage of African (black) students of total South African HE-enrolment has seen a significant increase from 40% in 1993 (HESA, 2014) to 73% in distance learning and 69.2% in contact learning, in 2015 (DHET, 2017:13).

Citing the Council for Higher Education (CHE) (2014), HESA (2014) states that, although it is improving, the participation rate of African students (number of HE-enrolments as a percentage of the 20 to 24-year old age group per race cohort), however, remains low at 14%, as opposed to 57% for whites. HESA further notes the significant higher success rate of white students in comparison with their black counterparts in HE in terms of 'drop-out, undergraduate success and graduation rates'. Whereas race-demographics have traditionally influenced opportunities and results, HESA acknowledges the growing role of social class in HE-inequality. Cloete (2016a:7) agrees and postulates that the current government-policy of decreased HE-spending perpetuates this divide between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'.

A second issue that HESA (2014:7,8) describes, is the 'intellectual colonisation and racialization' legacy of a pre-1994 HE-system. The student protests in 2015 and 2016 saw the questioning of Eurocentric epistemologies that still prevail, as well as ideologies that supposedly still perpetuate inequality, based on race and social class (Le Grange, 2016:1). Heleta (2016) calls for the dismantling of a westernised worldview and epistemologies in HE and the subsequent creation of South African, Southern African and African-centred teaching and learning. Majaba, Ralarala and Angu (2018:1) agree by noting the past three years' compelling call for 'decolonised education'.

These authors question the hegemonic use of English in perpetuating current Eurocentric-style curricula that suppress the African voice and the African languages. Mekoa (2018:239) further refers to the understaffing of black academics at historically white universities. He suggests that certain parties attempt to underplay this consequence (understaffing of black academics) of racism by referring to the high percentage of black student enrolment at these institutions and suggesting that socio-economic status is the real problem. Mekoa (2018:239), however, notes that this under-representation of black academics, points to the lingering practices of institutional racism and prejudice that tend to keep black people in lower socio-economic strata.

An ineffective HE-system

An ineffective HE-system resulting in low throughput rates represents the second challenge, as depicted in Table 4.2. Tjønneland (2017:2) maintains that the national wave of mass unrest in 2015 and 2016 is indicative of students' dissatisfaction with an ineffective/untransformed South African HE-system. CHE (2016:41,42) refers to continuing low throughput and subsequent low output rates due to systemic problems, such as the unpreparedness of high school scholars and ineffective material, human resources and subsidies. Cloete (2016a:4) remarks that 55% of all students that enrol for HE, never graduate. This, together with the fact that very few students (one in four) complete their qualifications within the prescribed timeframe, points to an ineffective HE-system that puts strain on the government-subsidies and HEI-resources (Cloete, 2016a:4).

HESA (2014:5-7), with specific reference to master's degrees and doctorates, maintains that current postgraduate enrolment and graduation rates are insufficient to address South Africa's need for highly skilled labour. Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard (2015:52) concur and state that South Africa finds itself very low down on the global list of *PhD-producers*. Cloete (2016a:2,3) does, however, allude to the momentous transformation strides made in South Africa: black doctoral graduates grew by 706% from 1996 to 2012. Cloete also reveals that South Africa outperforms the rest of Africa appreciably when it comes to producing doctorates and research outputs.

Limited funds

A third challenge relates to the already limited state funding of HE in South Africa that is decreasing. USAf (2016:3) argues that several studies have confirmed the underfunding of HE in South Africa. This university body remarks that, in 2012, government-spending on HE amounted to a ratio of 0.71% of the South African Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Countries like Cuba (4.5%), China (3%), Finland (2.18%), Malaysia (1.76%) and Ghana (1.44%) spend more than double this ratio; and countries like the USA (1.39%), Senegal (1.38%), Australia (1.24%) and India (1.2%) spend significantly more (USAf, 2016:3). USAf further contends that the South African spending ratio on HE has declined even further to 0.64% of GDP in the 2014/2015 financial year and that the 'teaching input grant per student unit' has been steadily decreasing.

The above trend seems concerning, especially within the light of increased HE-demand and fee-related protests in 2015 and 2016 – the 'Fees must fall' protests. DHET (2018c) contends that 2017 saw a South African HE-spending ratio of 0.7% to GDP, but also refers to Jacob Zuma, the former president of South Africa, who promised to increase university subsidies to 1% of GDP by 2021, as recommended by the Heher Commission of 2017. The Heher Commission of inquiry was established in 2016 to investigate the feasibility of providing free higher education in South Africa, following the nationwide student protests for free education (DHET, 2018c:4,49). DHET (2018c:50) further refers to Jacob Zuma over-ruling the Heher Commission's findings that free higher education is not possible by declaring in December 2017 that HE would be free for poor and working-class students. This decision seemingly prompted by political motives could be disastrous for a government budget already under pressure due to divergent demands. This declaration of Zuma could significantly impact upon the HE- landscape for years to come. Government duly allocated an extra R57 billion for three years starting in 2018, in addition to the extra R10 billion provided in 2017 (Tshwane, 2018). Whether this will be enough, especially within the context of Government's historic below-par spending on HE, and with student dissatisfaction still simmering from the 2015/2016 protests, remains to be seen.

Bawa, the CEO of Universities South Africa (USAf), questions the sustainability of the free HE-model and is concerned that Government will have to reverse its free

education policy within a few years' time (Child, 2018). Promises of free education can only exert more pressure on South African public HE-institutions, which are already struggling financially. The Walter Sisulu University, for example, has declared that they have been in a financial crisis since the 'Fees must fall'-protests (Tandwa, 2018); these protests purportedly cost South African universities R786 million (Kahn, 2018). In addition to dealing with these losses, Walter Sisulu University must also deal with students' non-payment of tuition and accommodation fees. The university relies on these fees to cover its operational costs (Tandwa, 2018). Mabizela, in *The Citizen* (2018), similarly sketches a bleak picture for Rhodes university, citing declining Government subsidies as a major contributing factor (*The Citizen*, 2018). Thwala (2019) alludes to students demanding "full access" to HE: in addition to free tuition, accommodation and food subsidies are also sought. This, the above author suggests, places further pressure on the public HE-system. The University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) has already faced student protests related to accommodation-debt early in 2019 (Kubekha, 2019). It is as if students are protesting at the point of delivery, namely the universities that simply cannot help everyone. These issues need to be resolved with the NSFAS-scheme that is tasked by Government to manage HE-funding, and not at universities (Kubekha, 2019). One can also speculate about the negative impact of a current funding model that disregards postgraduate education on universities' research outputs.

This discussion regarding the funding of HE in South Africa reveals many unaddressed issues that problematise effective HE-delivery in South Africa, as is discussed in the next section.

An inability to handle the upsurge in HE-demand

Government's inability to cater for the upsurge in HE-demand is the fourth challenge depicted in Table 4.2. Moodley (2019) reports that, in 2019, the University of Kwazulu-Natal received around 91 000 new first year applications; but it could only accommodate 8 770; the University of Stellenbosch received almost 34 000; but it has only 5300 places; the University of the Witwatersrand received 62 740 new first year applications; but it has only 4 200 seats. Pillay (2019) concomitantly reports that, while the Durban University of Technology received approximately 83 000 new first year applications in 2019, they could only take in 8 770 students; and that the University of

South Africa was aiming to accept 113 000 out of more than half a million new first year applications in 2019.

It must be noted though that some students apply at more than one university. The sheer extent of the above application figures confirms the pressing demand for HE. Caerus Capital (2017:93) estimated that the applications-to-seat ratio for public HEIs in South Africa was 3.1 to 1 before 2017. A comparison of the pre-2017 HE-demand with the above-described 2019 demand seems to further confirm the exponential growth in HE-demand. It is therefore quite concerning that, as depicted in Table 4.4, public student registrations are stagnating in excessive demand-conditions. This alludes to Government's acute inability to address HE-demand in South Africa.

DHET (2016b:1-3) concurs with HESA in commending the positive advances in HE since 1994. DHET (2016b:1-3), however, contends that the current HE-system still struggles to cater for all HE-needs; and DHET subsequently calls for the expansion and further differentiation of the HE-system to address these needs. DHET (2016b:1-3) further acknowledges the need to revise strategies in ensuring quality delivery of HE; specific mention is made of the inadequate system in ensuring the quality of private provision. SA News (2016) reports that Dr Blade Nzimande, the then South African minister of Higher Education and Training, voiced his concern over the acute lack of academics in a growing South African HE-landscape.

Nzimande reportedly stated that 1200 new academics need to be recruited per year, in order to address the HE-needs of South Africa (SA News, 2016). Nkwanyana (2015) suggests that challenges like an ageing academic workforce, slow transformation, increased expertise demands, as well as too few academics with doctorates problematize the effective current and future HE-delivery. Farber and Collins (2016) submit that South Africa could see an exodus of skilled academics following the 2015/2016 student protests. Naledi Pandor, the minister for HE, announced in May 2018 that Government committed to spend R934 million on the University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP) (SAnews.gov.za, 2018). This amount is earmarked for enhancing student access, staff development and curriculum development. R934 million might seem rather low if one considers the significant capacity challenges facing the South African HE-system, as discussed in this section.

Nationwide student protests

Cloete (2016b) provides a comprehensive discussion on factors that may have sparked the 2015/2016 student protests at South African public universities, the fifth challenge is depicted in Table 4.2. The current HE-landscape is characterised by an upsurge in demand, as well as rising study fees that can be attributed to dwindling governmental funding (per capita); this has triggered major countrywide student protests (Cloete, 2016b). Citing Fourie (2015), Cloete reports that, in 2015, only the top four per cent of South Africa's income-earning families could afford higher education without a loan or financial aid. He further states that, whereas government-subsidies covered 49% of universities' budgets in 2000, they now (2016) cover only 40%, and at some institutions only 30%. This has, according to Cloete (2016b), resulted in a 42% increase in class fees from 2010 to 2014. The above author adds that the National Student Financial Aid Scheme's (NFSAS) inability to recover debts (uncollected debts amounted to R3.7 billion in 2014) only serves to exacerbate the problem. Referring to the above problems and subsequent unrests that started in 2015, Cloete (2016b) concludes that 'something had to give'.

CHE (2016:29) remarks that the combination of a pressing demand for HE-access, limited financial assistance for poor students, and poor throughput rates represent the toughest challenges that the South African HE-system is currently facing. In reaction to the recent student turmoil, government has increased NFSAS-spending from R9,5 billion in 2015 to R14,1 billion in 2018 (NFSAS, 2018). As discussed in a preceding section, Government has allocated an additional R10 billion in 2017, as well as R57 billion for three years from 2018 (Tshwane, 2018) to cater for its free education campaign for poor and working-class families. This amount is also to be managed by NFSAS (Tshwane, 2017). The #FeesMustFall protests also gave rise to a call for the 'decolonisation' of universities (Francis & Hardman, 2018:67). Students, according to Francis and Hardman (2018:67), called on universities to do away with their 'white imperialistic' nature, and to desist from marginalising students of colour in their cultural practices and curricula. The above authors further allude to students damaging statues and artwork that represented the perpetual exclusion and alienation of different classes, genders and races. Majaba *et al.* (2018:1), similarly refer to students' voices that need to be heard; and then contend that multilingualism should be accepted at HEIs: African languages should be embraced as languages of teaching and learning.

Looking back at the student unrest at public providers; it is interesting to note that, during this time, there were no protests of note at any of the numerous private HE-providers across South Africa. One can only speculate about the reasons for this occurrence, or rather, non-occurrence.

It is evident from the above discussion that the current South African higher education landscape is quite volatile: the system is grappling with complicated issues that represent significant challenges in a constantly changing environment. Jansen in Waterworth (2018) goes as far as to say that South African universities are on the road to collapsing. Jansen postulates that the same forces that led to the collapse of universities in various African countries, are threatening South African universities. These forces include persistent state-underfunding; perpetual instability (unrest) and state intervention in the core functions of universities (Jansen in Waterworth, 2018). The next section addresses how HE-provision is regulated in South Africa to deal with the daunting challenges that this landscape is currently facing.

4.4.2 The regulation of higher education in South Africa

Higher education in South Africa is comprehensively regulated (Dirkse van Schalkwyk, 2011:35). The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) is ultimately responsible for HE-delivery in South Africa and all organisations wishing to offer HE-qualifications need to be registered with the DHET (CHE, 2016:2). All these organisations' programme offerings need to be registered, on the recommendation of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE), with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) on the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-framework (HEQSF) of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) (CHE, 2013). Table 4.3 provides a visual representation of the South African HE regulatory framework.

Table 4.3: The South African Education Framework (SAQA, 2016)

NQF Sub-Framework/ Quality Council	NQF Level	NQF Sub-Framework and qualification type		NQF Sub-Framework/ Quality Council
Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF)/ Council on Higher Education (CHE)	10	Doctoral Degree Doctoral Degree (Professional)	-	Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO)
	9	Masters Degree Masters Degree (Professional)	-	
	8	Bachelor Honours Degree Post Graduate Diploma Bachelors Degree	Occupational Certificate Level 8	
	7	Bachelors Degree Advanced Diploma	Occupational Certificate Level 7	
	6	Diploma Advanced Certificate	Occupational Certificate Level 6	
	5	Higher Certificate	Occupational Certificate Level 5 ⁵	
General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GFETQSF)/ Umalusi	4	National Certificate ¹	Occupational Certificate Level 4	
	3	Intermediate Certificate ²	Occupational Certificate Level 3	
	2	Elementary Certificate ³	Occupational Certificate Level 2	
	1	General Certificate ⁴	Occupational Certificate Level 1	

* 1-4: Certificates issued by Umalusi. 5: The N4-N6 qualifications at NQF 5-level is currently under revision

Table 4.3 provides a concise overview of training and education in South Africa:

- The National Qualifications Framework (NQF), as promulgated by the NQF Act 67 of 2008, provides for one integrated framework for all education and training in South Africa (CHE, 2013:5).
- There are three sub-frameworks within the NQF; the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-framework (GFETQSF) deals with basic and adult basic education; while the Occupational Qualifications Sub-framework (OQSF) deals with the occupational requirements. The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-framework (HEQSF) deals with higher education qualifications that are registered on the NQF at levels 5-10.
- The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) is mainly responsible for registering all qualifications on the NQF; and for developing and implementing policies regarding the 'development, registration and publication of qualifications' (SAQA, n.d.). This should be done in line with the NQF-objectives

and in consultation with the respective quality councils of the three sub-frameworks.

- All HE-qualifications are required to be registered by SAQA on the HEQSF of the NQF, with applications for registration that need to be done through the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council for Higher Education (CHE). CHE will then advise SAQA whether to grant registration.
- All HE-qualifications are required by law to be registered; and they can only be offered by Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) registered HE-institutions; and this includes public and private providers.

It is evident that the South African government is firmly set on the strict regulation of the HE-landscape, in its endeavours to improve HE-provision. The objectives of the NQF, as contained in the NQF Act 67 of 2008 (CHE, 2013) probably best describe the current thrust of HE in South Africa, namely to:

- Create a single integrated national framework for learning achievements.
- Facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within, education and training career paths.
- Enhance the quality of education and training.
- Accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities.

As indicated in this section, private providers form part of a highly governed South African regulatory HE-framework; and they are inextricably linked to the aspirations of the South African HE-powers that be. The next section will consequently examine private HE-provision in South Africa.

4.5 PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

This section serves to provide a description of the private provision sector of the HE-industry of South Africa. In addition to examining the PHE-landscape and the nature of private provision, the challenges facing private providers need to be scrutinised. The global recurring issues and challenges for PHEIs, as discussed in Section 4.3, also surface in the local PHE-landscape; and these will also be subsequently studied.

4.5.1 The South African private higher education landscape

The importance of private higher education institutions globally, and in South Africa, seems definite. Table 4.4 depicts the total HE-enrolments at South African private and public HEIs.

Table 4.4: South African HE-enrolments (adapted from DHET 2014; 2015; 2017; 2018)

Year	Public Enrolments	Private Enrolments	Number of Private HEIs
2010	892 936	90 767	109
2011	938 201	103 036	Not provided
2012	953 373	97 478	119
2013	983 698	119 941	113
2014	969 155	142 557	119
2015	985 212	144 210	124
2016	975 837	167 408	123

Table 4.4 indicates an increase in private HE-enrolments of 84% from 90 767 in 2010, to a head count of 167 408 students at 123 private HE-providers in 2016. In comparison, 2016 sees 975 837 enrolments at 26 public universities (DHET, 2018a); this represents an increase of 9.3% from 2010 to 2016. The private HE-enrolment growth rate is evidently significantly higher than the public HE-enrolments, with the private cohort representing 17.2% of the total HE-enrolments at 123 registered private HE-providers (organisations that offer whole qualifications from NQF-levels 5 to 10) (DHET, 2016b) in 2016.

As mentioned further on in this section, PHEIs were only required from 2008 to, by law, start submitting learner-data. Accurate data therefore do not exist on private enrolment before 2010. DHET (2014:4), however, estimates the private enrolment figure at 68 688 in 2008 and 77 205 in 2009. As discussed in Section 4.5.3.1, Jansen (2007:175) reports a rough estimate of about 500 000 student enrolments at 323 private HE-institutions (CHE, 2004:48); but this figure includes private-public

partnerships. This was at the turn of the 20th century just before the introduction of new PHEI-registration regulations and the subsequent deregistration of numerous private providers (see Section 4.5.3.1). It seems that these events led to a dramatic decrease in private providers and subsequently a drop in the enrolment figures. Webbstock (2018:1) agrees with Jansen and mentions that the influx of foreign investors was largely stemmed by the HE-regulations introduced in 2002.

In January 2019, the DHET HE-register (DHET, 2018b) reflected 106 registered and 30 provisionally registered private providers; this register is updated online every few months. Even though the public contingent is still significantly larger in terms of enrolment figures, the private provision cohort in South Africa is evidently not ignominious; and it is clearly growing. The decrease in public enrolment since 2011 (Table 4.4) in the face of the pressing demand for HE (see Section 4.4.1), seems indicative of the inability of the South African government to adequately accommodate HE-demand in South Africa through its public HE-system. At the same time, the contrasting significant growth of private enrolments appears to confirm the increasingly significant role that private providers play in addressing the HE-demand in South Africa.

4.5.2 A typology of South African private higher education providers

To be eligible for registration as a private provider, and thus to be able to legally offer HE-programmes in South Africa, a provider needs to (DHET, 2016b:6; DHET, 2018a:27):

- be registered as a company in accordance with the Companies Act (Act No. 71 of 2008); and
- to be comparable to its public counterparts, to perform the roles of registering students for HE-qualifications (on NQF-levels 5-10, see Table 4.3), providing and delivering curricula, assessing students and awarding qualifications.

The DHET (2016:6b) contends that the registration of legal private providers ensures the delivery of quality qualifications: that providers have the capacity and the resources to provide a qualification (thus also protecting the student); that these qualifications

are registered on the NQF, and that the transformation goals are upheld. Since 2008, PHEIs are, like public providers from 2001 onwards, also required to register students and their earned qualifications on the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD) (CHE, 2015:105,106). Private providers are thus seemingly fully incorporated, alongside their public counterparts, into a prescriptive South African HE-framework. Research on the nature of private HE-providers in South Africa is limited; and this thereby hinders the accurate description thereof. Kruss (2004:12) offers three criteria to be used in differentiating between public and private providers, as well as between different private providers: namely governance, funding and function. In offering a broad typology of different PHEIs in South Africa, the above three criteria that link with the three global differentiation criteria (see Section 4.3.1), will be employed, as depicted in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: A typology of South African higher education providers (adapted from Kruss, 2004, 2007; Blom, 2011; Dirkse van Schalkwyk, 2011; Bezuidenhout, 2013; CHE, 2016; Caerus Capital, 2017; DHET, 2018a and Webbstock, 2018)

Criteria	Descriptions
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ownership is private and providers are by definition autonomous but with restrictive registration requirements and regulation, governmental influence is far-reaching. • Internal governance structures are not strictly prescribed by government as with public providers (for example vice chancellors, senate, etc.). • Public-private partnerships exist. With most partnerships, PHEIs are regarded by Government as having a supplementary role; regulation thus flows through the relevant public providers.
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The biggest contingent is profit-seeking (around 74%) with non-profit seeking providers being mostly affiliated to religious organisations. • Funding comes from private investment and varies from personal investment at small providers to capital generated through Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) -notation for large providers, to funding from religious or other interest groups. • Providers rely on student fees to cover operating expenses. • Tuition fees range from low to higher than public HEIs.
Function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The main sales propositions usually revolve either around 'mobility' (articulation with public qualifications or international institutions) or 'credentials' (providing different and or/better or more industry-orientated qualifications).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many providers offer demand absorption of students who did not qualify to study at a public institution, providing pathways to further studies. • A large contingent of students are part-time, including distance learners (around 40%); this is a fast-growing segment that represent lucrative opportunities for investors. • By far, the most PHEIs can be considered as small: 88% of all registered PHEIs had less than 1000 enrolled students with only 4 with more than 3000 in 2016. • Certain providers offer only single qualifications, whereas others offer a great variety. • Some providers offer vocational (SETAs), as well as further education and training in addition to HE. • Urban centres in Gauteng, Western Cape and Kwazulu-Natal house almost all private providers. • Qualification-types mostly offered include, in order of popularity; bachelor's degrees/advanced diplomas (39.1% in 2016); diplomas/higher certificates (34.3% in 2016) and certificates. • Less 'resource-intensive' qualifications are offered with subsequent avoidance of 'pure science' qualifications, with some PHEIs being touted as 'degree mills'. • Most enrolments are in commerce and management (54,4% in 2016), followed by computer, mathematical, physical and life sciences (11.3% in 2016), as well as education and training (7.8% in 2016). • Niche offerings in fields like beauty, hospitality and design is evident. • Few offer master's degrees and even fewer doctorates; 90% of enrolments are lower than honour's degree or postgraduate diploma level and 0.2% on doctorate level (2016). • Most private providers cater for middle to high income students. • Most South African enrolled students, as measured in 2016, are: African (67,1%); White (18.28%); Coloured (7.5%) and Asian/Indian (7%). • There is a high contingent of part-time faculty, resulting in limited research outputs.
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Table 4.5 alludes to the significant variance between private providers, especially in function. Limited valid and integrated information on, as well as the significant variation between private providers, as described in Table 4.5, problematise a succinct description of South African private HE-providers. If one extracts, from Table 4.5, the characteristics mostly exhibited by the PHEIs, one can broadly describe private providers as: mostly registered companies that are privately owned and registered with the DHET, and which offer SAQA-accredited qualifications registered between

level five and ten on the NQF-framework. One can then add that no PHEI receives government subsidies; most are profit-seeking; most operate in big urban centres, focusing on 'lucrative' markets with lower input costs; most focus on students from the middle to higher-income group; and most deliver very limited research outputs. Even though private providers in South Africa receive no research subsidies from the government, some effort is needed to facilitate research. This is evident: The Independent Institute of Education (IEE), the tertiary education subsidiary of ADvTECH (Ltd.), a large PHE-provider, for example hosts a DHET-accredited journal called The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning (ADvTECH, 2017).

4.5.3 The private higher education industry's shape and size

As indicated in the previous section; very little information currently exists on the South African PHE-industry. This section attempts to shed more light on this industry by investigating an investment report on PHE-opportunities in Sub-Saharan Africa; identifying trends within this industry, as well as describing notable organisations that operate in this market.

Investment opportunities in private higher education

Caerus Capital, an HE-advisor and investment-organisation, launched a comprehensive investigation into private education in Sub-Saharan Africa, including South Africa (Caerus Capital, 2017). The result is a report highlighting the investment needs and the opportunities in this region. Notable findings include (The term 'private', according to the Caerus Capital-report, include all education activities that fall outside public HE-delivery. This includes profit-seeking organisations, as well as non-profit organisations, including religious and charitable HE-institutions):

- Total Sub-Saharan investment opportunities in the PHE-industry (distance and contact learning) in the next five years (starting in 2017) roughly amounts to between R35 and R40.5 billion. In South Africa alone, the investment opportunities exceed R21 billion. Opportunities exist that vary in risk, yield and capital requirements for 'commercial', 'strategic' or 'impact' investments, as well as donations.

- Sub-Saharan has the highest ratio of humanities and social science students in the world (70% of all enrolments).
- 54% of all Sub-Saharan employers report that graduates do not meet their skills needs.
- Seven of the world's twelve largest HE-business organisations (HE-publishing excluded) operate in Sub-Saharan Africa.
- The characteristics of the PHE-market that are attractive to investors include: 1), greater demand than supply; 2), inflation-beating price growth; 3), the possibility of long-term revenue calculation; 4), the availability of negative working capital in the form of pre-paid class fees and; 5), high entry barriers (for example, strict registration procedures). Negative attributes include 1), complex and uncertain regulations; 2), long time periods to reach sustainability; 3), fragmented PHE-landscapes with numerous small providers and; 4), skills shortages (qualified academic staff).
- Distance learning is changing the HE-landscape, with many PHEs diversifying to tap into this market that requires less physical resource-investment. Distance learning enrolments at PHEs in South Africa is currently growing at 8% per year.
- A very high percentage of PHE-students in South Africa are adult-learners (33%): people between the ages of 22 and 40 that did not engage in HE-learning directly after school. This represents a lucrative market that various PHEs target through offering part-time and distance-learning modes.
- The PHE-market in South Africa consists of many smaller private providers. This results in an average PHEI-size (in terms of enrolments) of 1 300 compared to an average public HEI-size of 38 000. Opportunities thus still exist for larger entities to, through investment, consolidate smaller providers.
- Africa represents an attractive market for international HE-providers and other investors to expand their footprint. International companies, like the Apollo Education Group (Milpark Education in 2014), Laureate International Universities (Monash South Africa in 2013) and Pearson (Pearson Institute of Higher Education and CTI education group in 2011) have acquired major shares in South African private HE-providers. IMM Graduate School secured investments from Lereko Metier Capital, Ke Nako Capital, as well as the Dutch development bank (FMO) in 2013 and GetSmarter was sold to 2U, an

educational technology company in 2017 (Techcentral, 2017). The AdvTECH group acquired a 51% share in the University of Africa in 2017, as will be discussed later on in this section.

- The estimated size of the South African private HE-provision industry is about R4.8 billion, with about 70% of the revenue generated by twelve PHEs, including large companies like AdvTECH; Stadio Holdings; Educor Holdings; Laureate International Universities and Pearson (Webbstock, 2018:4).
- IMM Graduate School (annual revenue of R67 million) is the largest premium-priced distance learning HE-provider and the Management College of Southern Africa (MANCOSA) (annual revenue of R267 million), as well as Milpark Education (now part of Stadio Holdings: annual revenue of R120 million) are the largest mid-priced distance-learning providers.

Notable trends in the PHE-industry

Webbstock (2018:4-9) identifies five major trends that may impact upon the size and shape of the PHE-industry. These trends clearly tie in with the industry-description of Caerus Capital (2017) in the previous section:

- **Trend 1: Ownership-changes.** Large companies are investing in the South African PHE-industry to tap into its significant market potential. Recently, these companies seemingly prefer to buy *going concerns*: existing smaller providers with courses and students, instead of building these from scratch. Hasenfuss (2017) agrees and specifically alludes to AdvTECH and Stadio Holding's aggressive pursuit of 'take-over opportunities'. These acquisitions of existing PHEs can probably be attributed to the strict regulation of private HE-provision that problematises the swift and cost-effective registration of new courses.
- **Trend 2: Growing international attention.** Webbstock mentions that recent times have seen international companies like Actis (Honoris Universities), Apollo Global, Laureate International Universities and Pearson Education procuring local private providers. This purportedly contributes new ideas, expertise and resources to the South African HE-landscape.
- **Trend 3: Varying modes of HE-delivery.** As stated earlier in Table 4.5, the distance-learning enrolment is growing rapidly. Webbstock (2018:5) notes that

technology enables private providers to offer distance, digital and blended programmes, in order to reach a greater number of students. This, Webbstock (2018:6) suggests, will soon challenge the University of South Africa, South Africa's dominant distance-learning provider.

- **Trend 4: Public-private partnerships.** As discussed in Section 4.5.4.1, the introduction of strict regulation and the de-registration of numerous providers in 2002 and 2003, has led to the termination of most public-private partnerships. Webbstock (2018:7), however, refers to a growing number of public-private partnerships forged especially in the wake of the 2015-2016 protests: South African universities are reportedly 'unbundling' and outsourcing their services to private providers. These public-private partnerships entail traditional universities moving their offerings increasingly onto digital platforms, and using experienced private providers to do this. GetSmarter, as discussed in the next section, has, for example, generated significant profit in partnering with UCT, the Universities of Stellenbosch and Wits in delivering accredited short courses.
- **Trend 5: Expanding into Africa.** Multinational companies have invested in South Africa, with an eye on using it as a base to move into the rest of Africa. Actis has, through its Honoris Universities division, already invested in Morocco and Tunisia. Webbstock (2018:8) suggests that large local companies, like ADvTECH and Stadio Holdings, are following suit with acquisitions in Botswana, Namibia and Zambia.

Webbstock (2018:9) postulates that the above trends hold different possible implications for the PHE-industry in South Africa; and only time will tell how things will pan out. It firstly seems that the trend of large companies acquiring smaller providers continues; this commodification of HE might disrupt some of the smaller acquired providers; as they are now subjected to the profit-drive of big companies. Tough economic climates can lead to austerity measures, including the retrenchment of full-time faculties in favour of part-time workers by these companies, in order to preserve the profit (Webbstock, 2018:9). This worldwide trend of the 'casualisation' HE-faculty, an increasingly poignant feature of public provision (See Section 4.2), can negatively affect the quality of HE-programmes and the quality of the provision thereof (Webbstock, 2018:9).

Webbstock (2018:10) further remarks that the 2017 announcement of an increase in the minimum-income threshold for free HE-education from R122 000 to R350 000 per annum, could lead to the demise of low-cost private providers. She, however, suggests that other privates might target the 'missing middle'; students, whose families do not earn much more than R350 000 per annum. Webbstock (2018:11) finally alludes to the possibility of large corporations litigating against HE-authorities if overzealous and/or ineffective regulation leads to potential profit loss. She continues to describe corrupt practices in many other African countries, in which regulating authority officials are pressured by private providers to register sub-standard programmes. Universities are supposedly established by rich people and politicians without rigorous scrutiny by the relevant authorities (Webbstock, 2018:11).

The potential and volatile nature of the South African PHE-industry is evident in the above discussion. The next section examines a few of the major players of this industry.

Notable competitors in the South African PHE-industry

This section provides a brief discussion of some of the South African PHE-sector's major players. This discussion does not aim to be exhaustive, but rather to provide some indication of the current shape of, as well as the competitors in this R4.8 billion industry (Caerus Capital, 2017:166). Table 4.6 depicts some of these major players.

Table 4.6: Major competitors in the South African private higher education sector (Adapted from Caerus Capital, 2017 & Webstock, 2018)

SA investors	Recent acquisitions	Year	Modes	Field	Locations
ADvTech Holdings (through IIE)	Private Hotel School	2016	Contact	Hospitality	Western Cape
	Capsicum Culinary Studio	2016	Contact	Hospitality	Gauteng; Kwazulu-Natal; Eastern Cape; Western Cape
	Oxbridge Academy	2016	* Distance	Various	Western Cape
	University of Africa	2017	Distance	Various	Zambia
	Monash South Africa	2018	Contact	Various	Gauteng
Educor holdings	London College of International Business Studies	2016	Fulltime; blended learning	Various	United Kingdom; Africa; South Africa
Stadio Holdings	Embury Institute	2013	Contact; distance; blended	Teacher education	Gauteng; Kwazulu-Natal
	BA ISAGO University	2016	Contact	Various	Botswana
	AFDA	2017	Contact	Film and television; IT	Gauteng; Kwazulu-Natal; Eastern Cape; Western Cape
	Southern Business School	2017	Distance	Management and safety	Gauteng; Namibia
	Milpark Education	2018	Contact; distance	Commerce	Gauteng; Kwazulu-Natal; Western Cape
	LISOF	2018	Contact	Fashion design	Gauteng
	CA Connect	2018	Contact	Accounting	South Africa
	Prestige Academy	2018	Contact	Various	Gauteng; Western Cape
Investec Asset Management	Richfield	2018	Contact; distance; blended	Commerce; computer science; teacher education; public administration	South Africa
International investors	Recent acquisitions	Year	Modes	Field	Locations
Actis (Honoris University Group)	MANCOSA	2017	Blended	Commerce	Gauteng; Kwazulu-Natal; Malawi
	Regent Business School	2017	Contact; distance	Commerce	Kwazulu-Natal
Pearson	Midrand Graduate Institute	2013	Contact; distance	Commerce; arts; computer science	Gauteng
2U	GetSmarter			Commerce short courses	South Africa

* Distance includes online; since all distance courses have some form of online interaction.

A discussion of the major players in the private higher education industry, as listed in Table 4.6, is provided below.

a. The ADvTECH group

The Independent Institute of Education (IIE) is the PHE-provider of the ADvTECH group, a JSE-listed company for over 30 years (ADvTECH, 2017:15). IIE is, according to ADvTECH (2018:20), the largest private HE-provider in South Africa; and this includes brands, like Oxbridge Academy, Rosebank College and Varsity College. The IIE boasted 33 463 full-qualification enrolments in 2017 (up by 15% from 2016), realising revenue of R1.6 billion (up by 26% from 2016) and subsequent profit of R321m (up by 44% from 2016) (ADvTECH, 2018:20).

The growth in enrolments can supposedly be ascribed to a combination of organic growth and business acquisitions. 2017 sees ADvTECH acquiring a 51% share of the University of Africa, an open distance learning institution in Zambia (ADvTECH, 2017:18). In 2018, ADvTECH acquired Monash South Africa from Monash Australia and Laureate Education who operated it as a joint venture, for R343 million (Hasenfuss, 2018). This has increased ADvTECH's total complement of enrolled HE-students to 40 000 fulltime and 30 000 distance students (this includes full qualification enrolment and other students), offering 165 accredited programmes.

In addition to increasingly targeting the online HE-market, the IIE aims to create and maintain competitive advantages through “innovation in the development of new qualifications, approaches to teaching and learning and the provision of sound student support” (ADvTECH, 2017:18). One might question whether large foreign organisations, like Monash Australia and Laureate Education's sudden departure from the South African HE-scene has something to do with the recent student protests and the subsequent declaration of free education; the tough economic situation, in which this landscape finds itself, or both.

b. Educor Holdings

A1 Capital, a private equity fund company, acquired Educor Holdings from Naspers in 2008 (A1 Capital, 2019). Educor Holdings house well-known brands like Damelin, Lyceum College and the London College of International Business Studies (LCIBS) (Educor, 2019). Educor Holdings is known as the largest private post-school education organisation in South Africa (HE, as well as further education and training combined, as opposed to ADvTECH that claims to be the largest private HE-provider) with 50

000 enrolments in 800 different qualifications offered through its ten brands at over 60 campuses in South Africa and internationally, generating an annual revenue of around R791 million (Caerus Capital, 2017:95). The company intends to unlock its products' 'unlimited potential' with ground-breaking technology, allowing for blended learning (Educor, 2019).

c. Stadio Holdings

Curro, a JSE-listed school education company has, in 2016, announced its plans to enter the South African private HE-industry (Barron, 2016). The company has already acquired Embury Institute, a teacher training provider, in 2013 (Barron, 2016). Curro, which is 58% owned by the PSG group, with a market capitalisation figure of R58 billion, unbundled its HE-division. This division subsequently listed independently on the JSE in 2017 under the name of Stadio Holdings (Hasenfuss, 2017). The company has since acquired a 51% stake in BA Isago University in Botswana (Hasenfuss, 2017). This was followed by the acquisition of AFDA School for the Creative Economy and the Southern Business School in 2017 (Stadio Holdings, 2018a:26), as well as the LISOF Fashion Design School, Millpark Education and CA Connect in 2018 (Stadio Holdings, 2018b:5). A total of 27 770 students were enrolled in 106 programmes at the above-mentioned providers in June 2018 (Stadio, 2018b:2).

In October 2018, Stadio signed an agreement to buy yet another private HE-provider, namely Prestige Academy, for an undisclosed sum (Caroline, 2018). This is in line with Stadio's integration strategy that entails growth through acquisitions (Stadio, 2018:2). The group also aims to stimulate organic growth through the development of its 'Multiversity'; creating faculties and campuses that synergistically link all of its acquired HE-providers through shared values, services and infrastructure (Stadio, 2018:2). It is further worth mentioning that Curro, before Stadio was formed in 2017, made an offer to buy the ADvTECH group for R6 billion in 2015; this offer was rejected by ADvTECH (Hill & Bonorchis, 2015; Webstock, 2018:6).

d. Richfield (Investec Asset Management)

Investec Asset management acquired a controlling stake in this private provider in late 2018 to tap into the promising potential of private distance HE-learning (MoneyMarketing, 2018). Richfield has around 20 000 enrolled students at 40

campuses across South Africa (MoneyMarketing, 2018). The company offers low-cost programmes; and it aims to aggressively grow enrolments by using blended learning-enabling technology (MoneyMarketing, 2018).

e. The Management College of Southern Africa (MANCOSA) (Actis-Honoris United Universities)

MANCOSA, founded in 1995, is currently the largest distance learning provider amassing revenue of approximately R270 million per annum (Caerus Capital, 2017:97). This company was acquired by Actis in 2017; and it now has more than 10 000 enrolled learners across ten South African Development Community countries, as well as a few other international students (MANCOSA, 2019). MANCOSA focuses mostly on adult learners, who are already working (MANCOSA, 2019). Together with Regent Business School that was also purchased by Actis. MANCOSA forms part of the Honoris Universities Group (Actis, 2019).

Actis is an investment company that seeks opportunities in growing markets across Africa, Asia and Latin America (Actis, 2019). This company owns the Honoris United University Group, a private pan-African HE-network of ten PHE-institutions that offer 150 different programmes to more than 32 000 students at 58 campuses across nine African countries (MANCOSA, 2019).

f. 2U (GetSmarter)

The 2008-established GetSmarter group was sold to 2U, a NASDAQ-listed educational technology company, in 2017 (Techcentral, 2017). This Cape Town based PHE specialises in online short courses offered in partnership with universities (Techcentral, 2017). The R1.4 billion price tag underlines the value and the perceived potential of the South African PHE-industry. 2U are specialists in online education; and they are seemingly going to change the South African distance learning/online market, or as they call it: 'digital education' (2U, 2017). GetSmarter has educated more than 50 000 since 2008; and it accrued R227 million in revenue in 2016 (Techcentral, 2017).

g. Pearson Education

The following discussion is based on the 2017 annual report of Pearson (Pearson, 2018). This large international group generated revenue of £4.5 billion with operations in South Africa contributing around two per cent of this revenue. This includes ancillary educational products and services. 5 800 students are enrolled (a 14% drop from 2016) at the group's Pearson Education Institute and CTI. Digital education represents 50% of Pearson's revenue (this sector is growing, despite decreasing overall enrolments); and the company foresees this ratio increasing to 75% in the near future.

At the time of the data collection stage of the current research, the two PHEIs investigated in the current study, were like most private providers in the South African HE-landscape (See Figure 4.5). They were small, unlisted profit seeking companies with less than a thousand registered students at any given time.

From the above discussion, the significant potential of the Sub-Saharan, specifically the South African PHE-industry, becomes quite apparent. International and local companies are prepared to invest large amounts in this fast-growing market. The PHE-industry is quite fragmented, with numerous small private providers. Large providers and investors are, however, gradually consolidating the PHE-industry in South Africa. Most of the larger private providers seem to diversify their offerings, in order to provide focused education to different niche-markets. Distance learning (because of lower resource costs), as well as flexible learning offered to adult learners, seem to be growth areas for private providers. These providers also diversify by offering education across the post-secondary education sector: HE offers further education and training, as well as vocational training.

Because PHEIs do not receive any subsidies from government, their target markets mostly consist of middle-to-higher income customers. Even with the proliferation of PHEIs in South Africa, they face major challenges in the South African HE-industry. These challenges are examined in the next section.

4.5.4 Challenges facing private providers in the South African HE-landscape

Two of the recurring themes in global private HE-provision, as previously depicted, also represent major stumbling blocks for PHEIs in South Africa. These themes include quality concerns and suspicion, as well as financing concerns; and these issues are examined in this section.

4.5.4.1 Lingering quality concerns and suspicions

To get behind the purported quality concerns and mistrust regarding private HE-provision in South Africa, it should firstly be contextualised within the racially charged history of South African HE-provision. The possible influence of the broader debate around HE, as a private or a public good, should also not be discounted.

The history of racialised higher education in South Africa

In the 1990s, a global boom in private provision coincided with the abolition of statutory race segregation in South Africa (Levy, 2009:7-23). A new government had to contend with an inherited HE-system that was significantly fragmented and functioning along racial lines (Bezuidenhout, 2013:31). Numerous newly established private providers, as well as existing private providers from the apartheid era that catered mainly for black students, most of them profit-seeking, were ready to address the urgent need to ensure HE-accessibility for all (Kruss, 2004:4).

Jansen (2007:174), as well as Fehnel (2002:350), postulate that, during this time, positive sentiment towards private provision and a general belief in the important role of PHE, led many private providers to expect governmental support and investment. The Higher Education Act of 1997 (Act No. 101 of 1997) duly enabled private providers to offer diplomas and degrees (Fehnel, 2002:350). Jansen (2007:176) added that private provision thrived amidst the embracing attitude of Government and its '*laissez-fair*' outlook on the regulation of private provision. In addition to the growing number of providers offering various new qualifications, partnerships were also being forged with public providers, with the latter seemingly attempting to tap into the lucrative market of students who did not qualify for university programmes (Mabizela, 2005:vii-viii).

Citing Bunting and Coetzee (2000), Jansen (2007:175) reports a rough estimate of about 500 000 student enrolments at 323 private HE-institutions (CHE,2004:48), including private-public partnerships, within a lucrative 'free-for-all' environment by the turn of the last century. According to Jansen (2007:177), initial positivity in the early years after Apartheid had turned into "disillusion", "suspicion", and "hostility". Private HE-provision was flourishing; while the public sector was declining; while grappling with serious challenges, like student mistrust and unrest (Jansen, 2007:177). Government started to regard PHE as being in competition with the public system; historically 'black' universities were supposedly especially being disadvantaged by the traditional 'white' universities forging partnerships with PHEIs in *cashing in* on sections of the profitable HE-market (Jansen, 2007:177).

Fehnel (2002:356); Mabizela (2005:4); Levy (2009:2), as well as Dirkse van Schalkwyk (2011), all suggest that, in their search for profit-maximisation, many private providers only focus on qualifications that are in high demand and that require low operating costs. Quality education and research are supposedly consequently compromised. From 1999, private providers were subsequently required to have their programmes accredited through SAQA; and a moratorium was placed on private-public HE-partnerships (Bezuidenhout, 2013:42). Re-accreditation took place as early as 2002 and 2003; and the private-public HE partnership moratorium was lifted, but much stricter regulations were instituted (Bezuidenhout, 2013:42). After the 2002/2003 re-accreditation process and with numerous private providers de-registered, the CHE (2004:48) concluded that private providers and their offerings:

- Did not meet labour requirements, particularly within the fields of science and technology, as well as engineering,
- Had too few adequately qualified lecturers; and they lacked academic infrastructure and support, as well as insufficient experiential learning programmes,
- lacked proper quality assurance with limited knowledge of HE-regulations, and
- seemed to be of lower quality than those of their public counterparts; they therefore could not deliver on what they had promised.

CHE (2016:84) admits that, even though many private institutions received positive reviews at that time; and the above conclusion fuelled the general belief that private providers in South Africa delivered programmes of questionable quality and required strict regulation.

In spite of the fact that South African private HE-providers and their offerings today are subjected to stringent regulation, as discussed in the previous section and that 'fly-by-nights' should have been eliminated from the system through these strict policies (Dirkse Van Schalkwyk, 2011:42; Stander & Herman, 2017), it seems as if a stigma of inferiority as poignantly declared by the CHE in the previous paragraph, as well as perceptions that private provision could compromise the public HE-framework, still persist. Dirkse van Schalkwyk (2011:7) observes that there is still a perception that public providers offer qualifications of superior quality and that HE is still largely thought of as 'university education'. Baumgardt (2013:81) concurs and, citing Coughlan (2012), suggests that the HE-regulators regard the private HE-sector 'somewhat charily'. Concomitantly, Ellis (2012:4) refers to the private sector's ongoing 'struggle' to be fully recognised by the South African HE-authorities. Reporting on the *Times Higher Education Africa Universities Summit* held in Johannesburg, Havergal (2015) quotes Van Rensburg, the Vice-chancellor of the University of Johannesburg, in referring to PHE: "the poor are willing to pay for bad education". This statement seems to confirm the South African public provider fraternity's reluctance to fully accept private HE-provision (Caerus Capital, 2017:125). Havergal (2015) concomitantly alludes to Levy's suggestion that quality concerns are more profound in Africa when compared to other continents. The fact that only nine per cent of all academics in private provision have doctorates, compared to 33 % in public institutions (CHE, 2016:150) probably adds to supposedly inferior quality perceptions. Stander and Herman (2017:208) refer to the over-regulation of PHE in South Africa that entails numerous complicated processes involving different quality-assurance bodies.

This over-regulation supposedly emanates from a drive by authorities to eliminate poor quality private providers. The above authors further suggest that these complicated registration and quality assurance processes that are exacerbated by a challenging timing regime across various HE-regulatory bodies, problematise private providers' internal quality-assurance processes. These quality-assurance processes generally

seem lacking; as private providers struggle to keep up with HE-requirements and quality-assurance demands (Stander & Herman, 2017:208). This, according to Stander and Herman (2017:208) is a grave concern for PHEIs; and it perpetuates lingering quality concerns.

The nuances of suspicion or distrust are further fuelled by the fact that private institutions are still not allowed to use the term 'university', neither can they award 'professorships'; these issues supposedly hamper private providers' quality and competitiveness against their public counterparts (CHE, 2016:86). The Higher Education Amendment Act of 2016 (Act No. 9 of 2016), will, when it comes into effect, allow for compliant private providers to be registered as universities (USAf, 2017). This does not seem like an imminent reality yet, as the Minister of Higher Education and Training has not defined the registration criteria yet. Even though the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013:42,43) acknowledge the importance of private provision in the South African HE-landscape, it offers no plans on how to promote and/or how to utilise it within the HE-framework. In fact, the White Paper clearly states that public provision should represent the core of HE-provision in South Africa.

Shaikh, Karodia David and Soni (2014:1) concur; and they allege that, in communicating through the media, the then Minister of Higher Education never mentioned the significant potential of private providers in broadening HE-access. Higher Education South Africa (HESA) (2014) in its commentary on the past 20 years' democracy in HE, even fails to mention private provision in South Africa at all. Stander and Herman (2017:209) refer to the 'voice of PHEIs being silent' in South African HE-publications. To make things worse, government has in 2016, in no uncertain terms, reiterated its negative sentiments towards private HE-providers. At a fees commission submission in 2016, Dr Blade Nzimande, the then South African minister of Higher Education and Training, stated that Government does not support the operation of private universities in South Africa (Barron, 2016).

Nzimande, as reported by Barron (2016), maintained that these institutions pose a serious threat to the public HE-sector; as they would poach academics and wealthy students from public providers. There are bodies that serve private providers (CHE,

2016:86). The Association of Private Providers of Education, Training and Development (APPETD), formed in 1997, represents higher education, as well as further education private providers (see Table 4.3). The Private Higher Education Institution Group (PHEIG) represents only a few private providers. CHE (2016:86) remarks that, despite the existence of the above bodies, private providers' interests are not represented well or in a co-ordinated way within the bigger HE-framework.

Linking quality concerns to the public-private debate on higher education

Baumgardt (2013:101) links the quality concerns and mistrust of the *public fraternity* towards private HE-providers to the broader public-private debate regarding HE. The above author cites a host of authors that question the idea of paying for HE, with a search for profit allegedly leading to inferior teaching and limiting research efforts. Kocaqi (2015:432,433) reports that HE is traditionally regarded as a public good, under governments' custodianship, thereby benefitting society as a whole.

Under neoliberalism's influence, HE is, however, seemingly morphing into a commodity demanding the implementation of sound business principles (Kocaqi, 2015:432,433). Ing (2016) agrees and states: "...higher education is a commodity and universities are businesses" and remarks that, because of this, HE is now becoming reserved only for those who can pay for it. Kocaqi (2015:433) remarks that, according to proponents of the private view of HE, students realise individual benefits compared to other individuals, who do not study, or who do not have access to HE. Exclusion, exacerbated by high HE-demand and dwindling funds, thus supposedly dictates that students should pay for their own education. The business-like evolution of HE draws significant criticism and concern from academia on a global scale (Giroux, 2010:185). It might just be that private providers are viewed as the purveyors of this new order, consequently attracting suspicion and accusations of delivering poor quality.

4.5.4.2 Financial concerns

In contrast to public providers receiving funding from Government, the private HE-sector receives no funding. This includes no funding for published research and no funding for students, who wish to study at a PHEI (Bezuidenhout, 2013:45). Because private providers subsequently must depend almost solely on programme fees, this

significantly compromises PHEIs' competitiveness against their public counterparts, as the private programme fees would necessarily have to be higher. This invariably leads to social-status discrimination, in which private HE-entry is solely reliant on a person's ability to pay study fees (Baumgardt, 2013:99).

The lack of governmental funding of private providers may serve to perpetuate the purported quality/mistrust concerns, as discussed in the previous section. Stander and Herman (2017:212) uncover another dimension that compounds the financial challenges of PHEIs, namely the expensive price of compliance: accreditation, registration and continuous quality assurance of institutions and their programmes entail complicated and drawn-out processes that consequently become very costly. Non-compliance in any of these processes can, according to Stander and Herman (2017:212), lead to the suspension of programmes and the consequential loss of income. A prospective provider needs to have access to resources, like classrooms, Wi-Fi and libraries, in order to 'convince' the relevant authorities of their ability to provide quality education (Stander & Herman, 2017:213). This considerable investment is thus required before prospective providers even know whether they and their programmes would be accredited. The above-mentioned financial challenges, according to Stander and Herman (2017:15,216), compel many PHEIs to engage in cost-saving measures that could hamper the quality assurance of their programme offerings. These measures include academics having to assume multiple roles; the employment of industry specialists without pedagogical backgrounds and experience; the appointment of younger staff members, who require lower salaries, as well as the 'casualisation' of faculty: the outsourcing of key academic functions (see the casualisation of HE-functions in Section 4.2.1) The above-mentioned actions could compromise the quality assurance of programme offerings in terms of, for example, substandard curricula and lecturing methodologies, as well as a lack of research leadership (Stander & Herman, 2017:216).

The above-mentioned challenges represent significant stumbling blocks on a private provider's way to create a sustainable venture within the HE-sector in South Africa. Despite the challenges facing private HE-providers, these organisations seem to be growing and they are probably here to stay. Caerus Capital (2017), in its comprehensive investigation of the investment possibilities in the Sub-Saharan PHE-

sector, concluded that the potential benefits handsomely outweigh the threats in this industry. The next section deals with the role of this growing cohort of private HE-organisations within the South African landscape.

4.5.5 A case for enhancing the role of private providers in South Africa

Alluding to the trample-death of a person in a registration frenzy at a public University in 2012, Bezuidenhout *et al.* (2013:1181), point to the pressing demand for HE in South Africa and Government's inability to cater for this growing need. Concomitantly, Baumgardt (2013:98) asks what would have happened to the thousands of students who are and were registered with private providers if these providers did not exist. CHE (2016:373) suggests that poor students, the biggest contingent of students in South Africa, would not benefit from the growth in private provision; since they cannot pay tuition fees. This, according to CHE, places the burden on public providers to provide HE to students who cannot afford to pay for it. Whether the free HE-education policy for all 'poor' and 'working-class' students will be successfully implemented, remains to be seen.

Shaikh *et al.* (2014), call for a more prominent role of private provision and suggest a few models based on the subsidy of students who study at PHEIs and private-public partnerships. CHE (2016:373) proposes that even a reduced subsidy of students registered with PHEIs through the NFSAS scheme would create more opportunities for students and relieve some pressure on the public system. Bezuidenhout *et al.* (2013:1193), question Government's decision to build new universities, requiring massive capital investment; while numerous private providers are ready to absorb excess HE-demand if students are subsidised through the NFSAS system. This decision becomes even more contentious considering the recruitment challenges emanating from a reported shortage and attrition of skilled academics (see Section 4.4).

Caerus Capital (2017:167) mentions that, although four South African public HEIs are ranked within the top 500 universities globally, numerous public providers are increasingly battling to provide quality education within conditions of decreasing government subsidy. This, according to Caerus Capital (2017:168), becomes evident

in the 50% average dropout rate of public students within their first year of study compared to an average dropout-rate of 10% for private HE-students. Qualification dropout-rates at distance learning public providers like Unisa are more than 60%, as opposed to MANCOSA's (a private distance learning provider) less than 20%. Considering that various PHEIs have produced thousands of graduates over many years with far better success, rates than their public counterparts with no public financial support within a highly regulated South African HE-environment, one may question the validity of quality concerns and mistrust. Is private provision really threatening the South African HE-system? This question becomes even more relevant within the context of the current South African HE-landscape that is typified by the pressing demand for HE, systemic ineffectiveness and violent protests.

Cloete (2016b) describes the strategies implemented by the Chinese government to ensure the highest growth in HE-registrations in world history. He suggests that, along with considerable HE-investment (3% of gross domestic product, compared to South Africa's 0.7%), China is utilising private provision. The tuition costs are high for private HE-tuition, but students receive loans endorsed by the Chinese Development Bank. Poor students, according to Cloete, receive lower interest rates and longer repayment periods than their more affluent counterparts. With restrictive quality control measures in place and with the proliferation of private provision, it seems rational and, possibly, essential to embrace private providers' role in improving the South African HE-landscape. Baumgardt (2013:105) concurrently suggests that, instead of obstructing private providers, authorities should nurture and develop these organisations to meaningfully contribute towards South African HE-provision.

4.5.6 The competitive advantages of private providers

Considering the alleged quality concerns and higher tuition fees (resulting from no government-subsidising), one may ask why students choose to study at PHEIs. The answer may involve more than just demand absorption of students who failed to qualify, seeking mobility; articulation with public providers. In 2016, the University of Buckingham, one of only three private universities in the United Kingdom (UK), topped the list of the National Student Survey (NSS) for student satisfaction for all universities across the UK for the seventh time in eleven years (Minsky, 2016). This institution

shared the honours with one of the other two private universities, namely the University of Law. The above may allude to private providers' client orientation, including smaller classes and 'individual pastoral care' for students (Finn, 2013).

In offering a national profile of 1600 independent colleges in the United States of America, The National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (2011) concludes that:

1. Classes are smaller with more student-lecturer interaction;
2. Students are far more likely to complete their qualifications; and
3. Private providers are flexible; and they are subsequently responsive to the needs of individual students.

Baumgardt (2013:113) contends that, in comparison, public providers:

1. Expect less from students; and they provide a less-challenging learning environment to students;
2. They promote less collaborative learning;
3. They have less student-lecturer interaction;
4. they exhibit lower student satisfaction ratings; and
5. They offer less support to students.

From the above discussion and the Caerus Capital investment report on PHE-investment opportunities (2017) as discussed in Section 4.5.3, areas of possible competitive advantage for private HE-providers in South Africa may include:

- Higher levels student satisfaction (this may be a culmination of most of the below areas of competitive advantages);
- superior levels of student support;
- smaller classes with more student-lecturer interaction;
- higher qualification completion rates;
- flexible and innovative learning options: Milpark Education, for example, offers new facilitation-intensive online learning qualifications;
- diversification into various targeted (niche) programme offerings: the ADvTECH group, for example, targets different market segments, through its different brands that focus on different niche markets;

- diversification across all three sub-environments of the South African post-secondary landscape: HE, further education and training, as well as vocational training, creating cross-subsidisation;
- business-like operational structures that promote effectiveness and efficiency,
- agility in making and implementing strategic decisions, for example innovation in teaching and the development of new qualifications.

The 2015/2016 academic years saw nationwide student protests at public universities that destabilised campus- environments and led to the suspension of classes. These tensions are seemingly simmering, ready to explode as NFSAS are grappling with the challenges of effectively delivering on a free education promise of Government. One can only speculate about how these events may ‘benefit’ (in terms of higher enrolments numbers) private providers where no protests have taken place. Considering this, one might add another area of competitive advantage: a peaceful campus environment with no disruptions of academic activities. One can further speculate about a future where PHEIs are as highly regarded as most private schools (primary and secondary education) in South Africa. Many people regard private schools in South Africa as superior to its public counterparts in terms of stability and performance (Fourie, 2017). This perception just might extend to South African PHEIs in the near future.

4.5.7 Concluding remarks on private higher education

Fig 4.2 depicts private HE in South Africa and subsequently the external environment of the organisations that is included in the empirical part of the current study.

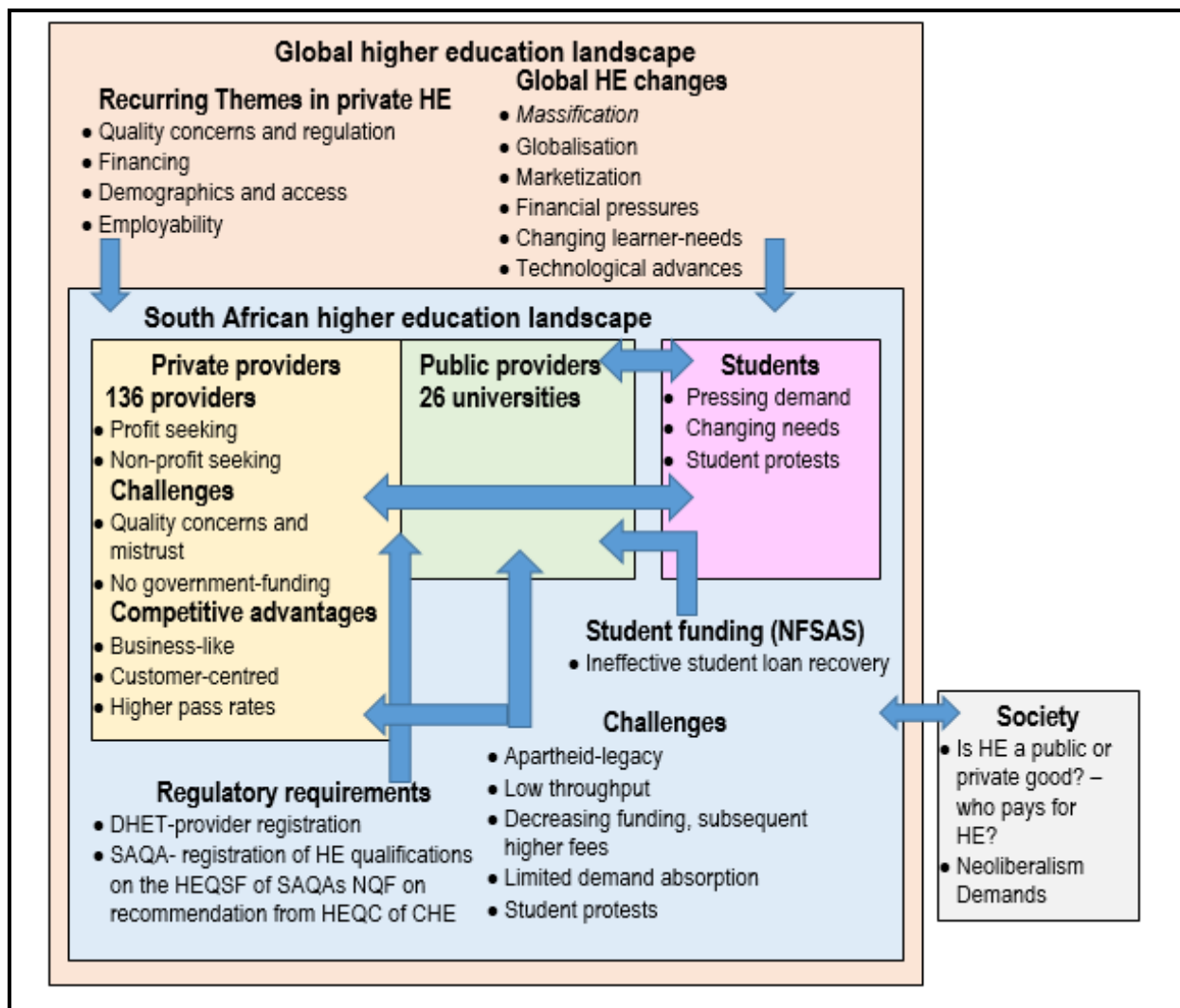


Figure 4.2: Private Provision in South Africa within a global and local higher education context (own compilation)

Figure 4.2 aims to provide a graphical presentation of the context of the South African PHE-landscape, as well as the environments, entities and issues that shape it. This figure also offers a concise depiction of the aspects discussed in Sections 4.2 to 4.5 of this chapter. From the preceding sections of this chapter that elucidate Fig. 4.2, it is evident that most private providers in South Africa are essentially business operating in very challenging local and global HE and PHE-environments. In a framework of strict regulation, public providers seemingly have financial, as well as perceptual advantages (quality concerns regarding private providers) over their private counterparts. Private HEIs thus have their work cut out to survive and prosper. In addition to its ‘societal development duty’ of delivering HE-programmes of quality, these ‘businesses’ need to secure growing profits for their shareholders. Baumgardt

(2013:101) refers to the 'efficient' and 'effective' delivery of HE. With the preceding sentences in mind, this (efficient and effective delivery) especially rings true for private providers in South Africa. From a strategic management perspective, as explored in the preceding chapters of the current study, private HE-providers need to create sustainable competitive advantages, as discussed in Section 4.5.6, to successfully compete against their adversaries from the public and private sector within a challenging South African HE-landscape.

Their business-like nature and their subsequent client-orientation seemingly broadly represent the private provider cohort's competitive advantages over their public counterparts. Competitive advantages between different South African providers are unknown, though. The literature review section of the current study points to the notion that gaining a holistic, in-depth understanding of their strategizing processes and the ultimate creation of sustainable competitive advantages, stand central to the continued success of South African private providers. The next section examines some of the existing studies in the field of strategic management within an HE-context.

4.6 STUDIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND STRATEGY

The literature review conducted in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 include a comprehensive review of current research in the fields of strategic management, strategy-as-practice, social interaction, as well as HE. This section describes existing research in the above-mentioned fields within the context of HE. Different studies worldwide address strategy in HE. A few studies are briefly discussed here and can loosely be classified as, 1, best practice studies that prescribe how strategic planning should be done in HE, 2, studies that explore competitive advantages in HE; and, 3, HE-studies from a strategy-as-practice viewpoint.

4.6.1 Prescriptive studies

Shawyun (2010) provides a textbook for HEIs on how to develop and implement strategies within the higher educational landscape. Similarly, authors like Hunt, Oosting, Stevens, Loudon and Miglion (1997); Hinton (2012); Hanover Research (2013), as well as Snyder (2015), provide guidelines for the strategic-planning process

to bring about transformation in HEIs. Taylor and de Lourdes Machado (2006:139) call for a more holistic approach to strategic management in HE: strategic management consists of much more than following certain prescribed steps. These authors allude to various studies that reveal the high failure rate of strategic planning initiatives in HE; these high failure rates can largely be ascribed to the poor implementation of devised strategies. Taylor and de Lourdes Machado (2006:138) consequently highlight the importance of leadership. Effective leadership is supposedly more important to the success of strategic planning than the choice of a strategic-planning model; since skilled and knowledgeable leaders would ensure that the strategic-planning process is followed through. Based on an investigation of five leading strategic-planning models used in HE, Taylor and de Lourdes Machado (2006:150) proffer a list of vital elements for successful strategic planning. Included in this list are: leadership, vision, environmental scanning, communication, participation, as well as flexibility and simplicity.

4.6.2 Competitive advantage

Mazzarol and Soutar (1999) present a model for creating sustainable competitive advantages for educational institutions. The model draws from the contingency perspective of strategy, advocating the establishment of *beneficial fits* between the organisation and its environment. Huang and Lee (2012), in a very similar study, propose a strategic-fit model in creating competitive advantage for higher education institutions (HEI) in the technical and vocational education industry in Taiwan. In a multiple-case study of PHEIs in Malaysia, Lindong (2007:xiv) found that the PHEIs do not deliberately and systematically strategize. This researcher also notes that those PHEIs that were struggling to make ends meet, could only create temporary competitive advantages. Richardson (2006), in a study of a struggling business schools in the United States of America, concludes that these struggling organisations should focus on the actions of their more successful competitors. De Haan (2014:56) provides a list of thirteen competitive advantages that Dutch HE-institutions seek and rank in order of importance. The three most important competitive advantages include the 'quality of education and/or research'; 'reputation/brand/image/attractiveness', as well as an 'unique selling point, being different'.

Kurniaty, Osman, Lewangka, Sumardi and Jusni (2015) conclude that service quality, as well as differentiation in terms of 'content, context and infrastructure', are sources of competitive advantage for private HEIs in Makassar, Indonesia. As described in Chapter 1, as well as in Chapter 2, the current study subscribes to the perspective of *meaningful competitive advantages*; reasons why customers chose to purchase a specific product, or in this case, the reasons why students chose to specifically study at a certain PHEI. The acid test for the validity of a competitive advantage thus lies in its customer-perceived superior value when he/she decides to procure the product or engage in the service, in comparison to what other organisations can offer. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the survey used in the current study to identify two private providers' areas of competitive advantage, as perceived by its customers, namely their students.

4.6.3 A Strategy-as-practice framework

The preceding sections describe a volatile South African PHE-landscape shaped by global and local HE-trends. This industry is typified by the remnants of a racialised system; strict regulation; perceptions of inferiority; zero governmental-subsidy; aggressive competition, but promising potential. With all its unique challenges and potential, the South African PHE-provides for a rich context in which to study the strategizing phenomenon.

Within a strategy-as-practice framework, Jarzabkowski (2005) conducted multiple-case study research at three United Kingdom universities. By means of a strategizing framework, the author explains how strategy is shaped over time by strategic practices. Jarzabkowski and Whittington (2008:282) assert that the strategy-as-practice perspective serves to connect strategic research and education to the actual practice of strategizing. Within a strategy-as-practice perspective, students are exposed to richly described and contextualised case studies of actual strategizing practices. This, according to Jarzabkowski and Whittington (2008:282), will equip a student with a better understanding of the practice of strategizing.

In a case study that explored the strategic practices of middle managers at a South African University, Davis (2012) concurs with Jarzabkowski (2005) that strategizing is

mainly a human activity; and he calls for further research in “practical research founded on the organisational realities”. The above author identifies “enablers and constraints” of the strategic work of middle managers. She concludes that, in a university-environment, sporting a plethora of strategic talk and practices, strategy loses its meaning – leading to middle managers favouring “compliance” over “buy-in”.

This section reveals that numerous studies exist, which in their attempt to provide ‘how-to’ guides for HEIs, addresses strategy from the traditional rational or economic perspective. As described in Chapters 1 and Chapter 2, the current study does not aim to provide yet another ‘how to’ strategy guide, but rather to understand how people interact when they strategize, and to understand how these interactions shape strategic decisions and outcomes. Higher education studies that focus on the social and micro-dimensions of strategy in HE are few and far between. As described in Chapter 3, the Strategy-as-practice perspective provides a framework that facilitates researching how people really interact and how this interaction, as social mechanism, determines the strategic outcomes of organisations. Strategy-as-practice research in HE is, however, scarce; and the published works on social interaction relating to strategy in HE only received sporadic consideration within this limited strategy-as-practice perspective. It is thus clear that, in order to properly investigate social interaction and its influence on strategizing, and, ultimately, competitive advantages within a context of private HE, a Strategy-as-practice empirical study is imperative.

4.7 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This aim of this chapter was to provide the context for the empirical phase of the current study. An investigation of the external environment of the two organisations of the empirical phase, was framed within the broader public-private debate on HE. The global HE-environment was explored, with specific reference to far-reaching changes that are altering the nature of HE. Recurring themes in global private provision, some of which are also evident within the local private HE-environment, were discussed. The nature of the South African HE-landscape and its significant influence on the development of South African private provision was examined next. An analysis of the private HE-landscape revealed the challenges that private providers face in surviving within a challenging and restrictive environment. A broad typology of private providers

preceded a discussion of the importance of private providers in addressing the South African HE-challenges. This was followed by a description of the advantages that private providers might have over their public counterparts. A summary of the private provision environment marked the end of the context-investigation; and this was lastly followed by a discussion of the existing literature on strategic management within the context of HE. Although many studies explore strategic management in HE per se, very little research exists on the actual practice of strategizing in HE from a social interaction viewpoint: it is limited to sporadic descriptions in a few strategy-as-practice studies in HE. The consequent need for socially informed research within a HE-context was thus justified.

With the theoretical framework provided in Chapters 2 and 3 and the research context provided in Chapter 4, the review of the relevant literature has now concluded. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the research design used in addressing the research questions of the current study.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH DESIGN

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Whereas Chapters 2 and 3 included an investigation of the main constructs concerning strategizing and social interaction, ultimately providing the theoretical framework that informs the current study, Chapter 4 provided the context for the empirical phase thereof. The aim of Chapter 5 is to describe how the research questions were addressed by means of unpacking the research process followed. In addition to addressing the mechanics of the chosen case study research design, the philosophical disposition and consequential research approach of the researcher is discussed. This research design with its underlying philosophical worldview and research approach, together with the theoretical framework (Chapters 2 and 3), the research context (Chapter 4), as well as this researcher's personal motivation for engaging in the current research (Chapter 7), all represent essential building blocks in the creation of the conceptual framework that guided the empirical inquiry in the current study.

Figure 5.1 depicts the relative position of Chapter 5 within the overall research project. The figure also presents the structure of this chapter.

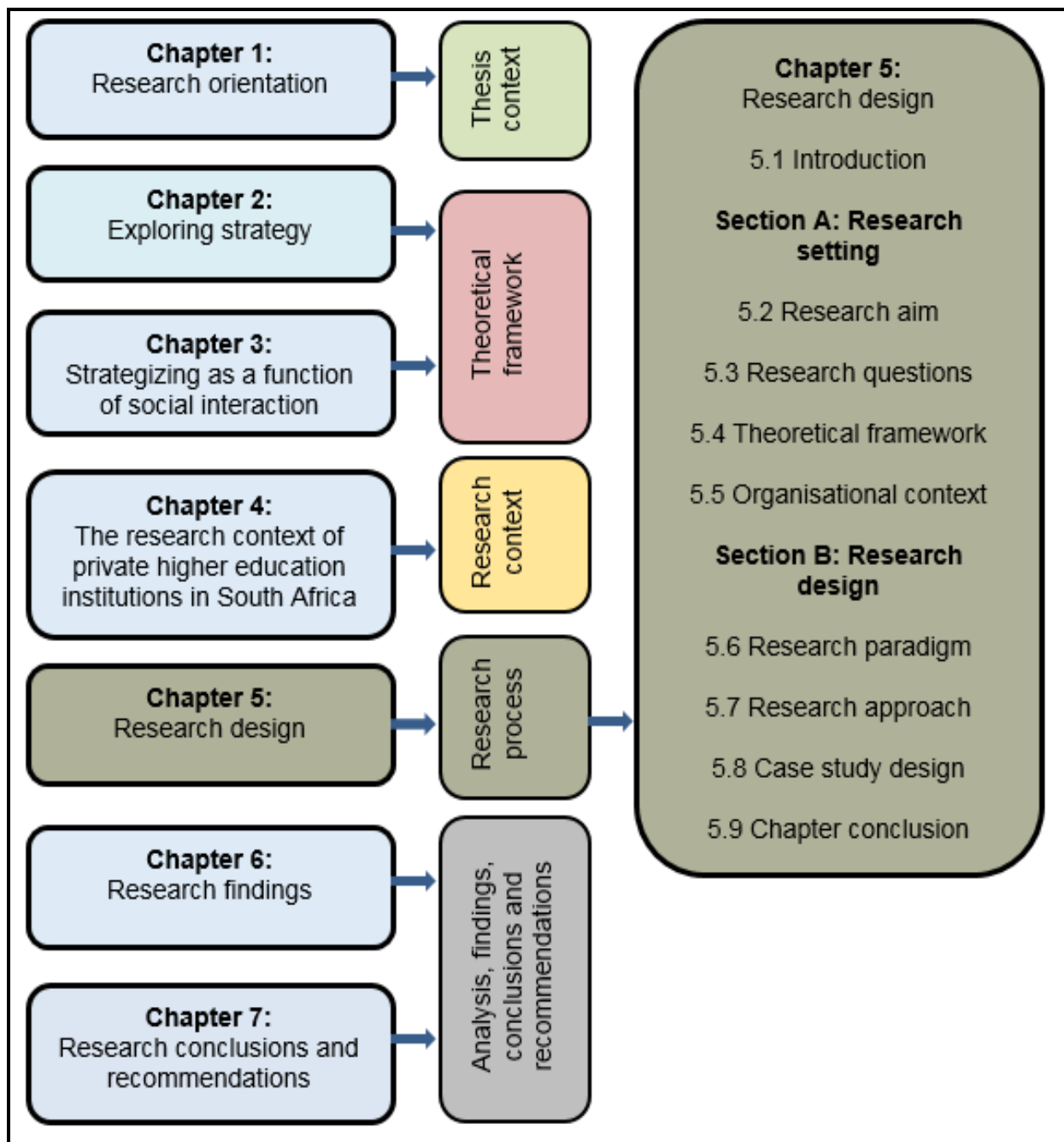


Figure 5.1: The structure of Chapter 5 (own compilation)

As depicted in Figure 5.1, this chapter is broadly divided into two sections. Section A provides the current study’s research setting by revisiting and summarising its research aims, research questions, theoretical framework and its macro-organisational context. Section B elaborates on the empirical research process followed. Before the specifics of the case study design are addressed, the philosophical underpinnings, as well as the research approach of the current study are comprehensively discussed. This long discussion of a pragmatic worldview and the

researcher's subscription to its philosophical dimensions was deemed necessary, firstly because pragmatism and a consequential mixed methods approach do not enjoy the same level of acceptance from the research community at large than other, more conventional approaches. Secondly, the underlying philosophies of pragmatism seems to have been neglected in many studies that only focus on finding a suitable worldview for a predetermined mixed methods research approach without really subscribing to a pragmatic worldview's philosophical foundations. This chapter endeavours to reveal how the philosophies of a pragmatic worldview guided the research approach and connected with the supported theories and assumptions of the current study. This golden thread extends to the subsequent case study design, in which the mechanics thereof are related to a pragmatically founded qualitatively driven mixed methods approach.

The section on the case study design includes an elucidation of the type of case study employed, the main units of analysis and the subcases. The four different data collection phases within the case study design are subsequently described, followed by an explanation of how the data were analysed and integrated before reporting on the findings. The ethical considerations, the scientific rigour, as well as the delimitations of the current study are also addressed. The research setting is described in the next section; it commences with a description of the research aim of the current study.

SECTION A: THE RESEARCH SETTING

This section provides a synopsis of the scope of the current study, including a description of the aim of the current research, the theoretical framework informing its inquiry, as well as the research context.

5.2 RESEARCH AIM

As discussed in the following sections, the aim of the current research was to gain a deeper understanding of social interaction as the social mechanism in shaping strategizing and to present a conceptual framework to guide further inquiry in this area of interest.

5.2.1 Strategizing as a function of social interaction

In subscribing to the view that strategizing, like all other organisational activities, is a function of social interaction, the current study explores the strategizing practices of top and middle managers as a function of their social interaction. As discussed in Chapter 3, various personal dispositions and motives, together with organisational practices (internal tools or mechanisms, processes and techniques) and broader extra-organisational practices, determine how managers interact and consequently strategize within various episodes of strategy praxis. Ongoing social interactions lead to negotiated and renegotiated shared and contextualised meaning, providing thereby a unique framework for strategizing within an organisation.

The current study focuses on understanding this social interaction as a mechanism in shaping unique organisational practices and shared meaning, specifically strategizing and how it leads to competitive advantages (the intended outcome of strategizing). In contrast to numerous studies that regard strategy-making as a rational, planned and linear activity, the current study thus heeds the call for strategy inquiry to be socially informed and focused on the actual strategizing practices of the strategy actors. The strategy-as-practice perspective provides for an appropriate lens, through which to view the actual practices of strategy actors. The overall aim was thus to develop a better understanding of how social interactions between top and middle managers shape strategizing and ultimately competitive advantages within certain contexts. An in-depth understanding of this iterative process may inform *how* social interaction in strategizing should be approached, in order to facilitate the creation of unique and heterogeneous strategizing processes and mechanisms within unique organisational contexts. The aim also includes creating a conceptual framework to guide further enquiry within this field, as discussed in the next section.

5.2.2 The conceptual framework

The development of a conceptual framework to guide future research focusing on understanding social interaction as a social mechanism in shaping strategizing was envisaged. Figure 5.2 portrays a generic depiction of the components of a conceptual framework that guides inquiry.

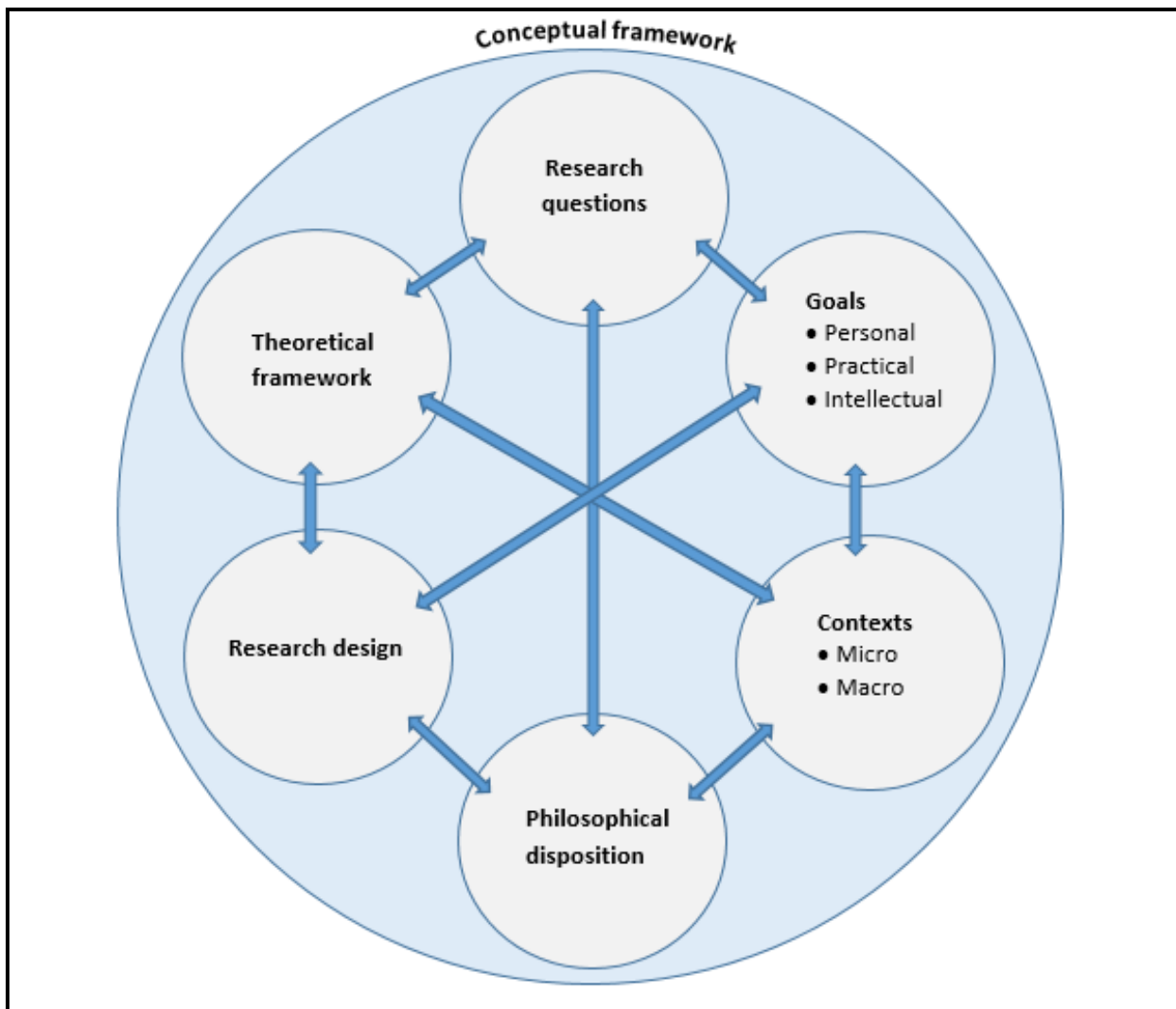


Figure 5.2: A conceptual framework guiding inquiry (adapted from Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016:36)

A conceptual framework, according to Miles, Huberman and Saldanã (2014:23) presents, graphically or narratively, the elements to be investigated; and it suggests what the presumed inter-relationships between these elements are. It represents a map to guide the researcher’s enquiry; and it evolves into a more refined framework, as the researcher engages more with the constructs of the study (Miles, Huberman & Saldanã, 2014:23). The researcher developed an initial exploratory framework during the early stages of the current research project; and subsequently refined it more as the current study progressed. This more refined conceptual framework was specifically developed to guide the empirical phase of the current research. This narrative framework was shaped through the consideration of various aspects as suggested by

Ravitch and Mittenfelner Carl (2016:36), as depicted in Figure 5.2: the research questions (Chapter 1), the theoretical framework (Chapters 2 and 3), together with the macro- (Chapter 4) and micro- (Chapters 5 and 6) organisational contexts of the two organisations of the current study, as well as the researcher's motivation and personal goals (Chapter 7), the philosophical disposition and the consequent research design (Chapter 5), constitute the conceptual framework of the current study.

This conceptual framework thus guided the empirical inquiry phase of the current study. The aim of the framework was not to restrictively prescribe investigation in a deductive way; it was rather a loose framework to keep the current research within broad parameters and to ensure that the main constructs were adequately explored. The conceptual framework of the current study therefore, as depicted in Figure 5.2, provided the researcher contextualised theoretical, philosophical and methodological bases for further inquiry into social interaction, as the social mechanism in shaping strategizing. In contrast to offering a definitive answer to the research questions that are generalisable to the overall population, the purpose of the current study, through its conceptual framework, was to proffer working (as opposed to final) research propositions to be developed/built through subsequent research in other situations: analytical generalisation (Yin, 2012:19). Following the completion of the empirical phase of the current study, the researcher reworked this framework to ultimately offer a conceptual framework for similar future studies. This reworked framework is graphically depicted and discussed in Chapter 7.

5.3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research problem justifies scientific inquiry; and it should therefore represent the main focus of any research (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013:27; Joubert, Hartell & Lombard, 2016:26). The main research question, investigative questions and research proposition, as described in Chapter 1, are presented below:

5.3.1 Main research question

- What are the strategizing practices of top and middle managers as they socially interact in two small South African private higher education institutions?

5.3.2 Investigative research questions

1. What motivation processes influence top and middle managers at two small South African private higher education institutions, when they engage in strategizing interactions?
2. What situational factors influence strategizing in two small South African private higher education institutions?
3. To what extent is strategy-making within two small South African private higher education institutions deliberate or emergent in nature?
4. What are the areas of competitive advantage of two small South African private higher education institutions, as perceived by their customers (students)?
5. Can a conceptual framework be constructed to guide further studies regarding how social interactions between managers shape strategizing?

5.3.3 The research proposition

Social interaction between top and middle level managers has a profound influence on the competitive strategy-making of the private higher education institutions of the current study. This interaction within different contexts (episodes of praxis) can be manipulated by observable and latent issues; some will contribute, and some will constrain meaningful strategy-making. Competitive strategy-making at the chosen case study organisations, namely two private higher education institutions, is mostly not deliberate; it is rather reactionary to market pressures. How these reactionary measures are implemented is mostly shaped by the social interaction between top and middle managers.

5.4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A comprehensive review of the existing literature within the fields of strategizing and social interaction culminated in a theoretical framework for the current study, as

depicted in Figure 3.3 and described in Section 3.7 of Chapter 3. The main theoretical approaches that informed the current research include the interactionist viewpoint, the strategy-as-practice perspective, as well as a holistic approach to strategy inquiry (strategy as planned and emergent).

5.5 ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

The importance of context in social interaction and strategizing is deliberated at length throughout the current study. The macro- (extra-organisational) setting of the two private higher education institutions that form part of the current research, is comprehensively addressed in Chapter 4. This includes a global and local examination of the private higher education industry, as it is framed within higher education globally and locally. The idiosyncrasies of the respective private higher education institutions (PHEIs) of the current study and how they impact on social interaction and strategizing were addressed in conducting the empirical phase of the current study. As discussed in Chapter 1 and Chapter 4, the selection of the two organisations of the current study is deemed relevant firstly from a macro-perspective: the significant growth of the private higher education sector and its role in addressing the growing need for higher education (HE) necessitates further inquiry. From a micro-level viewpoint: the chosen PHEIs fit the profile of typical South African profit seeking private HE-providers; and could thus provide a relevant contribution. In addition to competing with more than a hundred other private HE-providers, these PHEIs must also compete with their public counterparts who, unlike them, receive subsidies from the South African government. Link this with the apparent negative government sentiments towards private HE-providers, as discussed in Chapter 4, and it becomes evident that these organisations have their work cut out to survive. The selected PHEIs of the current study, like all the other South African private HE-providers, thus have to rely on sound strategizing practices to ensure their survival within a challenging business environment. One of the selected PHEI's head office is based within the Gauteng Province; while the second selected PHEI's head office is in the Western Cape Province, as described in Section 5.8.1.2.

This concludes the description of the research setting that frames the empirical phase of the current study. The second part of this chapter, Section B, is dedicated to how the current study addresses the stated research questions.

SECTION B: THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design represents the blueprint for the collection and the analysis of the data needed to answer the research questions (Bryman, Bell, Hirschson, Dos Santos, Du Toit, Masenge, Van Aardt & Wagner, 2014:100). In addressing the stated research questions, this blueprint adheres to the philosophical underpinnings and consequently the approach followed in the current study, which is duly addressed in Section B. This is followed by a comprehensive description of the case study research design employed in the current research. Table 5.1 portrays the paradigmatic disposition, the research approach and the specific research design followed in the current study.

Table 5.1: The Research design of the current study (own compilation)

Research design element	Description
Research Paradigm:	A pragmatic paradigm
Research approach:	Qualitatively driven mixed methods
Case study design:	Embedded, multiple, multi-phase, exploratory and explanatory, instrumental case study involving two South African private higher education institutions (PHEIs)

A qualitatively driven mixed methods approach, as depicted in Table 5.1, was identified as the most applicable way, within a pragmatic mindset, to address the current study's research questions. A multiple case study design consequently lends itself to an in-depth investigation of research phenomena, using multiple and/or mixed methods aimed at gaining a better understanding thereof. This paradigm, research approach and case study design are addressed in the next section.

5.6 RESEARCH PARADIGM

A pragmatic worldview anchored inquiry in the current research. This overarching pragmatic philosophy that guided the current study values concrete action and

experience; placing the social actor at the centre of investigation and valuing the practicality of knowledge. Rather than taking an either-or stance regarding a researcher's subscription to a worldview, a researcher within this paradigm anchors his or her research design in the research question; and he then identifies the appropriate research methods and their epistemological, ontological and axiological philosophical underpinnings in addressing this research problem (Creswell, 2013:10).

The *truth* is thus based on *what works*; and a researcher has the liberty to employ multiple research methods (even if these methods' philosophical underpinnings represent 'competing' paradigms like post-positivism and interpretivism) in understanding social phenomena (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009:88; Wahyuni, 2012:71; Creswell, 2013:10). Methodological pluralism or holism, as opposed to individualism, provides, according to pragmatists, for a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem (Chia & Rasche, 2015:43). Pansiri (2011:197) provides examples of numerous studies guided by a pragmatic philosophical framework; and he then postulates that, although relatively young, this is a contending paradigm. The next section deals with the philosophical foundations of the pragmatic paradigm.

5.6.1 The philosophical underpinnings of pragmatism

Authors like Friedrichs and Kratochwil (2009:702-703); Denzin (2012:82); as well as Morgan (2014:1045) warn that the pragmatic paradigm should not only be used as a convenient justification for the use of mixed research methods. These authors highlight the importance of the philosophical underpinnings of this worldview. In addition to a subscription to holism, as discussed in the previous section, the rest of Section 5.6.1 is dedicated to a discussion of the philosophies of this pragmatic paradigm.

5.6.1.1 Pragmatism and other research paradigms

Pragmatism regards the post-positivist-interpretivist *war* as being redundant (Friedrichs & Kratochwil, 2009:704). Both paradigms' views of the truth are supposedly socially contextualised/constrained: humans' experiences are constrained by nature (post-positivism), as well as by their beliefs (interpretivism) (Morgan, 2014:1049). In similarly asserting that the 'real world' is 'both bounded and perceptually laden', Miles

et al. (2014:7), call themselves 'pragmatic realists'. Instead of choosing one paradigm and having to exclusively abide by the research methods prescribed by this philosophical worldview, pragmatic inquiry is anchored in human experience; and 'methodological instrumentalism' serves as an approach in selecting the way in which knowledge is acquired (Friedrichs & Kratochwil, 2009:704). Methodological instrumentalism, by Friedrich's and Kratochwil's submission, refers to basing the value of a specific approach to inquiry not on how well it describes reality, but rather on explaining and predicting phenomena. Post-positivism and interpretivism thus represent different practical (situation-dependant), contextualised (socially constrained) approaches to inquiry.

5.6.1.2 The primacy of human social experience and practical problem-solving

Inquiry within a pragmatic worldview is informed by situated (including, historical, cultural and political contexts) social human experiences, actions and the consequences thereof (Simpson, 2009:1333; Creswell, 2013:11). Friedrichs and Kratochwil (2009:702-703) submit that many researchers agree that the search for irrefutable scientific knowledge, an *objective reality* (in a positivistic manner), in social research is not possible. They suggest that pragmatic research strategies offer a workable alternative to this *objective realism*. Friedrichs and Kratochwil (2009:703) continue to use an analogy of learning to drive: one can have factual driving lessons; but one only truly learns to drive (a social practice) when, in addition to mastering the theory of driving, one is driving on a road within different contexts among other drivers (city traffic, highways, etcetera) and learning how to deal with it. This notion that it is contextualised social experiences that lead to knowledge creation links with Mintzberg's (2015) insistence on strategic management learning through situated experience, as opposed to learning only from generalised evidence.

Mintzberg (2015) alludes to the business failures of numerous high-profile graduates from highly regarded business schools; and he questions their (the business schools) reliance on a pedagogy of applying generic strategy theory to supposedly explore generic situations or cases. The pragmatist paradigm thus offers a reconciliation between 'scientific inquiry with the requirements of practical reason' (Friedrichs & Kratochwil, 2009:703). Based on the works of seminal classical pragmatist thinkers

like Dewey and Mead, Simpson (2009:1333) submits that the pragmatist researcher concerns himself with how actors' social interactions (Simpson refers to Dewey and Bentley's [1949] use of the more committed term 'social transactions': interacting actors themselves represent the continuous emergence of meaning) create and recreate social meaning and identity (the 'social self') that consequently governs thought and action over time.

The production of knowledge is thus non-linear and temporal: dynamically and cyclically created and recreated through social interactions and subsequent social experiences with resultant consequences (Hall, 2013:17). Emotions are inextricably linked with these social experiences; knowledge production, therefore cannot simply imply rational reasoning (Morgan, 2014:1048). Feelings subsequently create important links between actions and belief (Morgan, 2014:1048). In the current study, the term 'social interactions' includes Dewey and Bentley's (1949) reference to 'social transactions' as alluded to by Simpson (2009:1333), as discussed earlier in this section.

Drawing on traditional pragmatic thinkers like Dewey, James, Mead and Peirce, Gross (2009:366) highlights the problem-solving orientation of the pragmatist paradigm: human thought and action are not viewed as independent from each other. The role of thought is to direct action in habitually solving practical problems (Gross, 2009:366). Pragmatists recognise that habits and creativity alternate in solving problems, but they acknowledge the primacy of habits over creativity in solving these problems with these habits ('acquired predispositions') being shaped through perpetual social interactions, actions and experiences, as well as earlier problem-solving endeavours (Gross, 2009:366). Unknown or challenging situations in which sole reliance on past experiences will not suffice for action, may call for 'inquiry': reflection is needed to consciously make (creative) decisions in realising the preferred consequences (Morgan, 2014:1047). This pragmatic inquiry is discussed in the next section.

5.6.1.3 Pragmatic inquiry

Just like any person must reflect in reacting to problematic situations, Morgan (2014:1047) in drawing on Dewey (1910), suggests that the researcher should engage

in 'thoughtful reflection' (inquiry) in making his research choices to address research problems. Research for pragmatists thus mirrors everyday problem-solving endeavours of social actors through inquiry. The only difference is that this heuristic inquiry is just more meticulous and self-conscious for the pragmatic researcher (Morgan, 2014:1047). Figure 5.3 provides a broad depiction of the inquiry process for pragmatic researchers.

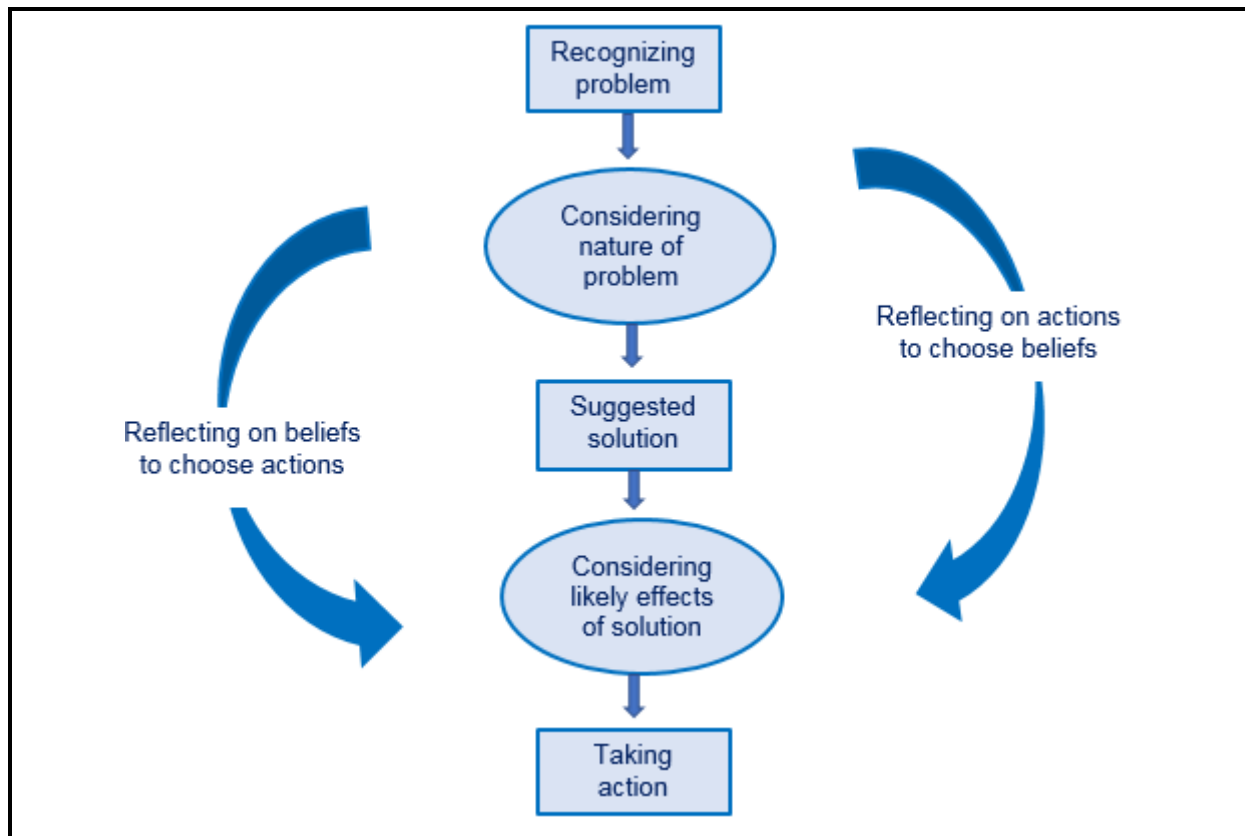


Figure 5.3: A model for pragmatic inquiry (Dewey, 1910 in Morgan, 2014:1048)

Morgan (2014:1048-1049) offers a concise description of the steps of Dewey's pragmatic inquiry process, as depicted in Figure 5.3. Note the focus on problem-solving, actions and consequences:

1. Recognise a situation as problematic;
2. Consider the difference it makes to define the problem one way rather than another;
3. Develop a possible line of action as a response to the problem;
4. Evaluate potential actions in terms of their likely consequences;
5. Take actions that are felt to be likely to address the problematic situation.

Morgan (2014:1048,1049) further elucidates the inquiry process of Figure 5.3:

- This process of inquiry allows for a linkage between beliefs and actions.
- Pragmatic inquiry is not a linear process, but an experience constituting a continuous process, possibly involving numerous cycles between beliefs and actions.
- Each occasion of inquiry is uniquely context-bound.
- Emotion; feelings and penchants influence inquiry; it is not a purely rational, detached process.
- Inquiry is a social process. Researchers are influenced by social factors like the requirements of peer reviews.
- The term 'knowledge' is toned down to the term 'warranted assertions' to illustrate the temporality and 'situatedness' of truth. These warranted assertions are the outcomes of inquiry typified by the interplay between belief and action: 'knowing and doing' are taken to be inseparable.

5.6.2 The pragmatic philosophies that guide the current study

Following on the discussion of the pragmatic paradigm and its philosophical underpinnings, the pragmatic philosophies that guide the current research are subsequently depicted in Table 5.2.

Table 5.2: The research paradigm guiding the current research (own compilation)

<p style="text-align: center;">The research paradigm: a pragmatic philosophical framework</p> <p>Pragmatism versus other philosophical frameworks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The a priori choice between competing research paradigms is redundant.• Subscription to methodological instrumentalism.• Subscription to holism/methodological pluralism. <p>Focusing on the primacy of human experience</p> <p>Knowledge/truth:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The production of knowledge is non-linear and temporal. <p>Pragmatic inquiry:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reflects upon actions and their implications.• Is a social, emotional and contextual process.• Examines and reflects on how actors socially interact and how these experiences create and recreate social meaning and identity.• Exhibits a problem-solving nature:<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Mirrors problem-solving in everyday life.○ Recognises the primacy of habits in problem-solving.○ Inquiry is needed to address challenging situations in everyday life.

In contrast to superficially choosing a pragmatic framework to justify mixed methods research, as depicted in Table 5.2, the current study truly commits to the philosophical underpinnings of the pragmatic paradigm:

Pragmatism versus other philosophical frameworks:

The a priori choice between paradigms like post-positivism and interpretivism and subsequent epistemological and ontological restrictions is regarded as redundant. A subscription to methodological instrumentalism is preferred: the selected research method is based on its ability to explain and predict a phenomenon. Research methods within both positivist and interpretivist paradigms can be considered, based on the social context of the research problem and the subsequent choice between what knowledge is needed and how to generate it. A subscription to methodological pluralism or holism means that the inclusion of different research methods from seemingly ‘incompatible’ paradigms supposedly facilitates an enhanced understanding of the research problem.

A focus on the primacy of human experience

Human actions, their experiences and 'meaning making' are examined individually and collectively as they interact (explicitly, as well as tacitly) within different problem situations or contexts. The pragmatist researcher thus concerns himself with how actors' social interactions (social transactions) and resultant experiences create and recreate social meaning and identity (the 'social self') that consequently governs thought and action over time.

Knowledge/truth:

The production of knowledge, or the truth, is non-linear and temporal: dynamically and cyclically created and recreated through social interactions and consequential social experiences with resultant consequences. This stands in contrast to *objective realism*: the notion that reality can be objectively sought.

Pragmatic inquiry:

The researcher studies and reflects upon actions and their implications. The pragmatic inquiry process is socially, emotionally and contextually (culturally historical and politically) laden, with beliefs and actions interacting in many cycles of inquiry: knowing and doing are inseparable. The pragmatic researcher examines and reflects on how actors' social interactions (social transactions) and the resultant experiences create and recreate social meaning; and s/he identifies (the 'social self') that consequently governs thought and action over time.

Pragmatic inquiry has a problem-solving nature: habits based on past experiences represent most of the problem-solving endeavours of social actors and pragmatic researchers alike. Inquiry is needed to address such challenging situations in everyday life, as well as for research problems (relying only on past experiences here is thus not enough). Research inquiry in addressing research problems is more meticulous and self-conscious than inquiry needed to solve challenging problems in everyday life.

The next section contains a discussion on how the current research was approached from a broad methodological perspective.

5.7 RESEARCH APPROACH

Within a pragmatic worldview that frames the current study, the approach in dealing with the research problem needs some elucidation. The qualitatively driven mixed methods approach followed in the current study is firstly unpacked in this section. The main theoretical constructs that informed the current research and how they impacted upon the empirical phase of the current study are subsequently addressed.

5.7.1 A mixed methods approach

A pragmatic worldview allows for a mixed method, multi-phase design that should be best suited to the current study. Morgan (2007:48) proposes that mixed methods should be acknowledged as the new guiding approach for social studies. Mixed method research entails the joint employment of quantitative and qualitative research methods (Plano Clark & Ivankova, 2016:4). Citing Ellingson, (2011), Tracy (2013:39) argues that researchers increasingly advocate “blurring the boundaries” between different research paradigms. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007:7), as well as Plano Clark and Ivankova (2016:80), contend that a mixed method approach (most used within a pragmatic paradigm) allows for a better understanding of the research problem. From the preceding section that deals with the philosophical assumptions of a pragmatic paradigm, it is apparent that pragmatism does not necessarily imply mixed methods research. In the current study, mixed methods were not initially chosen, followed by a consequential search for a paradigmatic home for this research approach. The researcher rather identified the need for in-depth, rich, contextualised knowledge to address the research problem and subsequently identified a qualitatively driven mixed method approach, as being the most applicable. This approach is elucidated in the next section.

5.7.1.1 A qualitatively driven mixed methods approach

Authors like Howe (2004:52) and Denzin (2010:420) contend that much of the mixed methods movement has recently been driven by post-positivists who have supposedly ‘poached’ qualitative methods to superficially (‘turning inquiry into a set of procedures’) employ them within quantitatively dominated mixed method approaches in the name

of triangulation. Citing various studies, Creswell, Shope, Plano Clark and O'Green (2006:2), however, claim that there are quite a number of mixed methods studies that award primacy to qualitative research, referring to this approach as 'qualitatively-driven mixed methods research'. Morse and Cheek (2014:3) concur and mention that, even though a lot of mixed method studies follow a traditionally preferred quantitative-dominated approach, many studies use qualitatively driven mixed methods research in a quest to gain a deeper understanding and richer description of phenomena in a 'complex social world'. This interpretive-driven (QUAL-*quan*, note that the capitalised 'QUAL' refers to its dominance in the approach) approach in the developing and contested field of mixed methods research is, according to Morse and Cheek (2014:3), gaining in popularity among researchers and acknowledgement from the research community, including scientific publications. Within this approach, to which the current study subscribes, a qualitative-dominant methodology allows for an inductive investigation of experiences and meaning-making, in which an auxiliary embedded quantitative phase serves as a supplementary method for further elucidation (Hesse-Biber, Rodriguez & Frost, 2015:3).

As discussed in Section 5.6, a pragmatic philosophy awards preference to methodological instrumentalism (selecting a research method based on its ability to explain and predict a phenomenon). This worldview thus downplays the all-or-nothing subscription to the philosophical underpinnings of supposedly irreconcilable worldviews, in favour of a holistic methodological approach: the use of a mix of methods to better understand a phenomenon (Gross, 2009:365,378; Chia & Rasche, 2015:43). It is, however, still necessary to acknowledge these guiding assumptions' role in shaping qualitative and quantitative methodologies, respectively. This section subsequently briefly deals with the different empirical research methods employed in the current study and their different guiding philosophical frameworks.

In addressing the investigative research questions of the current study, from a pragmatic viewpoint, it becomes apparent that the first three research questions required an in-depth investigation of narratives, scrutinizing the intricacies and hidden meanings of phenomena, thus a qualitative research approach, which is underpinned by an interpretivist paradigm (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013:95; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009:5-7). The fourth research question pertaining to the measurement of meaningful

competitive advantages, calls for the analysis of numerical values. This quantitative research approach is underpinned by a post-positivistic paradigm (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013:95; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009:5-7). The dominating number of qualitatively orientated research questions, as well as the supportive function of the quantitatively orientated research questions, from a pragmatic logic, necessitated a research approach, in which quantitative data are embedded within a dominant qualitative framework (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:7).

The different qualitative methods employed thus subscribed to an interpretivist paradigm, with a post-positivistic meta-theoretical stance that guided the quantitative data collection phase. The overall interpretation of the findings of the current study were guided by an interpretivist worldview, beliefs and values, as depicted in Table 5.3. The current study therefore employs a QUAL-quan type of qualitatively driven mixed methods approach (Hesse-Biber, *et al.*, 2015:5).

Table 5.3: The difference between positivist and interpretive research paradigms (A summary of Lincoln and Guba’s typology by Mukhopadhyay, S. & Gupta, R.K.)

	Positivist/ Post-positivist	Interpretive
Ontology	Single reality or can be apprehended probabilistically	Reality is constructed and can be multiple
Epistemology	Knower and known are independent	Knower and known are inseparable
Axiology	Inquiry is value-free	Inquiry is value-driven
Inductive/ Deductive	Deductive	Inductive
Generalisation	Generalisation is time and context free. Generalisation is possible	Generalisation is not possible; hence, the focus is on understanding

Table 5.3 provides a summary of Guba and Lincoln’s (1985) system for comparing the two dominant research paradigms of post-positivism and interpretivism (Mukhopadhyay & Gupta, 2014:111). From Table 5.4: an interpretive worldview guiding inquiry acknowledges that reality and the search for the truth are inextricably

linked to the situation or context and the researcher (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:105). Inquiry is inductive and value-driven, and the focus is rather on a deeper understanding of the topic than merely generalising the results. A post-positive stance conversely ascribes to the notion that reality can be objectively observed and sought. Inquiry is thus value-free and deductive, and the generalisation of the research results is important. Guba and Lincoln (1994:105) argue that a post-positivist research paradigm is more conducive to quantitative research, whereas an interpretive stance facilitates qualitative research. The current study's embedded research design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:71) favours mostly the collection of qualitative data, with the quantitative data playing merely a supporting role.

5.7.1.2 Mixed methods and triangulation

Denzin (2012:82) argues that triangulation does not represent a strategy for the validation of results, but rather an 'alternative to validation'. The current study duly focused on 'methodological triangulation' (Flick, 2004: by way of Denzin, 1978). Whereas Denzin (2010, 2012) questions mixed methods compatibility, Howe (2012:93) suggests that different qualitative and quantitative methods should be 'detached' from their underlying paradigms and viewed on a level of 'procedures and techniques'. This, according to Howe, refutes the incompatibility premise narrative (between qualitative and quantitative research methods). Hesse-Biber *et al.* (2015:4), similarly suggest that, instead of focusing on the dichotomy between qualitative and quantitative methodologies, the differences between these two methods should rather be viewed as lying on a continuum.

Shared perspectives between the approaches should consequently be sought as one moves towards the centre of the continuum. Instead of attempting to validate objective, conclusive results, the current study follows a holistic, methodological triangulation approach: accommodating data, whether conjunctive or disjunctive, to generate, within a broad, explanatory framework (Howe, 2012:90), a richer understanding of the complex nature of social interaction and its impact on strategizing (Flick, 2004:180; Lincoln & Guba, 1985:301-327; Denzin, 2012:82).

5.7.2 Strategy-as-practice, interactionism and the practice turn

In a discussion of the practical theories that stand central to the strategy-as-practice stream, Johnson *et al.* (2007:32-34), refer to the turn to practice in social theory. These authors argue that this social theory shares its concern with practical activity with a recently revived pragmatist tradition in philosophy as explored by philosophers, such as Derrida, Latour, Foucault and Wittgenstein. The current study places the social actor at the centre of investigation and values the practicality of knowledge – “Strategy research from a pragmatist perspective is not about creating abstract generalizations, but about getting close enough to actors and their activities, in order to help them to be more effective in the field” (Johnson *et al.*, 2007:33). Strategy knowledge cannot be commodified by offering parsimonious academic representations, which need first to be digested and applied for success. Instead, it should be *cultivated* and *re-cultivated* within sociological and historical milieus by way of the social practices (Chia & Rasche, 2015: 45).

As discussed in Chapter 3, the Strategy-as-practice perspective evolved within the ambit of the practice turn movement of sociologists. This approach further provides an appropriate lens to view strategizing as it aligns with the integrative and pragmatic nature of the interactionist conception (as discussed in Chapter 3) of organisational sociology. In addressing its main research problem, the current study thus, guided by pragmatic philosophies (action, experiences, meaning, consequences, problem solving) attempts to gain a deeper understanding of the practical social interaction activities of strategy practitioners and how these workplace interactions (episodes of praxis) shape strategizing and its outcomes. A pragmatist-guided approach, as well as a strategy-as-practice lens, requires *verstehen* (understanding) and *erklären* (explanation) (Friedrichs & Kratochwil, 2009:706), thus necessitating, as explained in the previous section, a qualitatively driven mixed methods approach (QUAL-quant).

The interactionist-framework guiding the current study is dealt with in Chapter 3, where it is concluded that social interaction represents the core of organisational life, including strategy making. Chia and Rasche (2015:45) call this a ‘relational ontology’. Shared meaning and reality are dynamically shaped through negotiations and renegotiations (or transactions, in Deweyan language) between organisational

members. It is the practice turn and its relevance to the current study that needs a little more unpacking, as is addressed in the next section.

5.7.2.1 A dwelling worldview: *phronesis* and *mētis*

In a discussion of the practice turn and its implications for strategy-as-practice research, Chia and Rasche (2015:44) report that the attempts of traditional strategy studies, anchored in a 'building worldview' (a division between body and mind, as well as between the individual and society, see Chapter 3), tend to offer theoretical accounts of strategy. This, according to the above authors, creates a 'schism' between these academic accounts and the actual strategizing activities. The above authors suggest that, even though most strategy-as-practice studies purport to prioritise social practice, they do not truly embrace this relational ontology. Chia and Rasche (2015:49) cite various strategy-as-practice studies that supposedly work in a building worldview fashion; proffering 'explicit knowledge'; superficially describing what the goal driven strategy making activities that are being studied entail. To really understand these social practices of strategizing, one needs to, in a 'dwelling worldview' fashion (immersion in context; 'being' and 'doing' cannot be separated, see Chapter 3), delve into the impact of identity, experiences, meaning and how these impact on social practices: what happens before actors strategize.

To illustrate their point, Chia and Rasche (2015:51) describe several strategy-as-practice studies, in which researchers still, in a building worldview fashion, subscribe to an epistemology of 'explicit knowledge'; visible activities and their outcomes: a subscription to simplistic, evidence-based research (Denzin, 2010:420; Denzin, 2012:85). The 'black box' of strategizing is thus not adequately investigated. Chia and Rasche (2015:47) call for strategy-as-practice research to also investigate the 'tacit dimension' of strategy: those unseen antecedent and non-deliberate elements of strategy making and strategic outcomes. The above authors suggest that a focus on "phronesis" and "mētis" (as opposed to epistemology only) will elucidate the situated, dispositional and transactional nature of strategy making with strategy emerging as a pattern of coping or "wayfinding" actions in unfolding situations. Phronesis refers to 'practical wisdom or intelligence' that is gained through experience: the ability to act aptly in social situations (Chia & Rasche, 2015:49). Whereas *phronesis* refers to

practical intelligence within an ethical or moral framework, *mētis* may have an ‘unsavoury’ connotation: the practical intelligence to react to situations in ‘underhanded’ or opportunistic ways, reversing fortunes and getting away with it – a type of ‘street-smart’ or ‘cunning intelligence’ (Chia & Rasche, 2015:47). Even though *phronesis* and, especially *mētis*, are difficult to measure and do not enjoy much attention in strategy research, this researcher of the current study argues that its consideration is paramount in true pragmatic, practice-guided studies.

5.7.3 Social interaction as a social mechanism that shapes strategizing

Drawing in part on the typology of Hedström and Swedberg (1998), Gross (2009:368) offers a pragmatic approach to investigate a ‘social mechanism’ (S): the process by which an input (I) leads to an outcome (O). This process (S) can only be comprehensively understood by studying all the actors (A) (individually and collectively) involved in this process (A_{1-n}): this will entail ascertaining why and how likely responses (R_n) manifest, based on the actors’ ‘habits of cognition and action’ (H_n), when facing problem situations (P_n) (Gross, 2009:368). The I-O connection is consequently reliant on an aggregate process of all relations: S (the social mechanism) = $A_{1-n} - P_{1-n} - H_{1-n} - R_{1-n}$.

For the current study, social interaction thus represents the input and strategizing the output. How the process of social interaction shapes strategizing thus represents the social mechanism. To deeply understand this mechanism, in the current study, all the organisational actors involved in strategizing are examined (actions, experiences and ‘meaning making’) individually and collectively, as they interact (explicitly, as well as tacitly) within different problem situations or contexts.

Hedström and Swedberg (1998:1) postulate that, while good social theory should be explanatory, most modern social research merely provides descriptive accounts of the chains of events. To advance social theory and research, the above authors maintain that the systematic explication of social mechanisms that “create and explain observed associations between events” is crucial. Hedström and Swedberg (1998:7) further suggest that, as opposed to statistical analysis that merely indicates probabilistic associations; social researchers should seek mechanisms that explain the

relationships between phenomena. The explanatory aim of a social mechanism approach is thus not just to describe what is likely to happen between two variables or events, but also why and how this happens. Social mechanism approaches, according to Edling and Rydgren (2016:1139), aim to integrate theory and empirical research.

These authors claim that social mechanisms represent a research strategy and not a theory; it is about revealing things that happen in the real world that bring about phenomena. Ylikoski (2017:406) agrees and mentions that a toolbox view of scientific social knowledge posits that the core of theoretical knowledge consists of mutually compatible “causal mechanism schemes”. The understanding of the social world supposedly increases as the collection of the compatible causal mechanisms grows. The current research duly aims to explain how the strategy-praxis episodes, as inputs explain strategy outcomes. This empirical outcome could thus serve as a building block for accumulating social science theory.

5.7.4 A hermeneutic and heuristic approach

The social, as well as the problem-solving nature of pragmatic inquiry is described in Section 5.6. This relates to hermeneutic and heuristic approaches followed in the current study, as discussed in this section. Section 5.6 describes the primacy of social interaction in the current study’s approach. Little (2008) states that: “The hermeneutic approach holds that the most basic fact of social life is the meaning of an action”. Little further submits that this approach focuses on the interpretation of the meanings of social action. The current study has consequently subscribed to a hermeneutic approach.

As discussed in Section 5.6, the pragmatic researcher’s inquiry mirrors the problem-solving nature of practitioners in dealing with everyday situations and challenges. This problem-solving orientation relates to heuristics, where the researcher draws on self-conscious experiences in creating a ‘cognitive toolbox’ to approach a research problem (Hastie & Dawes, 2010:88). Heuristics, according to Hastie and Dawes (2010:88), entails taking ‘mental shortcuts’ or applying ‘rules of thumb’. The use of specific heuristic guidelines serves as a strategy to mitigate the possibility of erring in research in the current study. Four heuristic values (Kleining & Witt, 2000)

consequently guided the current study: 1) The researcher is prepared to change his preconceptions and is open to new propositions; 2), the research topic may change as the study progresses; 3), a variation of research methods is applied to avoid possible one-sided representation of the topic; and 4), the analysis should be directed towards finding similarities from the diverse research data: and the grouping of similarities into patterns and themes.

5.7.4 Summarising the current study’s research approach

The main approaches and related assumptions that informed the current study are depicted in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4: The research approach (own compilation)

The research approach
<p>A qualitatively driven mixed methods approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In-depth, rich, contextualised knowledge. • A qualitative-dominant methodology. <p>Strategy-as-practice, interactionism and the practice turn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The social actor is at the centre of investigation. • The strategy-as-practice perspective as lens to view strategizing. • Investigating the black box, the ‘tacit dimension’ of strategy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <i>Phronesis</i>: practical intelligence. ○ <i>Mētis</i>: ‘cunning intelligence’. <p>Social interaction as a social mechanism:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigating the social mechanism: the process by which an input (social interaction) leads to an outcome (strategizing). <p>A hermeneutic and heuristic approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hermeneutics: interpreting the meanings of social actions. • Heuristics: mirroring the problem-solving nature of practitioners.

As shown in Table 5.4 and with reference to the discussion in this section, the current study’s research approaches can be summarised as:

A qualitatively driven mixed methods approach

This allows for a better understanding of the research problem through in-depth, rich, contextualised knowledge. The specific mixed methods approach entails a qualitative-

dominant methodology conducting an inductive investigation of experiences and meaning-making, with an auxiliary embedded quantitative phase as a supplementary method for further elucidation. Methodological triangulation, leading to better understanding is realised, as opposed to triangulation, in order to validate the results.

Strategy-as-practice, interactionism and the practice turn

The social actor is at the centre of investigation and the practicality of knowledge is valued. The strategy-as-practice perspective evolved within the ambit of the practice turn movement of sociologists. The strategy-as-practice perspective provides an appropriate lens through which to view strategizing, as it aligns with the integrative and pragmatic nature of the interactionist conception of organisational sociology. Investigating the black box, the 'tacit dimension' of strategy entails studying the unseen antecedent and non-deliberate elements of strategy-making and strategic outcomes from within a dwelling worldview:

- o Phronesis: practical intelligence of the social actors within an ethical or moral framework, as they interact.
- o Mētis: 'cunning intelligence' of social actors in sometimes unsavoury ways.

Social interaction as a social mechanism

The specific social mechanism explored in the current study includes the process by which an input (social interaction) leads to an outcome (strategizing). How the process of social interaction shapes strategizing thus represents the social mechanism. To deeply understand this mechanism, in the current study, the organisational actors involved in strategizing were examined ('meaning making', experiences, and actions) individually and collectively as they interact (explicitly, as well as tacitly) within different problem situations or contexts.

A hermeneutic and heuristic approach

Hermeneutics relates to focusing on the interpretation of the meanings of social actions. In terms of heuristics, the pragmatic researcher's inquiry mirrors the problem-solving nature of practitioners; taking 'mental shortcuts' or applying 'rules-of-thumb'.

This concludes the discussion of the approaches followed in the current study. The case study as a research design is subsequently dealt with in the next section.

5.8 CASE STUDY DESIGN

A case study design was employed in addressing the current study's stated research problems. This case study adhered to the philosophical assumptions and consequential approach followed in the current study, as discussed in the preceding sections. The case study design of the current study is subsequently described in this section.

The chosen case study design represents the most applicable way to address the research problem of the current study. The study of Jarzabkowski (2005) at three UK universities and Davis's (2013) research at a South African university, seem to vindicate the appropriateness of using case study research in the field of strategy-as-practice, specifically within a higher education context. Hughes and McDonagh (2017) conclude that case study research allows for novel research approaches in strategy-as-practice studies, offering new insights and avenues of inquiry. Case studies are "...intensive analyses and descriptions of a single unit or system bounded by time" (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011:10). Miles and Huberman (1994:25), as well as Yin (2012:4) allude to the notion that case studies are bound to real-world contexts; an in-depth study of phenomena in bounded, natural settings, in contrast to "derived settings".

In agreement, Merriam (1998:29) refers to Cronbach's (1975) description: "interpretation in context" and further alludes to the holistic nature of this interpretation, as the interrelationship between the case and its context. Creswell (2009:91) adds that case studies involve multiple sources of information, and continues to describe the "...long, distinguished history [of case studies] across many disciplines". Drawing on Cummings and Daellenbach (2009), Clegg *et al.* (2011:13), propose that frameworks and case studies are replacing the diminishing use of tools and models in strategy. Yin (2014:xix) alludes to the significant growth of case study research publications, also within in different fields of study, as well as the publishing of reference works that document the case study method. This, according to Yin, confirms the growing

acknowledgment of case study research as a respected research method. Yin (2012:5) however contends that, even though case study research is observed in numerous publications, it has not yet obtained the same extensive recognition that is enjoyed by other research designs.

Contrary to the notion of researchers, like Creswell (2009), as well as Hancock and Algozine (2011) that case study research is a thread of qualitative research, Yin (2012:11) postulates that it may include both quantitative and qualitative data. He thus contends that it should be recognised as an independent research design with its own procedures and methods. In subscribing to Yin's proposition, the current study, within an overarching pragmatic paradigm and qualitative-driven mixed methods research approach, employed multiple sources of data in an embedded, multiple, multi-phase, exploratory and explanatory, instrumental case study research design, involving two selected private higher education institutions (PHEI) (Stake, 2005:445; Creswell, 2009:89-95; Merriam, 2009:39; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013:260; Yin, 2012:4-19). The specifics of the current study's case study design are elucidated in Section 5.8.1.

A case study design for the current research thus allowed for an in-depth investigation within a real-world context (Yin, 2014:16). This multiple setting bound research facilitates an up-close, in-depth investigation of social interaction between strategy practitioners and its effect on strategizing. Yin (2012:6, 18-19) refers to the importance of case study research in providing analytical, in contrast to, statistical generalisations. The current study aims to establish a conceptual framework for exploring the social interactions of strategy practitioners and its consequences for strategizing that can be applied in other settings.

A framework for a systematic case study design

Yin (2012:6) recommends that, in order to address scientific rigour concerns from research communities, case study researchers need to subscribe to a systematic process and well-defined protocol for collecting and analysing the data. Yin (2012:6) however, submits that the research process should still be iterative, moving back and forth between steps, adapting research steps should thus still be possible within this design or blueprint. Merriam (1998, 2009) concurrently subscribes to systematic case study conduct despite her mostly qualitative focus on case studies that support

inductive reasoning. Like Yin (2012), Merriam (1998, 2009) recognises the importance of having a research framework promoting rigour in case study research and to address such concerns regarding the appropriate use of case studies. The current study duly heeded the above authors' call with a research design based on a systematically mapped process, as depicted in Figure 5.4, and discussed in the following sections.

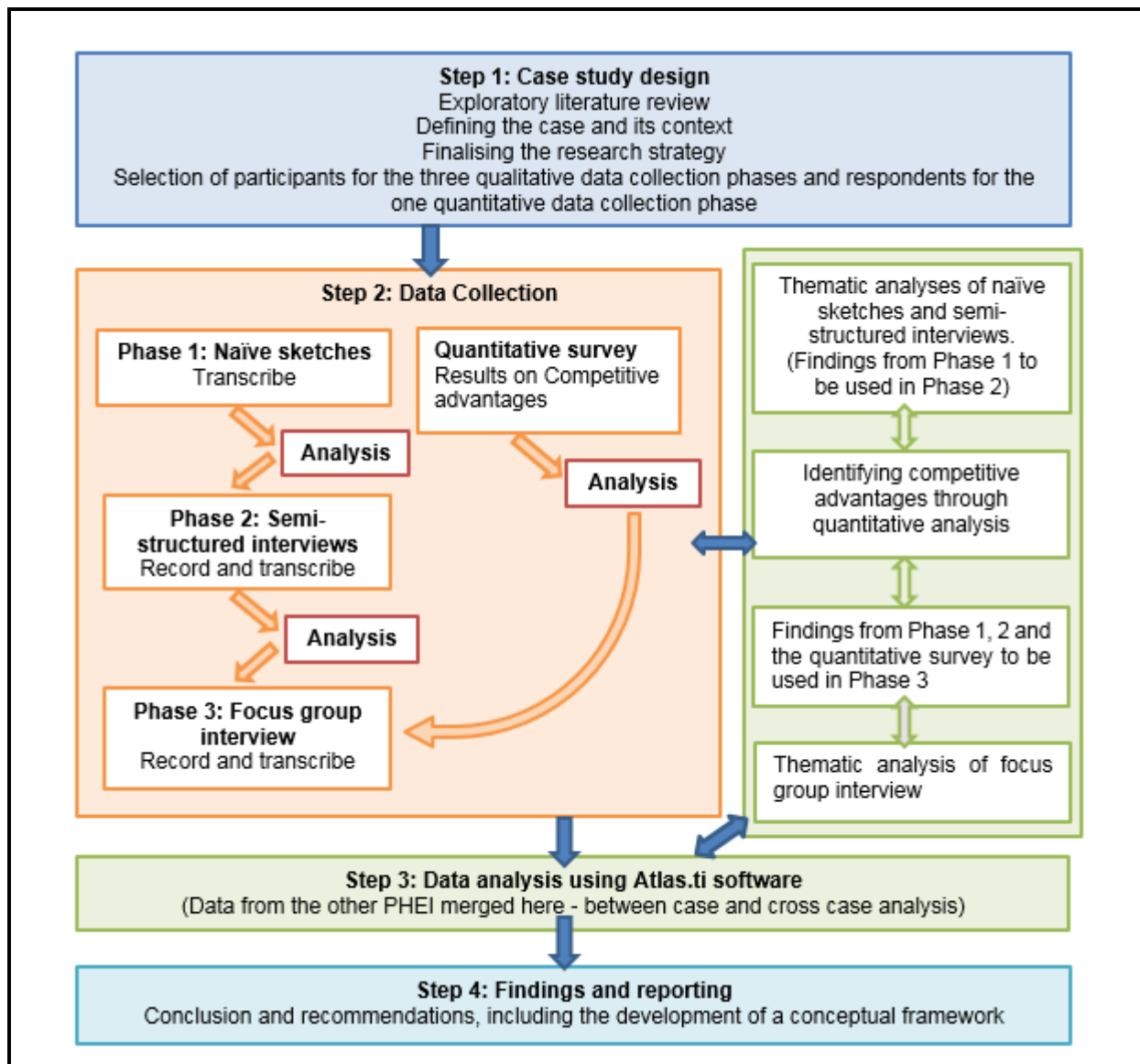


Figure 5.4: Case study design (own compilation)

As depicted in Figure 5.4, the case study research design of the current study comprises four steps, namely the design of the case study; data collection; data analysis and findings and reporting. The following sections are dedicated to a more detailed discussion of each step utilised for each of the two PHEIs separately, up to

the point where the data are merged, and the findings prepared. In the spirit of heuristic approach enquiry (described in Section 5.7), certain steps within the design could have been adapted, as the current study developed.

5.8.1 Step 1: Case study design

In subscribing to Yin's proposition (2012:9), the current study, within an overarching pragmatic paradigm and qualitative-driven mixed methods research approach, employed multiple sources of data in an embedded, multiple, multi-phase, exploratory and explanatory, instrumental case study research design, involving two selected PHEIs.

5.8.1.1 Theoretical framework

The literature review section (Chapters 2 to 4) of the current study provides for a better understanding of the cases and their contexts. Chapters 2 and 3 address theories of strategizing and relate them to the theories of organisational social interaction. Chapter 4 provides a discussion of the external environment (the global and South African HE and PHE-environment) in which the two PHEIs of the current study operate. This allowed for the development of a theoretical framework to address the research problems of the current study, as described in Chapter 3. The literature review in the current study was not intended to proffer theories to be deductively applied or tested.

The preliminary propositions of the theoretical framework rather served to refine/guide the case study conducted in the empirical phase of the current study. The researcher, in an inductive fashion, sought to explore and gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena under investigation; and he was prepared to iteratively adapt the research questions and propositions as the empirical study progresses (Yin, 2012:9,10).

5.8.1.2 Defining the case and its context

The current study employed an embedded multiple case study design (subcases embedded in the main cases of more than one organisation) in the empirical phase of

the current study (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2012). Within the two separate contexts (the two different PHEIs representing the case boundaries), the main units of analysis or cases were the episodes of strategy praxis between top and middle managers (strategy actors). Within these cases, the embedded subcases include firstly an exploration of the predisposition and meaning making of social actors that engage in these episodes of praxis. It also includes an investigation of the organisational tools, mechanisms, or processes and techniques (practices) that relate to strategizing within the intra- and extra-organisational environments of the case study organisations.

An investigation of the competitive advantages of the respective PHEIs is also included as part of their practices. These subcases contextualise the strategy practitioners' strategizing practices (praxis). They are instrumental in elucidating the interaction between the strategy practitioners during episodes of strategy praxis; and they were, therefore, included in the analysis and the reporting of the research data.

The two PHEIs of the current study are registered in South Africa, as private institutions; one has its head office in Gauteng and one in the Western Cape. As alluded to in Section 5.5, the choice of the South African private higher education industry, as the context for investigating strategizing in the current study is topical; since this industry has an important role to play in providing for the pressing demand for higher education in Africa. On a macro-level, this study aimed to provide an up-to-date investigation of this volatile industry, including having a look at its major players, as well as the complicated relationships between the private providers and the government. On a micro-level, the current study aimed to provide some insight on how two typical small profit seeking private higher education providers strategize.

Both are profit-seeking organisations. The PHEI, with its head office in Gauteng (henceforth called PHEI A) had 922 full-time registered students in 2018; while the one with its head office in the Western Cape (henceforth called PHEI B) had 521 full-time registered students in 2018. Both PHEIs do engage in strategizing activities. Both PHEIs regularly strategize among the top management team, followed by less regular strategizing episodes, in which middle managers are involved. PHEI A has four top managers and fifteen middle managers; whereas PHEI B has 8 top managers and 9 middle managers. Conducting the actual case study revealed more micro-

organisational contextual factors that impact upon social interaction and strategizing at the respective organisations.

5.8.1.3 Finalising the research strategy

This section contains a discussion of the characteristics of the case study employed in the current study:

- ***An instrumental multiple case study employing multiple sources of evidence***

A multiple case study facilitates a better understanding of the research topic (Merriam, 2009:49). More than one case allows for within-the-case, between-the-case, and cross-case analyses, resulting in greater confidence in the findings of the study (Yin, 2012:7,17). The current case study is also instrumental: an analysis of the embedded subcases (practitioners and practices) is instrumental in exploring, describing and explaining the research topic (how social interactions shape strategizing) (Stake, 2005:445). The use of multiple data collection methods reveals multiple perspectives; and it allows for a richer understanding of the research topic (Stake, 2005:453; Yin, 2012:10).

- ***An inductive case study seeking explanatory insights within an exploratory framework***

While Yin's (2012, 2014) work on case studies implicitly exhibits positivistic undertones, Merriam (1998, 2009), while acknowledging the possibility of quantitative inquiry, focuses on qualitative case study research (Crotty, 1998 cited in Yazan, 2015:136,137). In a comprehensive study of Stake (1995), Merriam (1998) and Yin's (2012) perspectives on case study research, Yazan (2015:137) aligns with Merriam's and Stake's constructivist philosophical underpinnings. However, true to his pragmatic orientation, Yazan does acknowledge the instrumentality of Yin's strategies and guidelines that embrace quantitative and qualitative research methods alike. In keeping with its pragmatic and paradigmatic stance and consequential research approach, the current study, like Yazan, acknowledges the practicality of Stake's,

Merriam's and Yin's guidelines in informing its overall case design and implementation.

As the current study subscribed to a qualitative-driven mixed methods approach within a pragmatic stance, it supports Merriam's (1998:39, 2009:39, 40) supposition that case study research entails inductive investigation and rich description; and it seeks to explore and explain various phenomena.

Explanatory insights in qualitative research

Drawing on Stake (2006), Merriam (2009) and Yin (2014), as well as various other researchers, Harrison, Birks, Franklin and Mills (2017:8) assert that case study research is exploratory and explanatory in nature, answering *why* and *how* questions. Exploration involves efforts to become familiarised with a topic; in order to gain an in-depth understanding thereof (Babbie, 2008:97).

Yin (2014:7) contends that case studies are not limited to the exploratory phases of research designs and that explanation is not just limited to experimental studies. The above author continues to provide an in-depth of selected well-known qualitative case studies that were explanatory in nature. Tracy (2013:219) concurs and suggests that qualitative research is superior to quantitative research in developing 'local causality' - explanations for contextualised activities. Miles *et al.* (2014:222), agree and claim that causation in quantitative research is limited to possible associations that are smoothed across numerous instances. The above authors maintain that robust explanation and causation can only be truly realised through qualitative research.

Patton (2015:582) cites Northcutt and McCoy (2004), as well as Kahneman in Pomeroy (2013), in asserting that causality plays an integral part in constructing reality: 'humans are creatures of causality'. Miles *et al.* (2014:222), concur and argue that, as part of everyday life, after observing 'what' has happened, people ask 'why' and 'how', which is usually answered by 'because'. Patton (2015:583) notes the importance of causal inference in qualitative research. Qualitative researchers usually report on explanations offered by interviewees for why certain things happened. Patton (2015:584) subsequently submits that there is no reason why qualitative researchers, who have been intimately involved with the data, may not share their explanatory

insights from their analyses. The above author contends that advancements in qualitative research have facilitated the rigorous production of credible causal explanations; and he concludes that this may be a justification of case study research. Cases, according to Patton (2015:586), are deliberately selected to 'illuminate causation'. Qualitative analysis within multiple cases, according to Miles *et al.* (2014:223), represents the best approach for "advancing our assertions and theories about the way social life works". Section 5.8.4.2 addresses the analytical procedures followed for the current study, to build explanatory insights.

Maxwell and Mittapalli (2008:325), as well as Maxwell (2012:656), refer to Hume's 'regularity theory' from the 18th century that led to the view of explanation being limited to quantitative research. Maxwell and Mittapalli, (2008:325), as well as Maxwell (2012:656) further state that, according to this theory (regularity theory), causality can only be established through identifying the regularities between independent inputs and dependent outputs. Patton (2015:584) alludes to the 'collateral damage' of this exclusive 'hold' of experimental research on causality: many 'excellent' qualitative research-programs are consequently not funded.

This, according to Patton, has led to many qualitative researchers, while continuously engaging with causality in their studies, fearing to tread near this subject. Like Tracy (2013) and Patton (2015:586-587), Maxwell and Mittapalli (2008:325-326), in drawing on Miles and Huberman (1984), offer an alternative viewpoint of explanation. The above authors posit that, in contrast to identifying regularities, explanation is more effectively identified and understood by investigating the processes, or mechanisms at play in causal outcomes within specific contexts. This 'realist' view of causation allows for examining actual, observable interactions and actors' meaning-making (see Section 5.6) in explaining certain outcomes, as opposed to a 'positivist view' that regards causality processes as non-observable (Miles, *et al.*, 2014:7).

Maxwell (2012:655) maintains that the view that causality can only be investigated quantitatively is 'narrow', 'incomplete' and 'dated'; and that the recognition of qualitative approaches to causality is imperative, not only for the social sciences, but even for the natural sciences as well. The focus should be on understanding processes, instead of merely focusing on variable relationships (Patton, 2015:586).

Morris (2009) as quoted by Miles *et al.* (2014:222), state: “It is individuals, not variables [like social class, sex, ethnicity, etc.], which do the acting and the causing”. Maxwell (2004:243) notes the growing recognition, among the qualitative and the quantitative research communities, of qualitative research methods’ usefulness in identifying causal relationships and developing causal explanations. The above author postulates that qualitative multisite data can generate ‘rather powerful general explanations’, when explanation is regarded as developed from contextualised processes and mechanisms, as opposed to “observable regularities”.

In justifying the use of qualitative research in building explanations, Maxwell (2004:247) maintains that, with this realist approach to causality, researchers can directly observe and interpret real causal social processes or mechanisms, while considering the significant influence of contextual factors on causality. The above author further asserts that, in a qualitative tradition, the investigation of intent and meaning making of social actors and their influence on causality is made possible by this process/mechanism approach to causality. This contrasts sharply with the positivist viewpoint’s disregard of the significant influence of processes, context and cognition on causality. Maxwell (2004:247) specifically promotes the applicability of case study designs in examining causal processes/mechanisms. Causality development within the current study are based on within-case and across-case comparison, as well as observation and process analysis: collecting rich data; analysis of narratives and connections (Maxwell, 2004:252-256; Tracy, 2013:220). This explanation development is further examined in Section 5.8.4.2.

In explaining the relationship between the different levels of analysis, Patton (2015:582) argues that description informs the reader what happened, interpretation entails assigning meaning and significance to the description; while explanation asks why things happened, as described. The current study accordingly employed a case study design that, within an exploratory framework, sought to gain ‘explanatory insights’ (Babbie, 2008:326): an understanding of how the process (mechanism) of social interaction between strategy actors shaped strategizing within two organisations. This was done by means of an in-depth, interpretive, inductive investigation that entailed rich description and using multiple sources of data. It is important to note that the current study’s aim was not to provide exact/irrefutable

explanations, but rather to explore causal relationships between social interaction and strategizing. It is envisaged that the conceptual framework emergent from the current study could be used to further explore causality between social interaction and strategizing in other contexts.

5.8.2 Step 2: Primary data collection

As indicated in Figure 5.4, various primary data collection methods were employed during the multiple phases of research. A case study design allows for the use of multiple sources of data in gaining an in-depth understanding of such phenomena (Yin, 2012:10). The current study employed three qualitative methods and one quantitative data collection method. The importance of the researcher's observations should not be discounted (Merriam, 1998:137).

The current study thus, in addition to the above-mentioned data collection methods, relied on the observations of the researcher as research instrument. Before looking at the four data collection phases, this section firstly describes the researcher, as a research instrument, during the qualitative phases, followed by a discussion of the participant and the respondent selection plan, after which the data collection phases are unpacked.

5.8.2.1 The researcher as research instrument

In collecting qualitative data, the researcher is regarded as the research instrument in describing and interpreting the phenomena of social interaction and competitive strategy (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994:108). Stake (1995:99) concomitantly touts the researcher as the research instrument: an interpreter, as well as a gatherer of interpretations (constructed knowledge, as opposed to objective reality). In submitting to the above authors' views, the researcher was personally immersed in generating the relevant data, as a result of the interactions with the participants. The research instrument that was utilised for the quantitative data collection is a self-administered questionnaire, as described in Section 5.8.2.5.

Creating a field journal

Yin (2012:11) remarks that a case study design makes it possible for a researcher to create an observational narrative of what he or she sees, hears or senses. The researcher of the current study consequently created a field journal to document such observations. Field notes are important; as they document the researcher's first-hand contextualised experiences, as 'primary research instrument' (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016:161). As suggested by Yin (2012:11), the researcher has explicitly stated the goal or circumstances of the field journal inscriptions: whether neutrality and factuality are intended; whether the view of a research participant is noted, or whether the inscription represents the researcher's own interpretation.

5.8.2.2 Participant and respondent selection

- ***The three qualitative phases***

The total research population for the qualitative phases for PHEI A consisted of four top managers, namely a chief executive officer, an academic manager, a financial manager and a programme manager, as well as fifteen middle managers, namely heads of academic departments and campus co-ordinators: a total of 19 possible participants. PHEI B has eight top managers, namely directors, a rector, an academic manager, a technical manager, marketing manager and financial manager, as well as nine middle managers, namely heads of academic departments, programme coordinators and registrars: a total of 17 possible participants. All the mentioned top and middle managers engage in strategizing at the respective organisations of the current study. The only inclusion criteria for the qualitative research phases of the current study, are that a participant should be a top or middle level manager; and that he or she should participate in all three qualitative research phases (naïve sketch, interview and focus group).

Regarding the number of participants needed for the three qualitative phases: there is no accepted rule for the number of participants needed in qualitative research (Magnussen & Marecek, 2015:36; Patton, 2015:311). The nature of the current study dictates that in-depth information is sought from a limited number of participants, as opposed to more superficial information from more people. Morse (2000:4-5) notes that a large amount of data collected from each participant justifies limiting the number

of participants. The participants of the current study were engaged in three phases yielding rich, in-depth and meaningful data. By Morse's submission, gathering a large amount of rich data through these three phases allows for a limited number of research participants for the current study. The credibility of these three qualitative research methods is thus not dependent on the number of participants, but rather on the richness and meaningfulness of the data yielded.

Because the population is limited for PHEI A (19) and PHEI B (17); and it was expected that not all would have obliged, all population members were solicited; a census approach was thus followed. In addition to the limited number of potential participants, the researcher had no way of predetermining whether a participant would yield useable data, or not. Sampling is, therefore, redundant in this instance. The researcher determined ultimately whether the data collected per participant were substantial enough to contribute towards a better understanding of the researched phenomena.

Gaining permission and access and building rapport are crucial in gaining a commitment from the potential participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018:155). This was especially important for the current study, because of the limited population. The minimum objective for the current study was to gain useable data from at least three top managers and at least eight middle managers from PHEI A. For PHEI B, this number was at least four top managers and at least five middle managers. The idea was to gain an understanding of a comprehensive set of experiences of managers related to social interaction and strategizing (Magnussen & Marecek, 2015:35). As discussed in Section 5.8, the current research yielded data that should facilitate analytical generalisation: the findings from the current study should guide similar future studies in terms of what to include and expect in other contexts (Kvale, 2007:127; Yin, 2012:6, 18,19). While no sampling was implemented for the qualitative research methods, the quantitative phase had an explicit sampling plan, as discussed in the next section.

- ***The quantitative phase***

For the quantitative phase, where a survey was undertaken at each of the two PHEIs, the respondents for each PHEI were selected by means of a simple random sampling technique. The population of interest consisted of the 922 and the 521 registered

students of the respective PHEIs. The sample elements or units were thus the registered students of the two PHEIs. The sampling frames for the two PHEIs consisted of a cleaned list of all registered students. The sample elements were randomly selected from these lists. Pallant (2011:187) suggests that a realised sample size of 150 is deemed enough for statistical analysis. According to Tabachnick and Fidell's (2007, in Pallant, 2011:157) calculation: $N > 50 + 8m$, where m equals the number of independent variables. The independent variables entail the seven factors of the survey (see Section 5.8.2.5). Considering Tabachnick and Fidell's calculation, the minimum required realised sample size, namely 106, is even lower, in this case.

The researcher aimed to meet Pallant's higher sample requirement of 150 respondents per PHEI. To secure the stated number of sample respondents per group, the aim was to randomly draw at least double the number of respondents that would be requested per email-message to complete the survey. Therefore, 300 possible respondents per PHEI should have been randomly drawn and requested to complete the online survey.

The next section provides a discussion of the three qualitative data collection phases, followed by a description of the quantitative data collection phase of the current case study.

5.8.2.3 Phase 1: Naïve sketches

In this phase, participants were requested to write naïve sketches, as described by Giorgi (1985:10-19): Naïve sketches provide participants with the opportunity to write about their lived experiences. These sketches also allowed for empathetic immersion regarding the participants and their lived experiences, as strategists (Giorgi, 2009:127). Giorgi advocates, in the spirit of true qualitative research, that more naïve applications, instead of rigorous steps, should be used in search of the true essence of meaning. This approach, according to the above author, enhances the authenticity of the current research; the authentic voices of the participants are heard. Various researchers have employed this technique to explore the lived experiences of subjects, in order to create a better understanding of phenomena.

Steyn (2012), within a case study design, utilised naïve sketches to explore their views on the implementation and sustainment of an inviting educational milieu for learners at two South African schools. Van der Merwe, Myburgh and Poggenpoel (2015) explored female teacher's lived experience of aggression in the workplace by employing naïve sketches', together with interviews and observation. Du Plessis and Van Niekerk (2017) likewise used naïve sketches, in conjunction with interviews, to gain a deeper understanding of the attitudes of managers towards performance appraisals. The current study similarly aimed to, through naïve sketches, ask participants to tell their own story; a narrative that reveals their lived experiences.

Three open questions were subsequently posed:

- Tell me about the times that you and your fellow managers strategized/engaged in strategic planning at work.
- How did you personally experience the interaction between you and your fellow managers during these strategizing/strategic planning sessions: how did it make you feel?
- Tell me about your role in strategizing/strategic planning at work.

All prospective research participants were contacted by email and invited to participate in this phase of the current research. The research participants' email addresses were requested from the two private providers of the current study, who had already been given institutional approval. The email message with the invitation provided a background of the current study, including what was expected from the naïve sketch. The message also stressed that participation was voluntary, and that anonymity was ensured. The naïve sketches were emailed back to the researcher by each participant personally. The participants had the choice to type or handwrite their sketch. The hand-written sketches were converted into a digital format for the purpose of analysis.

5.8.2.4 Phase 2: Semi-structured interviews

In phase 2, the researcher engaged in individual, one-on-one semi-structured interviews with each participant. Table 5.5 provides a concise description of the features of the interviews that were held.

Table 5.5: Interviews held: main features (own compilation)

Feature	Description
1. Qualitative:	
1.1 Life world	The everyday life, lived experiences of interviewees
1.2 Meaning making	How interviewees interpret their lived experiences regarding the research phenomenon
1.3 Contextualised	Micro and macro contexts shaping interviewees' experiences and meaning making
1.4 Social constructionist	Stories co-constructed between the interviewer and interviewee through dialogue
2. Semi-structured:	
2.1 Interview guide	An interview protocol with questions to guide the interview
3. The Researcher as the Interviewer	
Principles of rigorous interviewing	Interviewer to follow ten principles to ensure high quality data
Iterative development of interview sessions	Analysis starts with the first Interview leading to an iterative process of refining subsequent interviews

From Table 5.5: Kvale (2007) focuses his publication on, what he calls, 'a semi-structured life-world interview'. He advises that with this type of interview, the researcher aims to, in a qualitative fashion, gain interviewees' 'life-world' (everyday life, lived experiences) descriptions regarding their interpretations/ meaning making of the research phenomenon (Kvale, 2007:8). This is comparable to Patton's (2015:433,434) 'social constructionist interviewing'. This type of interviewing focuses on contextualised 'social meaning making' actions (their stories of practice). In this interview, knowledge regarding the interviewee's life world experiences of the researched phenomenon, are co-constructed by the interviewer and interviewee by means of dialogue ('shared discourse').

The current study subscribes to the above type of inquiry; and the purpose thereof, as described by Kvale (2007) and Patton (2015). Ravitch and Mittenfelner Carl (2016:154) mention that, unlike structured interviews that have a fixed protocol of identical questions to be asked in the same order, semi-structured interviews use an

interview guide with a few broad questions that can be asked to elicit responses. The order of the questions between interviews differed somewhat, depending on how they unfolded. and certain questions had some follow-up questions to facilitate probing. Unstructured interviews, in contrast, are completely inductive, with no prescriptions (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016:154). Patton (2015:439) suggests that the interview guide for semi-structured interviews could also just include a description of the issues that the researcher needs to explore with each interviewee. The current study's main exploration areas stemmed from the research problem; and firstly included the research participants' social interactions with other middle and top managers of the organisation; and secondly, how these social interactions shape strategizing. From an analysis of the naïve sketches, the researcher identified issues that needed further probing in the interviews in elucidating social interaction shaping strategizing. It is then these issues that the researcher and each interviewee explored through conversation and to co-construct an explanation of the above-mentioned phenomenon.

Qualitative enquiry is an iterative and recursive process; it entails moving back and forth between data generation and analysis, with all its component parts (like, for example, questions, experiences and literature read), as building blocks of a holistic picture (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016:224). Similarly, the researcher reflected on each completed interview in his efforts to 'fine tune' the subsequent interviews, to ensure a high-quality data collection. This included amending some of the interview questions. The researcher conducted the interviews. This enabled the researcher, as the primary research instrument, to become immersed in the data; for example, by noticing non-verbal cues and making brief field notes during the interviews. The researcher followed ten principles prescribed by Patton (2015:428), in order to ensure rigorous interviews that yielded high-quality information:

- Asking open-ended questions that invite reflective, deep responses,
- Asking clear, comprehensible questions that can be answered,
- Listening carefully to the interviewees and showing them that they are heard through appropriate responses,
- Probing appropriately, following up responses with probes to clarify them,
- Observing the interviewee, guiding the interaction process,
- Exhibiting empathy and neutrality, offering non-judgemental encouragement,

- Making transitions, guiding the interviewee through the different phases,
- Distinguishing between different types of questions: questions eliciting description, or questions eliciting interpretation or judgement,
- Being equipped to handle unforeseen responses, being flexible, and
- Being attentive and focused throughout the interview.

An interview guide or protocol, derived from the research questions and the naïve sketches from the first data collection phase, contained a few central semi-structured questions (Kvale, 2007:56; Patton, 2015:439; Creswell & Poth, 2018:167). These questions, however, did not inhibit the participant from venturing into unrelated areas. This allowed the participant and the researcher to, for example, explore some deep-rooted issues that might have impacted on the participants' lived experiences. These interview guiding questions are attached in Appendix D. The interviews were conducted in a private, natural setting, for example, the participants' offices. At least 45 minutes were set aside for each interview. These interviews were recorded and transcribed with the knowledge and consent of each participant.

5.8.2.5 The quantitative survey

As depicted in Figure 5.4, this activity had to be done before Phase 3 of the qualitative research. The purpose of this survey was to address the fourth investigative research question: What are the competitive advantages of two small South African private higher education institutions as perceived by their customers (students)? It was also envisaged that the survey results would cast some light, in conjunction with the qualitative phases, on the planned or emergent nature of strategy-making at the two PHEIs, as touched on in the third investigative research question of the current study.

As discussed in Section 2.7.3 of Chapter 2, as well as in Section 7.2.5 of Chapter 7, the current study subscribes to the notion that meaningful competitive advantage can only truly be identified by an organisation's customers; a competitive advantage means nothing, if it is not acknowledged by the consumers. A cross-sectional, quantitative survey was consequently undertaken among a randomly selected sample of students from the respective PHEIs of the current study, as described in Section

5.8.2.2. The data collection instrument was a self-administered questionnaire developed by Bezuidenhout (2012), to determine the importance of students' choice of variables in their selection of a PHEI, at which to study.

To do this, the respondents are asked to rate on an itemised rating-type scale from 'not important at all' to 'very important', the importance of 45 variables, or items from which to choose, where they would prefer to study. Following the use of the current instrument on various occasions, the current researcher has categorised the 45 items of the questionnaire into seven formative measurement indices or factors. These seven factors are formative – instead of the traditional tendency of being reflective in nature. Whereas in the reflective measurement theory, the construct assumedly causes the measured variables; while in formative measurement theory, the measured variables are believed to cause the construct (Hair, Black, Babin & Anderson, 214:611). According to Hair *et al.* (2014:612), formative measures are increasingly being used in research. The seven formative measure indices or factors for the current research instrument of the current research include: academic issues; cost issues; employment prospects; image and marketing of the institution; location and access; security/safety issues; and support facilities and infrastructure.

These seven measurement indices, each made up of their own exclusive share of the 45 measurement items, yield information on the most important factors that convinced students to study at the PHEIs of the current research. These results consequently provide an indication of the areas in which the respective PHEIs of the current study perceivably excel. This points to their areas of competitive advantage in the eyes of the customers. Students' eventual choice of PHEI thus does not reflectively cause the seven areas of competitive advantage. Rather, the seven areas of competitive advantage formatively lead to the students' choice of PHEI. The randomly selected respondents were invited to click on a link that took them to the online questionnaire on a Lime Survey platform. The results were firstly recorded within the Lime Survey programme, after which the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 18.0 was used to do the inferential analyses. A pilot test was done before the actual launching of the questionnaire, as discussed in Section 5.8.6.2. A printed copy of the questionnaire is attached in Appendix E. The results from this data collection phase

were open for discussion in the focus group interview (Figure 5.4, Phase 3), as described in the next section.

5.8.2.6 Phase 3: Focus group interviews

Two focus group interviews were held: one each for the respective management teams (top and middle managers) of the organisations of the current study, who had chosen to participate in the naïve sketches and semi-structured interviews. Focus groups and interviews can be used in combination, with, for instance, themes identified from the interviews that will be further explored in the focus group discussions (Bryman, *et al.*, 2014:237). In agreement with Bryman *et al.*, this final phase (focus group interviews), guided by information from all the other phases, served to provide a final link between the social interaction of management and its impact on strategy-making within the two organisations of the current study, respectively. These focus group interviews facilitated triangulation because it contributed to the ‘richness and depth of the data’ (Bryman, *et al.*, 2014:237).

Instead of directly asking participants, as in Phases 1 and 2, how they interact when strategizing; and how it makes them feel – the objective of the focus group discussions was also to observe how the managers interact with each other when they discuss certain non-personal strategy-related topics with one another. Together with the analyses from Phases 1 and 2, these observations provided a deeper understanding of the interactions between the managers. “Focus groups are a form of group interview that capitalises on communication between the research participants, in order to generate data” (Kitzinger, 1995:299). Morgan (1997:12) submits that, in contrast to interviews, focus groups rely on interaction between the group members when addressing issues. Morgan and Spanish (1984:260) note that focus groups allow for interviewing, as well as observation. Liamputtong (2013:75-76) proposes that focus group interviews allow for: in-depth discussions, a focus on a specific issue, and moderator assistance in exploring various topics. Liamputtong (2013:75) further notes the growing popularity of this research method in health and social sciences.

Like Morgan (2007), Ravitch and Mittenfelner Carl (2016:167-170) advocate the use of focus groups to observe the interaction between research participants. These

authors promote the use of focus groups in understanding issues related to social-interaction processes. The focus group interview enabled the researcher, from a triangulation point of view, to observe the social interaction (as opposed to directly questioning participants on their interactions and experiences thereof in Phases 1 and 2) between the participants (the top and middle managers for each PHEI of the current study) and comparing this with the data collected from the first two phases. The focus groups provided insights into the group dynamics shaping shared meaning and knowledge construction within the group. Ravitch and Mittenfelner Carl (2016:167) refer to 'group-think' where the researcher introduces a topic, after which the group interacts around this topic, building group understanding. The researcher of the current study similarly, as moderator of the focus group, introduced the topics of strategizing and competitive advantage. A copy of the focus group discussion guide is included in Appendix F. To ensure effective focus groups that yield high-quality data, the researcher subscribed to Krueger and Casey's (2015:4,5) principles: an environment must be created in which the participant feels "comfortable, respected and free to give opinions without being judged".

Krueger and Casey (2015:103-128) refer to the term *moderator*, as a person guiding the discussion, allowing interaction between group members. This contrasts with the term *interviewer* that refers to the limited notion of two-way communication between interviewer and interviewee. The researcher of the current study thus focused on moderating discussion, allowing for and observing social interaction; and he shared meaning (building on the insights gained from Phases 1 and 2) between the participants as members of the same organisation, as they explored the topics introduced.

To assist the researcher in observing the interaction between the participants, a registered industrial psychologist was present at both focus group discussions. This industrial psychologist made notes of her observations regarding the social interaction between the focus group participants. After each focus group, the researcher and the industrial psychologist had a debriefing session to compare notes/insights. The focus group sessions were recorded with the knowledge and consent of each participant, which was then transcribed. It is important to note that no personal or sensitive information (this includes information gathered from Phases 1 and 2 of the current

study) was shared in this session. Judging individuals' roles in strategizing, and/or their interaction with others, was not allowed in the focus group discussions between participants at all. This was made clear before each session commenced.

5.8.3 Ethical considerations

A careful perusal of Unisa's policy on research ethics (Unisa, 2012) yielded important ethical issues that were addressed in the current study, as discussed below:

5.8.3.1 Basic principles

This current research was guided by four moral principles of ethics in research (Unisa, 2012:9):

- The autonomy, rights and dignity of each participant were respected.
- Beneficence: the current study aimed to provide a positive contribution towards people's welfare.
- Non-maleficence: this study did not cause harm to any research participant.
- Justice: the benefits of this study will be fairly distributed among people.

In addition to the above moral principles, ten general ethical principles, as published in the Unisa research-ethical policy (Unisa, 2012:9, 10), further guided the current study. They include ensuring essential and relevant research, the maximisation of public interest and of social justice, competence, ability and commitment to research, respect for and protection of the rights and interests of all the participants and the institutions, informed and non-coerced consent, respect for cultural differences, justice, fairness and objectivity, integrity, transparency and accountability, risk minimisation and non-exploitation.

5.8.3.2 The relationship between the researcher and the participants

The participants were regarded as essential partners in the current study. Care was taken not to cause them physical, or any unnecessary social or psychological harm. In addition to considering each participant's social, cultural and historical background,

they were not exploited or coerced in any way. They were informed of the Unisa policy on research ethics. Although no participant requested it, this Unisa policy document would have been made available upon request.

5.8.3.3 Informed consent

The researcher obtained formal permission from the executive boards of the organisations that serve as the context or the setting for the current study. Ethical approval from Unisa was further obtained for the current research. Every individual participant was informed of the nature and purpose of the research project, once it had started. A copy of the participant information sheet is attached in Appendix B. They also received an informed consent form; and they were requested to sign the form, when they agreed to participate. The participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the current study at any point, should they wish to do so. A copy of this informed consent form is attached in Appendix C.

5.8.3.4 Confidentiality

Immediately after transcribing the naïve sketches, semi-structured interviews, and the focus group interview, the scribe handed over the transcripts to the researcher. All the hardcopies were then immediately shredded, and all the computer files were permanently deleted from the scribe's computer. The transcripts of the interviews are locked away at the researcher's home. After co-coding (the co-coder consented, in writing, never to reveal anything from the transcriptions to anyone), the extra transcriptions were also locked away. All computer records are password protected and all reasonable care was taken to ensure that no one would be able to access the transcripts. The same procedure was followed with the quantitative surveys. All computer files are password-protected; and only the researcher has access to the files. A back-up copy is kept in a locked safe at the researcher's home.

Even though the focus group interview participants were requested not to divulge any information outside the perimeters of the interview, the participants were advised that confidentiality could not be assured within the focus groups. Focus group interviewees' identities were not divulged in reporting on this phase of the current research.

5.8.3.5 Data storage and disposal

The data will be stored at the researcher's home for a period of five years in a lockable steel cabinet, which can only be accessed by the researcher himself. After this period, all the documents will be shredded, and the computer files will be permanently deleted.

5.8.3.6 Possible risk factors for the participants

There was no physical or financial risk that could reasonably be foreseen. On a psychological level, it could have been possible that participants may have experienced a degree of emotional discomfort after participating in the current research. The researcher provided his contact details to participants and encouraged them to contact him if they experienced any emotional discomfort afterwards. All efforts were made to provide support and to arrange for counselling, should this have occurred.

5.8.3.7 Conflict of interest

The primary risk factor of the current research project could have been a perceived conflict of interest. At the time of the data gathering, the researcher was employed at a different PHEI than those of the current study. He was aware of his status as an employee of a PHEI that may have been considered as a competitor of the PHEIs of the current study. This might have created an impression of impropriety that might have undermined his credibility. Before commencing with the data collection, an uninvolved researcher conducted an epoch with the researcher to "bracket" his own perceptions and pre-conceived ideas. The researcher also used a self-reflection diary that forced him to constantly be aware of his own ideas/interpretations throughout the research process. At the time of the data gathering, the researcher was not a top manager, nor a middle manager. To maintain trust in all the phases of this project, the researcher did his best to remain visibly trustworthy.

The researcher made every effort to be 100% transparent. The researcher always focused on the primary interest of the current study, namely the generation of accurate

knowledge, integrity, transparency and openness—and made it clear to all the parties involved that he would not deviate from the above. The researcher consequently never sensed that any participant considered him to be a threat, or a competitor’s agent.

5.8.4 Step 3: Data analysis

Even though they are presented as separate sections, within a qualitatively driven approach, data collection and analysis in the current study are done simultaneously in an iterative and emerging way (Merriam, 1998:155; Creswell & Poth, 2018:182). Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault (2016:161,162) allude to the researcher building a narrative; telling the research participants’ story through rich description: accounts interwoven with context, as well as their inner experiences and meaning making. The researcher should tell this story from a first-hand, ‘walking in informants’ shoes’-viewpoint (Taylor, *et al.*, 2016:162). From ‘bits and pieces’, the researcher has to weave his tapestry of accounts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:4). The researcher relies on in-depth and repetitive textual analyses and reflects on his personal observations and experiences in his attempts to reveal the ‘bigger picture’ to build this narrative (Joubert *et al.*, 2016:117).

Merriam (1998:178-197) describes three levels of qualitative analysis, which in their aim to enable sense-making, ‘reduce, consolidate and interpret’ the participants’ words, the researcher’s observations and what he has read. These levels include, a), description; b), constructing categories and themes; and c), theory building/interpretation – a gradual move from the ‘empirical to the conceptual’ (Merriam, 1998:178-197). Similarly, Creswell and Poth (2018:182) posit that all qualitative analyses follow the same ‘general procedures’: data management; coding and theme building, as well as presenting the data in discussions. The above authors suggest that, in addition to these general procedures, further analytical strategies are employed, depending on one of five qualitative approaches followed. The current study followed the general levels or procedures of data analysis (Merriam,1998:155-197; Creswell & Poth, 2018:181-193), as well as qualitatively driven case study-specific analyses (Yin, 2014; Creswell & Poth, 2018:202-203), as described in the following sections. Before the data analysis procedures are unpacked, the researcher’s role in this data analysis phase is discussed.

5.8.4.1 The role of the researcher

In the analysis of the collected data, the researcher (Visagie 2012:8-9):

- Displays theoretical sensitivity, thus being aware of the “subtleties of the meaning of data”;
- thinks reflectively, drawing upon his own experiences, in linking lived experiences with social constructs;
- gives a voice to the participants in the current study;
- states his preconceived ideas, value assumptions, and knowledge; brackets them, so that he can become immersed in the lived experiences of the participants, as well as the research process (intuiting); and
- continuously applies self-evaluation, in order to ensure intuiting.

5.8.4.2 The data analysis strategy

This section firstly deals with the general data analyses for the three qualitative phases and the one quantitative phase. The case study-specific focus areas of the current study’s data analysis are secondly addressed.

a) General data analysis procedures

Data analysis should not consist of a series of linear, cast-in-stone, steps (Merriam,1998:155; Creswell & Poth, 2018:182). It entails continuously moving back and forth between description and interpretation (Merriam, 1998:188). Alluding to Dey’s (1993) description of qualitative data analysis, as a ‘learning by doing’, iterative process of ‘insight, intuition and impression’, Creswell (2009:183), as well as Creswell and Poth (2018:184) provide a spiral model for data-analysis. Figure 5.5 depicts this spiral model, to which the current study subscribed in its general data analysis strategy.

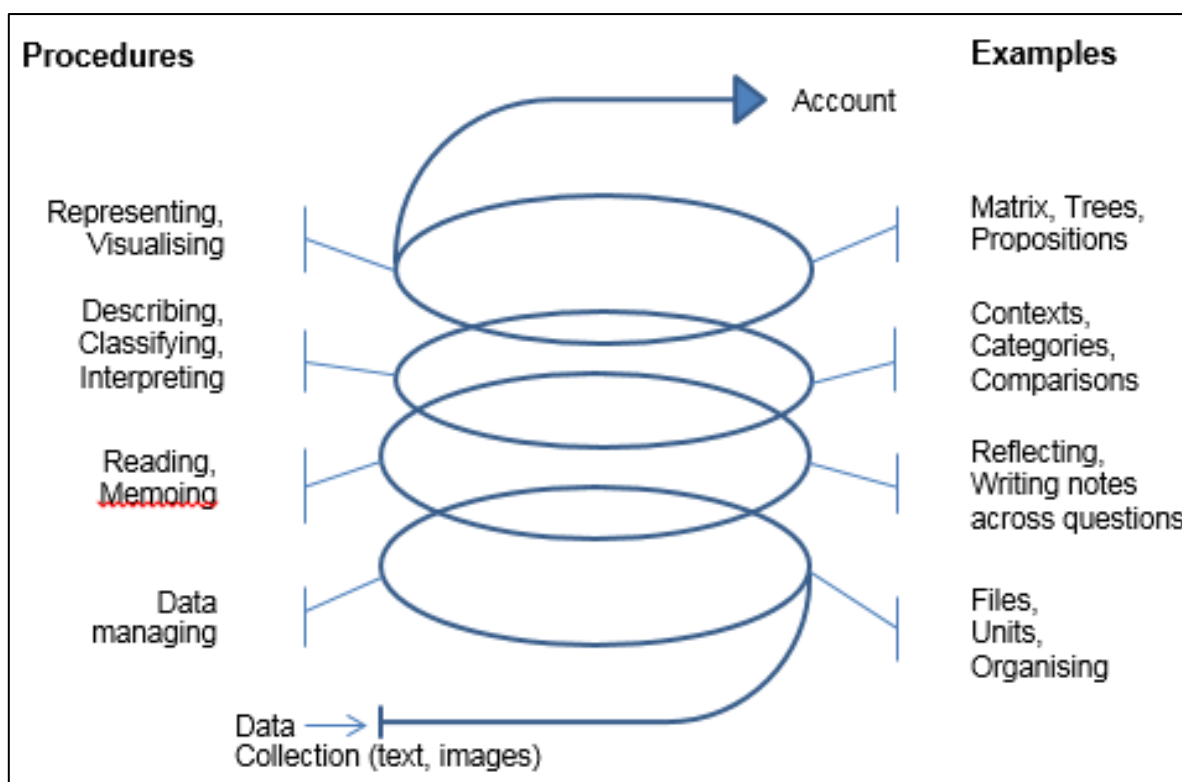


Figure 5.5: The Data Analysis Spiral (Creswell, 2009:183; Creswell & Poth, 2018:184)

The Spirals of Figure 5.5 represent the circular nature of qualitative data analysis procedures. At the same time, the figure also depicts the ‘general contour’ of qualitative data analysis. Despite a constant inductive ‘toing and froing’, qualitative analyses thus still follow a general path. Figure 5.5 also depicts examples of activities or outcomes within each analytical phase, as depicted by Creswell (2009:183). The following section provides a discussion of the current study’s data analysis-activities within the phases/procedures depicted in Figure 5.5.

Data managing

In subscribing to the Creswell-spiral model, the researcher firstly prepared and organised all transcribed qualitative data. A comprehensive case record was held that incorporated and organised all the raw data (Patton, 2015:537). Transcriptions were uploaded as hermeneutic units into Atlas.ti. This is a computer software package that facilitates qualitative data analysis. The quantitative data were recorded on Lime Survey, an online survey research platform, as well as a Microsoft 10 Excel spreadsheet.

Reading and ‘memoing’

The researcher next immersed himself in the data, reading through them several times, in order to get a sense of the whole database. The researcher also wrote memoirs on the margins of the field notes that helped him in this initial, explorative stage.

Describing, classifying and interpreting

The next step involved classifying and interpreting the data into codes and themes. A thematic analysis of the transcribed data allowed the researcher, in addition to concrete issues, to explore latent content inductively. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009:252) quote Eisner (1998:104) in stating that thematic analyses involve “...identifying the recurring messages that pervade the situation, about which the critic writes.” With this analysis, the researcher progressed through three stages of inquiry: recognising important moments, coding them and then interpreting them (Boyatzis, 1998 in Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009:253).

Visagie (2012:11-12) stresses the importance of synthesis after analysis. She contends that combining salient aspects from the analysis would lead to a higher level of truth.

In interpreting, the researcher moved beyond the codes and themes, abstracting to the overall meaning of the data. These interpretations were linked to the research questions of the current study; and they were also related to the existing research literature. The quantitative phase-analysis is discussed in the next phase.

Quantitative phase analysis

After confirming the reliability of the quantitative data by means of a Cronbach’s Alpha correlational analysis (see Section 5.8.6); and after cleaning the dataset, descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyse it. Descriptive statistics provide a biographical account of the respondents of the current study. The descriptive analysis also includes drafting frequency tables and the calculating of the measures of central location (means) and the variance of the respondents’ choice factor responses. The

itemised rating-type questions yielded interval scale data that are conducive to inferential analysis.

Inferential statistics were employed to statistically test whether there is a significant difference in the importance that the respondents of the respective PHEIs of the current study assign to the importance of factors that have influenced their choice of PHEI. In addition to a comparison between the descriptive measures (means) of the respective PHEIs' datasets, an independent samples *t*-Test was employed to statistically test the below formulated null hypothesis:

H₀: The respondents at two small private higher education institutions in South Africa do not significantly differ in the importance they assign to different factors that influence them in their choice of an educational institution.

H_a: The respondents at two small private higher education institutions in South Africa differ significantly in the importance they assign to different factors that influence them in their choice of an educational institution.

A *t*-Test for Equality of Means at a 95% confidence level was consequently employed to examine the overall difference between the means of the choice factors (dependent variables) regarding their importance to the respective PHEIs' (independent variables) respondents (independent variable).

The next section will look at how the different phases' analyses per PHEI were integrated within the different case studies, between them, and also across the different case studies.

b) Case study specific data analysis strategies

As discussed in Section 5.3, the current study and consequently the data analysis phase, is anchored in the research questions and loosely in a tentative theoretical proposition regarding social interaction and strategizing (Yin, 2014:136). In analysing the research evidence, its relevance to the research questions and theoretical proposition were therefore considered. It is however important to note that the role of the research proposition is not to provide theory to be tested in a deductive way; but rather, it is to create a platform for further exploration of the links between social interaction and strategizing in an inductive way. The theoretical proposition, for

example, proposes *what* elements of social interaction might shape strategizing; but it does not answer the question of *how* and *why* social interaction might shape strategizing.

As advocated by Creswell and Poth (2018:202), the data analysis phase includes a thorough description of the cases, as well as their settings. This is done, because the different cases are instrumental in gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of social interaction shaping strategizing. Patton (2015:536) stresses the importance of starting case study analysis at the most primary analysis level. The current study therefore started with the analysis of individuals' narratives – the naïve sketches and interviews.

Explanation building

A specific strategy followed in the current study is that of explanation building (Yin, 2014:147-150). As discussed in Section 5.8.1.3, instead of seeking an exact, quantitatively tested explanation, the data analysis of the current study aimed to gain explanatory insights into the processes or mechanisms at play in causal outcomes within specific contexts. Patton (2015:602) warns against the appeal of simplistic, linear 'cause-and-effect' explanations. The current study embraces Patton's notion that causation relates to complex 'inter-relationships'; and it requires a holistic approach; a back-and-forth, circular analysis. An iterative process of explanation-building in the current study, as suggested by Yin (2014:149), included the following:

- Creating a preliminary explanatory proposition;
- Comparing the first case results to the explanatory position;
- Amending the explanatory position; and
- Comparing the amended explanatory proposition with subsequent case findings with consequent revision of the explanatory proposition.

The eventual explanatory insights are proffered by means of a comprehensive narrative analysis (Patton, 2015:590).

A cross-case analysis

With the analysis procedure/strategies discussed in the preceding sections, each case of the current study was thoroughly explored within the two different settings, namely the two case study organisations. The findings were then synthesised across all the cases. 'Replicating logic' (Yin, 2012:17) was sought across the different cases and case settings, as indicated in the preceding section on explanation building. This 'corroboratory framework' ultimately culminated in a narrative that offers a conceptual framework for the further exploration of the relationship between social interaction and strategizing.

5.8.4.3 Ensuring a sound data analysis

The current study followed four principles, as suggested by Yin (2014:166), to ensure a rigorous, scientifically sound data analysis. The researcher:

- Addressed all the evidence;
- Entertained the main rival explanations;
- Identified and comprehensively dealt with the most significant issues; and
- Drew upon on the theoretical knowledge acquired regarding the research phenomenon; and he also built on his practical experience gained in the case method.

5.8.5 Step 4: Presenting the research findings

As described in Section 5.8.1.3, an instrumental multiple case-study approach was followed for the current study, each with embedded subcases or units of analysis. In reporting the findings from the case study, the cases within each case context (PHEI A and B) were firstly comprehensively dealt with. The findings from the separate case studies were then synthesised in a narrative, which aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the investigated phenomenon studied of the current study – the case studies are *instrumental* in elucidating the phenomenon (see Section 5.8.1.3). A theory building compositional structure (Yin, 2014:183) was chosen for the findings-narrative, as the aim of the current study was to gain explanatory insights into social interaction;

and how it shapes strategizing; and to ultimately offer a conceptual framework for further exploration of the phenomenon.

As described in Section 5.8.4, the findings are presented in a narrative record: telling people's stories, as they are interpreted by the researcher (Stake, 2010:170). Pelias (2011:661) states that: "It (a narrative) is a formed tale, told by a narrator, relying upon point-of-view, plot, and character." The narrative report should, however, not be viewed as a story in the strict sense of the word; it should rather be regarded as a collection of 'descriptions and interpretations of events', with these descriptions and interpretations presented by means of 'observations', 'interviews' and 'vignettes' (a brief story illustrating an issue) (Stake, 2010:180). In addressing each research question, the researcher discussed the recurrent themes in the narrative report. Within the themes, the researcher provided evidence by means of verbatim quotes from the transcriptions.

5.8.6 Scientific rigour

Despite its widespread use, the case study method is still contested within the research community; and credibility concerns still linger (Merriam, 2009:39; Yin, 2012:6; Yazan, 2015:134). Seminal authors, like Miles and Huberman (1994), Stake (1995), Merriam (1998, 2009) and Yin (1994, 2009, 2012, 2014), have endeavoured to elucidate the workings (theory and implementation) of the case study, followed by various other researchers, like Creswell (2009, 2014, 2018), Woodside (2010) and Harrison (2017). As discussed in Section 5.8, the current study made use of planned systematic steps and protocols for collecting and analysing the data, as suggested by Yin (2012:6) and Merriam (2009:39).

5.8.6.1 Trustworthiness in the qualitative phases

In qualitative research, the widely accepted criteria (that also guided the current study) in facilitating the trustworthiness of research, as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985:301-327) include: credibility; transferability; dependability and confirmability. Regarding credibility, or confidence in the *truth*, the researcher:

- Stayed in the field for enough time to ensure an in-depth understanding of the phenomena of the current study;
- Through persistent observation, zoomed in on the most relevant issues surrounding the phenomena;
- Ensured methodological triangulation by investigating different theories or perspectives; employing various data-collection methods; consulting multiple sources of data, and using different data analysis techniques;
- Through a debriefing with an uninvolved peer; facilitated reflexion; testing ideas or propositions, and in identifying any biases;
- investigated elements that are incongruous to emerging patterns in the current study; and
- Tested the conclusions and interpretations of the current study through member-checking.

Regarding transferability, or external validity, the researcher:

- Described the phenomena in rich detail through thick descriptions.

Regarding dependability; the consistency and repeatability of the research, the researcher:

- Had an objective researcher investigate the current study in terms of the research process and the conclusions.

Regarding confirmability, or the neutrality of the research, the researcher:

- Recorded all evidence of fieldwork to provide an audit trail;
- Maintained a reflexive journal through all the steps of the research process, reflecting on issues like the logistics of the research process, methodological decisions and reasons for them, and his own insights; and
- He framed his own preconceptions related to the current research, before commencing with it.

The researcher addressed another quality dimension of qualitative research, namely authenticity. The researcher adhered to the five criteria of authenticity, as prescribed by Guba and Lincoln (1989:246-247). These authenticity criteria include: fairness;

ontological authenticity; educative authenticity, catalytic authenticity; and tactical authenticity.

5.8.6.2 Validity and reliability during the quantitative phase

The following description by Bezuidenhout (2012:15) pertains to the issues of validity and reliability of the questionnaire to be used for the current study (see Section 5.8.2.2): “The internal reliability of the data was measured by using Cronbach’s alpha correlation coefficients. To facilitate the content validity of the data-collection instrument of the current study, the researcher consulted established questionnaires; and he followed the guidelines of good questionnaire design and asking questions. The questionnaire was also presented to a panel of experts for their scrutiny. The questionnaire was also subjected to a pre-test study among students attending a PHEI”.

In the 2012 study, a significantly high overall Cronbach’s Alpha correlation coefficient score of 0.9 pointed to the reliability of the research instrument.” The researcher again instituted a Cronbach’s Alpha correlation coefficient test with a cut-off point of 0.7 regarding the scale reliability (internal consistency) of the questionnaire: a test whether the 45 items (questions) in the scale measured the same underlying phenomenon. As explained in Section 5.8.2.5, the 45 items were grouped under seven independent scale indices or factors in a formative way. As explained, these factors are regarded as causing the construct. These seven separate measures are, therefore, not required to correlate with each other.

The grouped items within each of the seven separate scale indices should, however, correlate; since they are reflective of these respective indices. The internal consistency of each of the seven scale indices was, therefore, also independently subjected to Cronbach’s Alpha correlation coefficient test. A pilot study was done among five potential respondents per PHEI. These respondents’ understanding of the different questions, as well as their uniform interpretation of the questions among all the respondents were tested in a subsequent cognitive interview (Van Zyl & Pellissier, 2017:151). The data from this pilot study were also tested against the planned analysis of these survey data.

5.8.7 Delimitations of the current study

As discussed in the research methodology section, this multiple case study research, using multiple methods, was done within the context of two profit seeking private providers of higher education, based in Gauteng and in the Western Cape Province, South Africa. According to Statistics South Africa (2018), Gauteng and Western Cape have the highest and second highest gross domestic product per capita of the nine provinces in South Africa, respectively. Gauteng is regarded as an economic powerhouse in Africa, with approximately the seventh largest economy in Africa (Statistics South Africa, 2018). The primary units of analysis (the cases) were the episodes of strategy praxis between top and middle managers (strategy actors). Participants during the qualitative phases of the current study included top and middle managers of the PHEIs of the current study.

In the quantitative phase, the respondents consisted of randomly selected registered students from the respective PHEIs of the current study. The aim was not to statistically generalise the findings of the current study, but to provide for analytical generalisation through the development of a framework for future research (Yin, 2012:6, 18-19).

5.9 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a discussion of the research design – the blueprint for the current study’s empirical phase, aimed at answering its research questions. Before the details of the research design were expounded, it was framed within the current study’s aim and the resultant research questions, research proposition, theoretical framework and context. The stated aim of the current study is to examine social interaction, as a social mechanism in shaping strategizing, and to subsequently proffer a conceptual framework for similar future studies. The philosophical underpinnings of a pragmatic worldview; and how it connects with a qualitatively driven mixed methods approach, was described next. The following section offered a comprehensive explanation of an embedded, multiple, multi-phase, exploratory, instrumental case study research design. This included a discussion of the three qualitative and one quantitative data collection phases, the analysis thereof, as well as how the findings

should best be presented. Important ethical considerations were also deliberated in this section. The next section addressed the assurance of scientific rigour of the current study, followed by the final section that dealt with the delimitations of the current study. The findings of the empirical phase of the current study is presented in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH FINDINGS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

As described in Chapter 1, the current research investigated the strategizing practices of strategy practitioners at two private higher education institutions (PHEIs). The researcher proposed that social interaction between top and middle level managers has a profound influence on the strategizing of the participating private higher education institutions of the current study. This interaction within different contexts (episodes of praxis) is proposedly manipulated by observable and latent issues; some will contribute; while others will constrain meaningful strategy-making. For the current study, strategizing and strategy-making are considered as synonyms; these terms are consequently used interchangeably throughout this document.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the findings of the current research. A comparative narrative record of both case study organisations is offered. These narratives are based on the findings of a thematic analysis of the transcriptions of all the qualitative data collection methods employed, together with the incorporated results from a quantitative survey. The qualitative data collection methods include naïve sketches, semi-structured face-to-face interviews and focus group interviews. Rich contextualised descriptions and verbatim quotes provide an account of the lived experiences of top and middle managers regarding their strategizing activities and interactions at their organisations are offered. In investigating the strategy praxis of top and middle managers, the current research makes various contributions to the existing body of knowledge of strategic management. Firstly, it investigates an unexplored avenue of strategizing research, namely strategizing as a function of social interaction. The current research, in an in-depth manner, examines how social interaction and all its intricacies between strategy actors before, during, and after episodes of strategy praxis, shape the strategizing activities of these actors.

This social interaction that takes place over time and within unique organisational contexts, ultimately shape the strategy outcomes of organisations. Secondly, the current research views strategizing through a strategy-as-practice lens; as it allows for placing the social actor at the centre of the investigation; and it values the practicality

of knowledge. To truly understand the social practices of strategizing, the current research is anchored in a 'dwelling worldview', consequently offering a view into the 'tacit dimension' or 'black box' of strategy: those unseen antecedent and non-deliberate elements of strategy making and strategic outcomes.

The current research consequently contributes to the strategy-as-practice research agenda. The current research thirdly proffers a conceptual framework to guide future research aimed at understanding social interaction as a social mechanism in shaping strategizing in different settings: analytical generalisation instead of statistical generalisation. If the strategy-as-practice perspective was the lens, through which to examine strategizing, the two PHEIs of the current research provided the canvas for investigating the strategizing. Even though the current research focuses on understanding strategizing, as a social activity, in Chapter 4, it offers a comprehensive investigation of the South African higher education (HE) landscape, with specific reference to private provision, as the external context of the case study organisations of the current research.

Chapter 6 further provides a look into the internal context of two private South African HE-providers. Both case study organisations are small, profit seeking companies with total student enrolments of less than a thousand; they fit the profile of a typical PHEI in South Africa, as described in Chapter 4. The current study thus also contributes to the overall body of knowledge regarding private HE in South Africa; and it provides insight into the type of providers that are most prevalent in this landscape. Figure 6.1 depicts the relative position of Chapter 6 within the overall research project, as well as the structure of this chapter.

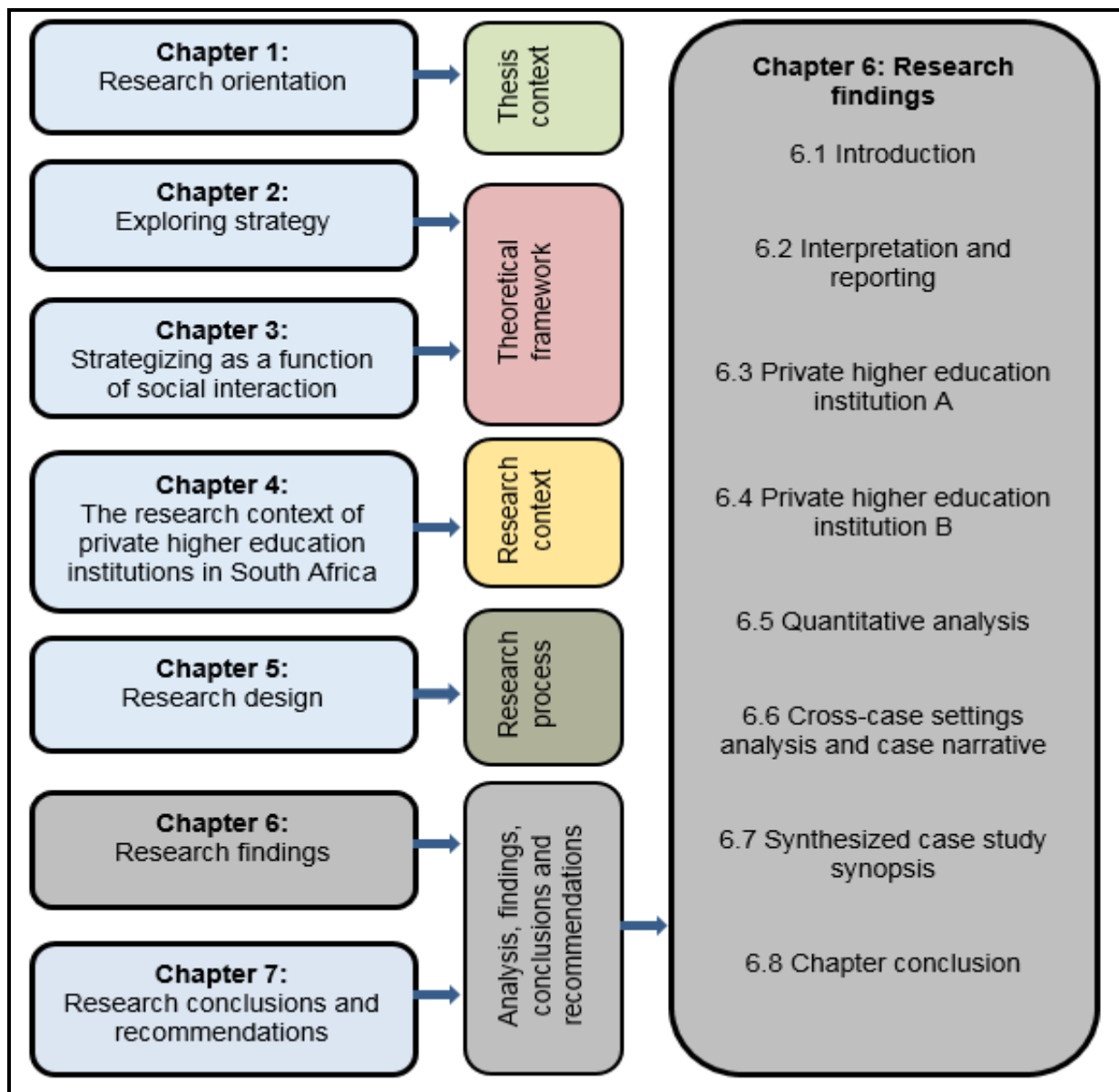


Figure 6.1: The structure of Chapter 6 (own compilation)

As depicted in Figure 6.1, Chapter 6 provides a discussion of the findings of the current research that is aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of social interaction, as a social mechanism in shaping strategizing. A discussion of the two case study organisations and their respective participant-groups is followed by a presentation of the results of a quantitative survey regarding students' choice. A cross-case study context analysis, in which the findings from the two case study settings are compared, is presented next. This includes narrative records with rich descriptions and verbatim quotes provided for both case study settings (organisations). This chapter lastly offers an integrated synopsis of the main findings of the current research, including a discussion of the social interaction processes that shape strategizing at the two case

study organisations. Unlike many studies that offer parsimonious, evidence-based, prescriptive strategizing theory; the current research explores strategizing, as a function of social interaction. The findings are reported by means of rich descriptions, including verbatim quotes that offer an account of strategy actors' lived experiences, as regards strategy-related practices and social interactions.

6.2 INTERPRETATION AND REPORTING

This section provides a synopsis of the salient aspects that relate to the reporting of the collected and analysed data, as described in Chapter 5. The empirical phase of the current study, within an overarching pragmatic paradigm and qualitatively driven mixed methods research approach, employed multiple sources of data in an embedded, multiple, multi-phase, exploratory and explanatory, instrumental case study research design – involving two selected small private higher education institutions (PHEIs). This was done to gain a deeper understanding of social interaction, as a social mechanism in shaping strategizing.

The main units of analysis or cases were the episodes of strategy praxis between top and middle managers (strategy actors or practitioners) within two different research settings (the two PHEIs). Within these cases, embedded subcases included the strategy actors who engage in strategizing, including their predispositions, meaning making and other latent issues (practitioners). It also included the strategizing processes, tools and techniques (practices) that the respective PHEIs of this case study employed within their operating environment, as well as their resultant competitive advantages. Investigating the above subcases is thus instrumental in facilitating a better understanding of the main cases, namely, the episodes of praxis.

The qualitative analysis strategy of the current research followed Creswell and Poth's (2018:183) suggested 'general procedures' of qualitative analysis, including data management; coding and theme building, as well as presenting the data in discussions. The data analysis spiral (Creswell & Poth, 2018:184), as described in Section 5.8.4.2 of Chapter 5, provides a detailed discussion of the iterative analysis process followed. The naïve sketches; all the transcribed semi-structured interviews, as well as the transcriptions of the focus group discussion, were uploaded into an

Atlas.ti 8 software programme, in order to facilitate the coding and the subsequent theme building. This was done separately for both organisations. The identified themes and codes were then compared with those of an established qualitative researcher, who did an independent thematic analysis of the collected naïve sketches, as well as transcripts of the interviews and focus group discussions. The researcher then moved beyond the codes and themes, abstracting to the overall meaning of the data. A case study design enabled the researcher to create an observational narrative of what he saw, heard and sensed (Yin, 2012). The researcher, as the primary research instrument in qualitative research (Ravitch & Mittenfelner Carl, 2016:161), consequently created a field journal to document his observations; as well as his first-hand contextualised experiences. The researcher also kept a reflective journal, in which he recorded his learning, as well as his reflections and thoughts regarding all the happenings, as the current study progressed.

Because the research aimed to understand how social interaction, as a social mechanism, shapes strategizing within a myriad of contextualised strategy-related variables, the analysis entailed an iterative ‘to-ing and fro-ing’ between themes and codes. It took the researcher months to organise and make sense of the data and to build a narrative; as well as to weave his tapestry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:4). This is in line with the suggestion of Creswell and Poth (2018:206) that case study analyses should involve detailed descriptions of cases and their settings. The researcher analysed all the collected data, and he drafted an initial elaborate list of codes, categories and themes, together with their detailed descriptions. This culminated in a comprehensive record for each PHEI of all those aspects that could possibly influence the way in which strategy actors interact during the strategy praxis episodes. The researcher felt that this first analysis of meticulously and exhaustively engaging with all the material was imperative for the current study. This step created an intimate familiarity with the data that allowed the researcher to move beyond coding and categorising by interpreting the data; to make careful judgements; and abstracting to “the larger meaning of the data” (Creswell & Poth, 195:218). This initial analysis is available for perusal at the following website address: https://drive.google.com/open?id=1Ez73sugdDuKleVhbF_BVWPY9HgEHCJxb. The initial thematic analysis was followed by a cross-case analysis between the cases within the two respective PHEIs of the current research. The findings from this analysis

are presented in a comparative narrative record for each of the respective settings: telling people's stories, as interpreted by the researcher (Stake, 2010:170).

In these narratives, the researcher offers a discussion of a set of recurrent themes that were refined from the initial analysis. Within these themes, the researcher provides evidence by means of selected salient verbatim quotes from the transcriptions. The separate case study settings were then synthesised into a single narrative that addresses the social interaction process; as observed in the strategizing endeavours of the case study organisations. A theory building compositional structure (Yin, 2014:183) was chosen for the findings-narrative, as the main objective of the current study was to gain explanatory insights into social interaction, and how it shapes strategizing, and to ultimately offer a conceptual framework for further exploration of the phenomenon. The results from the quantitative phase of the current study (see Section 5.8.4.2 of Chapter 5) were incorporated into the case study narratives.

6.2.1 The third- versus the first-person voice

The researcher followed a pragmatic approach to the current study; where the most applicable research methods were chosen to address the research questions. The researcher chose to employ a varying voice throughout the thesis, as suggested by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011:253). First person writing is only used in reporting the findings of the qualitative phases of the current research; in which the researcher is the primary research instrument. Third person writing is used to report on the quantitative phase-results. In addition, a third person voice is employed for the rest of the thesis. This was done to place the researcher in the background and demonstrate the objectivity of the current study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011:253). Thus, for the following Sections 6.3 to 6.7: because the researcher was the primary research instrument in collecting and interpreting the qualitative data; while the findings from the thematic analysis are reported in the first person. Table 6.1 highlights the reference system used in reporting on the findings of the qualitative analysis.

Table 6.1: The reference system used in reporting on the qualitative data (own compilation)

Example	INT:3:23
Where INT refers to an interview: the type of data collection method used (NS refers to a naïve sketch; and FG refers to a focus group)	
Where 3 refers to the interviewee number	
Where 23 refers to the interviewees' 23rd quotation	

The following sections entail reporting on the findings from the current study and the interpretation thereof. Sections 6.3 and 6.4 provide a discussion of the research settings; the two case study organisations, in which the current research was conducted. The quantitative phase is reported on in Section 6.5. Section 6.6 contains a comparative narrative record emanating from a cross-case analysis between the cases within the two respective PHEIs of the current research. Lastly, a synthesised case study report, including the salient observations, is offered in Section 6.7.

6.3 PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION A

This section provides a description of the first of the two case study organisations, as well as a discussion of each of the research participants from this organisation.

6.3.1 Company background

PHEI A was registered as a private higher education (HE) provider in 2001; and this involved opening a small campus in Gauteng, South Africa. This profit seeking private company currently has a few small campuses across three provinces. The company with its head office in Gauteng had 922 full-time registered students in 2018. The chief executive officer (CEO) of the company is also its sole owner. Top management consists of four managers, namely the chief executive officer, the academic manager, the financial manager and the programme manager. The organisation has fifteen middle managers within a flat management structure. This organisation has already conferred 6568 qualifications between 2002 and 2017. As a small, profit seeking company, with a total number of student enrolments of less than a thousand, this

provider fits the profile of a typical PHEI in South Africa, as was described in Chapter 4.

6.3.2 Description of the participants for the qualitative phases

The total research population for the qualitative phases for PHEI A consisted of four top managers, as well as fifteen middle managers, namely heads of academic departments and campus coordinators: a total of 19 possible participants. The participant sample for the three qualitative data collection methods consisted of twelve managers: three of the four top managers, as well as nine of the fifteen middle managers. Eight participants were females and four were males. All the participants completed the naïve sketches; and they all participated in the semi-structured interviews. Eight of the twelve managers formed part of the focus group interviews. The total semi-structured interviews amounted to 411.18 minutes of recorded time; while the focus group interview recording amounted to 54.34 minutes. The transcription of the naïve sketches, the semi-structured interviews and the focus group interviews comprised 323 pages. I used observational field notes and a reflexive research journal to describe the context of each interview. The interview context of each participant is presented in Table 6.2. Because this organisation is quite small, with only a few managers, I did not want to divulge too much of each participant's character, or to reveal their gender. I also did not reveal their company position, nor their years of service. This was done to avoid revealing the identity of the participants to other managers within the organisations that might read this report.

Table 6.2: Participants' interview and focus group contexts (own compilation)

Participant	Interview context
Interviewee 1	We met in a quiet corner at a coffee shop for the interview. This participant was very relaxed and very open to any questions, which were answered with confidence. I did not have to consciously probe that much, as the long, relaxed and insightful conversation flowed naturally until we had comprehensively covered everything. Even though this person criticized the organisation, his/her strong loyalty and commitment towards it was quite noticeable. This participant also engaged meaningfully in the focus group interview-discussions. This participant is a middle manager.
Interviewee 2	The participant was relaxed, and we had a relaxed conversation with the interviewee answering any question without hesitation. I did have the opportunity to probe all the issues I wanted with this participant. The interviewee was open to discuss any question and did not seem to hide

	anything. Even though this participant seemed frustrated by certain challenges within the organisation, he/she was still very positive about the organisation and committed to the students. The interviewee also participated candidly in the focus group discussions. This participant is a middle manager.
Interviewee 3	The interviewee seemed very relaxed and totally open to all my questions. The participant did not pull any punches in discussing negative issues at the organisation. Our conversation flowed naturally; and there were no uncomfortable pauses; it was very insightful. This person was quite negative towards the organisation and declared that he/she was consequently focusing inward on the students. This interviewee also participated freely in the focus group discussion. This participant is a middle manager.
Interviewee 4	This interviewee responded so promptly to my participation request and sent through a completed naïve sketch in good time upon request. This participant was very busy at the time of scheduling the meeting, but on the day s/he gave me undivided attention during the interview. The interview was done at the participant's workplace in an open meeting room. We had a long conversation, providing me with ample time to probe all issues comprehensively. I sometimes got the feeling that this participant was somewhat hesitant to comment too harshly on negative issues; but I believe that this is more because of this interviewee's positive disposition, and not because of any apprehension that negative answers might lead to negative consequences. I do however feel that all issues were covered and that I got fruitful and truthful responses from this participant. This interviewee could unfortunately not participate in the focus group discussions. This participant is a middle manager.
Interviewee 5	We had a long conversation, with the interviewee passionately answering all questions without any hesitation. This participant was passionate about what she was doing. I got the idea that the participant really enjoyed our conversation; and the feeling was mutual. This interviewee also participated freely in the focus group discussion. This participant is a middle manager.
Interviewee 6	This interviewee seemed somewhat nervous and apprehensive during the early stages of the interview. I got the feeling that the interviewee felt obligated in some way to answer on behalf of the organisation. After probing around certain issues (I in no way forced the interviewee to answer any question), the interviewee started to open up and provided insightful answers, even when it meant placing the organisation in a bad light. To me, this person seemed very troubled about the goings on at the organisation. Overall, our discussion was very insightful to me, and seemingly, in a way, therapeutic to the interviewee. This participant is a top manager.
Interviewee 7	It was as if the interviewee believed that all answers should paint a positive picture of the organisation. I initially thought that the interviewee only participated, because he/she thought that it was compulsory. I once again assured the participant that participation was not compulsory and that all the answers were confidential. I did probe and found that the participant answered a bit more openly; but the respondent was still somewhat reserved. With the focus group interview and sitting among colleagues, this participant opened up much more; and s/he engaged in some meaningful discussions. This participant is a middle manager.
Interviewee 8	The interviewee was friendly and answered questions openly and without hesitation. The person acknowledged the challenges faced; but was still

	very positive about the future of the organisation. The conversation was quite relaxed and meaningful. This participant could unfortunately not attend the focus group discussion. This participant is a middle manager.
Interviewee 9	This participant was friendly and quite relaxed during the interview. We had meaningful discussion with the participant answering without much probing needed. This person was very rational in critiquing the organisation; but was still positive about the organisation. This interviewee also engaged in many meaningful discussions during the focus group interview. This participant is a middle manager.
Interviewee 10	I expected a hurried interview and I was ready to make the most of it within a limited time. This interview however ended up being the second longest of all the interviews. I found the participant open; honest and willing to comprehensively elaborate on issues and feelings. The interview was quite insightful to me; and I got the feeling that the participant appreciated the opportunity to talk to someone. This interviewee did unfortunately not participate in the focus group discussion. I suspect that the participant chose not to participate; as this person did not indicate his/her unavailability for the focus group discussion. This participant is a top manager.
Interviewee 11	The participant was friendly, but quiet. It took some probing to cover important issues, but the answers were useful. It was interesting to notice this person's ability to supposedly calmly distance him/herself emotionally from certain goings on and conflict at PHEI A; it is as though nothing can unsettle this calm person. The interviewee was not available for the focus group discussion. This participant is a top manager.
Interviewee 12	The interviewee was quite relaxed, and the conversation flowed with little probing required. This participant did not hesitate to identify certain negative issues and was open in describing his/her feelings. This participant overall seemed quite negative about the organisation. The interviewee did engage meaningfully in the focus group discussions. This participant is a middle manager.
Focus group	The focus group discussion took place on a weekday afternoon after work in the conference room of PHEI A. The interviewees' commitment to the current study was evident in their willingness to stay after work, with some of the participants even being willing to travel from another campus for the session. The CEO was not present– this turned out to be a blessing in disguise; as the participants were very receptive to meaningful discussions on many issues. I suspect this was possible because the CEO was not present. I tried to take a back seat; while the interviewees conversed with each other. The session was informal and friendly; and it was evident that the participants felt safe to open up and discuss issues with honesty. This session yielded important information that was crucial in building an overall picture of the interactions and their contexts.

6.3.3 Themes and categories

Table 6.3 provides an overall depiction of all the constructed themes and categories of codes, following a thematic analysis of all the naïve sketches, the transcribed semi-structured interviews, as well as the transcribed focus group discussion of PHEI A.

Table 6.3: Themes and code categories for PHEI A (own compilation)

Theme	Categories
Practitioners	Chief executive officer (CEO)
	Top and middle managers
	Roles
	Inputs and ideas
	Feelings
Practices	External environment
	Internal environment
	Strategic direction/intent
	Strategizing
	Decision-making
	Evaluating strategizing practices
	Competitive advantages
Praxis	Interaction
	Conflict

The categories in Table 6.3 were constructed by grouping the codes that I had identified in the thematic analysis of the transcribed data. These codes are depicted in Tables 6.13 - 6.15, and then described in the initial analysis available for perusal at the said website address in Section 6.2, as well as in Section 6.6. Because my naïve sketches, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions entailed probing around social interactions, the organisations' strategizing practices, as well as the participants (the main unit of analysis and sub-cases), the coding scheme runs along those lines. Consequently, the categories of codes are grouped in themes that relate to praxis (interaction during praxis), practices and practitioners (strategy actors).

6.4 PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION B

This section provides a description of the second of the two case study organisations, as well as a discussion of each of the research participants from PHEI B.

6.4.1 Company background

PHEI B was established in 1995; and it was accredited as a registered private HE-provider with the South African Department of Higher Education and Training in 2003. This profit seeking private company's head office is in the Western Cape; and they

have another campus in Gauteng. The company had 521 full-time registered students in 2018. The company is owned by three people, including two sisters, who established the company, as the majority shareholders. The two sisters act as fulltime managing directors of the company. The top management consists of five managers, namely a financial director, a marketing director, rector, academic manager, as well as a satellite campus academic manager. The organisation has eight middle managers within a flat management structure. This organisation has already conferred 4216 qualifications by 2017. This provider fits the profile of a typical PHEI in South Africa, as described in Chapter 4.

6.4.2 Description of the participants for the qualitative phases

The total research population for the qualitative phases for PHEI B comprises five top managers, as well as nine middle managers, namely heads of the academic departments and campus coordinators: making a total of fourteen possible participants. The sample for the three qualitative data collection methods consisted of eight managers: all five top managers, as well as three of the eight middle managers. Five of the participants were females; and three were males. All the participants completed the naïve sketches and attended the semi-structured interviews. Six of the eight managers formed part of the focus group interviews. The total semi-structured interviews amount to 285.37 minutes of recorded time; and the focus group interview recording to 54.48 minutes. The transcription of the naïve sketches, semi-structured interviews and the focus group interviews consists of 221 pages. I used observational field notes and a reflective research journal to describe the context of each interview. The interview context of each participant and for the focus group interview are subsequently summarised in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4: Participants' interview and focus group contexts (own compilation)

Participant	Interview context
Interviewee 1	The participant was calm and relaxed during the interview. The interviewee was not expressive or very talkative, so I had to do a bit more talking. I however got enough information to gain insight into the participant's story. The interviewee harboured quite negative feelings towards the organisation. This interviewee did attend the focus group and was a bit quiet during the discussion. I however posed specific questions to solicit his/her participation, which was answered meaningfully, and the

	participant consequently conversed with the other participants. This interviewee is a top manager.
Interviewee 2	The interviewee was courteous; but s/he was noticeably anxious. The participant told me that he/she was afraid to answer the questions incorrectly. After assuring the interviewee that no answers are incorrect, we continued with the interview. The participant was quite reserved during our conversation; and I had to keep the conversation going at times. Facilitated by some probing, I however got very useful information from this interviewee. This interviewee resigned a few weeks later; and s/he consequently did not attend the focus group discussion. This interviewee is a middle manager.
Interviewee 3	Although this interviewee accepted my invitation to participate in the study, the completed naïve sketch was only sent to me a few weeks later. A time and place for the interview was scheduled per email and we duly met in the participant's office. I was pleasantly surprised by this interviewee's willingness to share his/her story, despite time constraints; and we subsequently had a meaningful conversation. This interviewee also participated meaningfully during the focus group discussions. This interviewee is a top manager.
Interviewee 4	This interviewee was friendly; and we had a very pleasant and free flowing long conversation. The participant confided in me and opened up about his/her feelings and problems and confessed that it was very therapeutic to talk to someone regarding his/her challenges and feelings. This was my second longest interview with a PHEI B manager; and it was quite insightful. This participant was an integral part of the focus group discussions. This interviewee is a top manager.
Interviewee 5	This was my longest interview with a PHEI B manager; but I felt that it was worth every second. The participant opened up to me and answered honestly and comprehensively without any reservation. I gained important insights during our conversation into the interviewee's world, as well as how things are done at PHEI B. This person had the ability to discuss organisational issues in a rational, unemotional way. This interviewee participated meaningfully in most of the conversations during the focus group discussion. This interviewee is a top manager.
Interviewee 6	The interviewee was very courteous; and we had a meaningful conversation. The participant seemed very committed to the students and to helping people. The interviewee conveyed various negative feelings but declared a commitment towards the organisation and its students. The participant engaged meaningfully in the focus group discussion. This interviewee is a top manager.
Interviewee 7	The interviewee was initially not very talkative; this was because of his/her quiet nature, and not because of trying to hide something. I had to do some probing to get this interviewee to start talking. The participant opened up more as the interview progressed. Our conversation was subsequently quite insightful to me. This person was very quiet during the focus group discussions; and I had to ask direct questions to this participant to get him/her to talk. This interviewee is a middle manager.
Interviewee 8	We had a very long insightful conversation about things at the office and the participant's feelings and aspirations. The participant was quite negative about the organisation and made no secret of it. This interviewee duly resigned a few weeks after our interview; and consequently, did not participate in the focus-group discussion. This interviewee is a middle manager.

Focus group	The focus group discussion took place on a weekday morning in the conference room of PHEI B. Everyone welcomed me; and I especially appreciated the top managers' availability for the discussion. Things were a bit formal initially, but the conversation soon became more genial. Most of the participants engaged meaningfully and candidly in discussions. I solicited more engagement from two of the less talkative participants by asking for their opinion at times. This conversation yielded important information that was instrumental in building an overall picture of interactions and their contexts at PHEI B.
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6.4.3 Themes and categories

Table 6.5 provides an overall depiction of all the constructed themes and categories of codes, following a thematic analysis of all the naïve sketches, the transcribed semi-structured interviews, as well as the transcribed focus group discussion of PHEI B.

Table 6.5: Themes and code categories for PHEI B (own compilation)

Theme	Categories
Practitioners	The owners
	Family
	Top and middle managers
	Inputs
	Feelings
Practices	External environment
	Internal environment
	Strategic direction/intent
	Strategizing
	Decision-making
	Evaluating strategizing
	Competitive advantages
Praxis	Family dynamics
	Interaction
	Interaction techniques

The identified codes and categories for PHEI B in Table 6.5 are similar to those of PHEI A; and the themes are exactly the same. As discussed in Section 6.3.3, I have focused on probing around the main cases and the subcases. The naïve sketch-questions were the same for the participants of both PHEIs. The minor differences in codes and categories could be ascribed to the unique organisational contexts of each case study company, as well as to the personal differences between the different participant-cohorts themselves. The next section describes the results from the analysis of the quantitative survey of the current study.

6.5 QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Even though the results from the quantitative analysis phase were used during the analysis-phase of each of the two organisations of the current study, it is described here to simplify the reporting process. As described in Chapter 5, the quantitative phase was firstly introduced in this qualitatively driven study, in order to elucidate the areas of competitive advantage, as perceived by the respective private providers' clients. The second aim was to compare these survey-reported areas of competitive advantage with those, as perceived by the respective organisations' interviewed managers. A description of the realised sample of this online survey is followed by a statistical analysis of the reliability of the measuring scale of the research instrument employed in this phase. The results of the descriptive analysis of the importance that the survey respondents assigned to 45 items, when they decided to study at PHEI A or B; and this is discussed next. The analysis ends with the statistical testing of the single hypothesis of the current research and the consequential answering of Secondary objective 3 of the current study, which pertains to the possible significant differences between the responses of the respective private providers' respondents.

6.5.1 Sample profile

As described in Chapter 5 (see Section 5.8.2.2), 342 and 279 randomly selected full-time registered students of PHEI A and PHEI B respectively, were contacted per email-message and requested to complete the online survey. The survey was completed from September to October in 2018. A depiction of the realised sample is provided in Table 6.6.

Table 6.6: Sample description (own compilation)

Institution	Respondents contacted	Useable questionnaires			Response rate	Mean age
		Male	Female	Total		
PHEI A	342	88	80	168	49%	20.3
PHEI B	279	54	97	151	54%	20.56
Total	621	142	177	319	51%	

As summarised in Table 6.6, the survey yielded 319 useable questionnaires, with a satisfactory response rate per institution, and a subsequent satisfactory overall response rate (51%). The respective realised sample sizes of 168 and 151 are deemed sufficient for statistical analyses, as proposed by Pallant (2011:187), namely a minimum of 150. According to the calculation of Tabachnick and Fidell (2007, in Pallant, 2011:157), the needed sample size is even lower: $N > 50 + 8m$, at which point m equals the number of independent variables). The independent variables entail the seven factors of the current study. The minimum sample size is thus 106 in this case. Both samples exceeded this number, as indicated in Table 6.6. The overall male-to-female ratio is 44,5 to 55,5 per cent. The respondents' ages at PHEI A ranged from 18 to 28 years with a mean age of 20.3. The mean age of PHEI B-respondents was 20.56; and they ranged between the ages of 18 to 26.

6.5.2 Reliability

As discussed in Chapter 5; to test the reliability of the overall measurement scale within the employed questionnaire, an internal consistency statistic was used to test whether the 45 items in the scale measured the same underlying phenomenon. The overall consistency reliability coefficient consequently yielded an alpha value of 0.93 which indicates a high level of overall consistency between the multiple measurements of the scale. The overall scale can thus be regarded as being reliable. As described in Chapter 5, the 45 items of the questionnaire were categorised within seven formative scale indices or factors. As explained, these factors are regarded as causing the construct. These separate measures are, therefore, not required to correlate with each other. The items within each of the seven separate indices should, however, correlate;

since they are reflective of these respective indices or factors. Table 6.7 provides a depiction of the reliability coefficient for each of the seven formative scales indices, as well as for the overall scale.

Table 6.7: Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient for formative measurement scales (own compilation)

Formative scale (factor)	Number of items	Reliability Coefficient
1. Academic issues	10	0.79
2. Cost issues	5	0.70
3. Employment prospects	5	0.76
4. Image and marketing of institution	7	0.70
5. Location and access	6	0.61
6. Security/safety issues	5	0.50
7. Support facilities and infrastructure	7	0.78
Overall	45	0.93

From Table 6.7 it is evident that five of the seven scales indicate acceptable internal consistency levels; and consequently, they should be deemed as being reliable in measuring the respective underlying attributes, as depicted in the table. Formative scales 5 and 6 each fall under 0.7. Even though a correlation coefficient of 0.7 is widely regarded as the acceptable cut-off point for reliability confirmation, Hair, Black, Babbins and Anderson (2014:95) suggest a coefficient of 0.6 to 0.7 that could be regarded as on the lower threshold for accepting a scale as being reliable. The above authors further propose that less than ten items within a scale further diminishes its reliability level. Because of this, these scales should not be discarded with the caveat that, in future studies, the scales should include more items (Hair, *et al.*, 2014:145).

Pallant (2011:6) concomitantly states that the number of items significantly influences Cronbach’s alpha values. Pallant (2011:6) further suggests that, in cases where a small number of items compromises the reliability score of scales, conducting a mean inter-item correlation test might be more relevant. An inter-item correlation score of between 0.2 to 0.4 can be regarded as optimal (Briggs & Cheek, 1986 in Pallant, 2011:6). The five items in Scale 6, namely Security/safety issues in Table 6.7 yield an

inter-item correlation coefficient of 0.201. Based on the above discussion, the current researcher has therefore decided not to discard Scale 5 (Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of between 0.6 and 0.7) and 6 (inter-item correlation coefficient of between 0.2 and 0.4) from the current study.

6.5.3 Descriptive analysis

This section is dedicated to reporting the importance that respondents at the two different organisations of the current study assigned to the 45 items regarding student choice. As indicated in Chapter 5, questions regarding the 45 choice-related items solicited responses in pre-coded categories with 1 (not important at all) and 5 (very important) on the opposite ends of the scale. These items were categorised into seven distinct formative dimensions, or factors of student choice. The mean-score of each factor consisting of the combined mean-scores of its interrelated items was calculated to determine a ranking of these factors. The highest mean-score student-choice factors allude to areas of the organisations' competitive advantage; as these were perceived by its registered students the moment when they decided to register at their chosen provider. Table 6.8 provides a comparative description of the seven choice-factors.

Table 6.8: Factors of student choice mean-scores with importance ranking (own compilation)

Factors (dimensions)	PHEI A		PHEI B	
	Mean-scores	Ranking	Mean-scores	Ranking
Security/safety issues	4.39	1	4.17	2
Employment prospects	4.24	2	4.28	1
Academic issues	4.23	3	4.13	3
Cost issues	4.1	4	4.02	4
Image and marketing of institution	3.89	5	3.88	5
Support facilities and infrastructure	3.78	6	3.64	6
Location and access	3.47	7	3.17	7

As depicted in Table 6.8, Safety/security issues represent the most important factor to PHEI A-respondents; while the employment prospects-factor is the most for PHEI B-respondents; and these were recorded as being second in importance for PHEI A-respondents. Academic issues represent the third most important factor of choice-items for both respondent-groups, while they share the same importance ranking for the rest of the factors. There is thus very little difference in the importance that PHEI A and B-respondents assign to the seven HEI-choice factors. The three highest ranked choice-factors seem to be clearly more important to both PHEI-respondent groups, if judged by their distinctively higher means than those of the other four.

To facilitate a more detailed discussion of the three highest ranked choice-factors, their inter-related choice-items with their respective mean-scores are depicted in Tables 6.9 to 6.11. These tables depict the combined mean-scores for both of the PHEI A and B-respondent groups.

Table 6.9: Security/safety: interrelated items with mean-scores (own compilation)

Question in survey	Choice-item	Mean
Q2	Safe/secure parking facilities on campus	4.26
Q5	A safe/secure campus	4.64
Q9	No protests/campus unrest	4.67
Q17	Safe accommodation on/near campus	3.45
Q23	Safe/secure neighbourhood surrounding the campus	4.40
Combined Security/safety factor mean		4.28

From Table 6.9 it is evident that safety/security has the highest combined (PHEI A and B) mean-score of all the factors and can therefore be considered as the most important choice factor. It represents highest and second highest choice-factor for the respective respondent cohorts of PHEI A and PHEI B. No protests/campus unrest (mean-score: 4.67) and a safe/secure campus (mean-score: 4.64). These values represent the two most important items of the 45 choice items of the current study. This result is in line with a previous study of Bezuidenhout (2013:163) that found security/safety conditions

to be the most important choice item (among 45) in a study among three private HE-providers. A study by Wiese (2008), among 1500 students at six different public HE-providers also indicated the students' high consideration of security/safety. Bezuidenhout (2013:163) alluded to the possible influence of crime on the psyche of South African students – to such a degree that safety/security as the choice factor garners preference over the other factors, especially considering that other international choice-studies do not even list safety/security as an option for student-respondents to consider. Campus unrest seemingly added more impetus to the importance of this choice factor.

Table 6.10: Employment prospects: interrelated items with mean-scores (own compilation)

Question in survey	Choice-item	Mean
Q13	Provides a variety of internship/ practicum programmes	3.99
Q34	Industry links (e.g. contact with employers)	4.10
Q38	International links (e.g. study- & job opportunities)	4.26
Q39	Employment prospects (e.g. possible job opportunities)	4.52
Q43	Most graduates from this institution secure jobs	4.45
Combined Employment prospects factor mean		4.28

Table 6.10 indicates that employment prospects represent the overall second most important factor. The respective ranking per PHEI A and B were second and first. It seems that the high current unemployment levels in South Africa are possibly fuelling the assigned importance of this factor. This result is in line with the Bezuidenhout-study (2013:163), that concurrently concluded employment prospects to be the second most important choice-item. The Wiese-study (2008:233), as described in the previous paragraph, also reported a high importance, assigned to employment prospects. The specific items within this factor that yielded the highest combined mean-score include 'employment prospects' and 'most graduates from this institution' secure jobs. It is as if the students purposely identified the two items that directly dealt with employment.

Table 6.11: Academic issues: interrelated items with mean-scores (own compilation)

Question in survey	Choice-item	Mean
Q19	Small classes for better learning	4.31
Q21	Reasonable admission requirements	4.09
Q24	Spacious, well equipped classes	4.42
Q26	Administrative staff approachable and informed	4.33
Q28	Easy registration process	4.34
Q29	Academic staff who is approachable	4.53
Q31	Offers a wide range of study courses	4.17
Q35	Student focused/good customer service	4.30
Q37	Effective induction programme for new students	4.03
Q40	Flexible study mode (e.g. evening classes)	3.28
Combined Academic issues factor mean		4.18

From Table 6.11 it is evident from its combined mean-score that academic issues are the most important choice-factors for students. An approachable academic staff and spacious, well equipped classes received the highest important rating among this factor's interrelated items. Spacious, well equipped classes, as the choice-item, have concomitantly been identified as very important in the Bezuidenhout study (2013); it received the third highest overall mean-score.

6.5.4 Testing of Hypothesis 1

In addition to the descriptive analysis of the possible overall difference between respondent group answers (PHEI A versus PHEI B) in the preceding section, an Independent Samples *t*-Test was employed to statistically test the below formulated hypothesis.

H₀: The respondents at two private higher education institutions in South Africa do not significantly differ in the importance they assign to different factors that influence them in their choice of an educational institution.

H_a: The respondents at two private higher education institutions in South Africa differ significantly in the importance they assign to different factors that influence them in their choice of an educational institution.

Table 6.12: t-Test results to explore the differences in the respondent group answers (own compilation)

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							Effect (Eta squared)
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
								Lower	Upper	
F1	0.328	0.567	-1.526	314	0.128	-0.09900	0.06488	-0.22665	0.02865	0.01
			-1.531	312.379	0.127	-0.09900	0.06465	-0.22621	0.02821	
F2	0.015	0.901	-0.905	314	0.366	-0.08124	0.08979	-0.25791	0.09543	0.00
			-0.910	313.425	0.364	-0.08124	0.08931	-0.25697	0.09449	
F3	3.852	0.051	0.496	314	0.620	0.03974	0.08004	-0.11774	0.19722	0.00
			0.502	313.655	0.616	0.03974	0.07923	-0.11616	0.19563	
F4	0.259	0.611	-0.207	314	0.836	-0.01374	0.06626	-0.14411	0.11662	0.00
			-0.208	312.947	0.835	-0.01374	0.06597	-0.14354	0.11605	
F5	0.596	0.441	-3.406	314	0.001	-0.30092	0.08835	-0.47476	-0.12707	0.04
			-3.392	302.772	0.001	-0.30092	0.08872	-0.47551	-0.12632	
F6	1.751	0.187	-3.405	314	0.001	-0.22053	0.06477	-0.34797	-0.09308	0.04
			-3.397	305.989	0.001	-0.22053	0.06492	-0.34827	-0.09279	
F7	0.840	0.360	-1.534	314	0.126	-0.13957	0.09099	-0.31860	0.03946	0.01
			-1.524	298.374	0.129	-0.13957	0.09158	-0.31980	0.04066	0.01

Table 6.12 depicts a completed *t*-Test for Equality of Means at a 95% confidence level. With Factor 1-4 and Factor 7, $p > \alpha$ (0.05). The higher *p*-value thus means that the null hypothesis is not rejected for these five factors. With Factors 5 and 6, $p < \alpha$ (0.05), an initial inspection thus alludes to the null hypothesis being rejected. However, because most of the factors showed no significant differences in the statistic test; and the descriptive analysis in the previous section showed very little overall difference in means between the two groups, another test was necessitated. The last column in Table 6.12 depicts the partial eta squared test statistics for the seven factors. While the small probability values in Factors 5 and 6 allude to statistical significance, partial eta squared statistics relates to the 'effect size' or 'strength of association' (Pallant, 2011:210). Partial eta squared figures, according to Pallant (2011:210), relate to what

proportion of the variance between the dependent values can be attributed to the independent value. Pallant (2011:210) uses Cohen's (1988) proposed guidelines to determine effect size: small - 0.1 or 1% of variance explained (by the independent value); medium - 0.6 or 6%; and large - 0.138 or 13.8%. The partial eta squared statistics for Factors 5 and 6 in Table 6.12 indicate a small effect size.

With the above discussion in mind, the null hypothesis is therefore not rejected; there is thus no statistically significant overall difference in the importance that two different groups assign to different factors that influence them in their choice of an educational institution. The descriptive analysis results, as well as the rejection of the null hypothesis, leads the current study to conclude that there is no significant difference in the importance of the various factors that influenced respondents at two different private higher education providers in South Africa in their education institution of choice. The next section deals with reporting the findings from a combined analysis of the two different case study settings, namely PHEI A and B. The results from the quantitative survey are also incorporated in the report of Section 6.6.

6.6 CROSS-CASE SETTINGS ANALYSIS AND CASE NARRATIVE

This section's aim is firstly to compare cases from the two different settings of PHEI A and B. This section secondly aims to offer a combined discussion of the findings from separate thematic analyses of the naïve sketches, semi-structured interviews and the focus group interviews of the respective organisational participant-groups; and to relate these values to the existing theory and material relevant to the constructs of the current study. I did take care to provide for the voice of the interviewees to be heard; creating narratives that reflect their perspectives.

The theoretical framework that guided the empirical phase of the current study entailed inquiry into the various fields of strategy, social interaction and the strategy-as-practice perspective, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. As the current study acknowledges the importance of context, the external context of the two PHEIs of the current research, as described in Chapter 4, also informed the analysis. Lastly, the internal context of the two organisations of the current study were investigated; but this was largely done through the case studies' naïve sketches, semi-structured interviews and focus group

interviews. This was done to get the managers' perspective on their internal organisational context. This section thus contains a comparison of the empirical findings of the current study – with existing material related to the constructs of strategizing, social interaction and the practice-view of strategy. As described in Chapter 5, the analysis of the current study focused on rich contextualised descriptions with the social actor at the centre of the investigation. The strategy-as-practice perspective served as a lens to view strategizing in this empirical phase. To understand how contextualised social interaction between strategy actors during episodes of strategy practice as mechanism shape strategizing and consequential strategic outcomes, a holistic inquiry was needed. The strategy-as-practice perspective allowed for this holistic inquiry: to understand how strategy actors interact during episodes of strategy *praxis*, one needs to study the strategy *practitioners* that interact and make meaning of these interactions, as well as the strategizing practices (processes, tools and techniques) within the organisation. An investigation of the organisational environment that enables and constrains these interactions is also necessitated. It is for this reason that the themes of the case-study analysis include practitioners, practices and praxis. The extra, and intra-organisational environments are positioned as categories within the organisational practices- theme.

6.6.1 Theme 1: Practitioners

This section addresses the strategy actors that engage in some form of strategizing at the respective organisations of the current study. In addition to describing the owners, the top and middle managers, their roles and inputs, as well as their consequential feelings are investigated. Table 6.13 depicts the different categories; and it summarises the codes within the categories that make up Theme 1. This depiction facilitates a discussion of the strategy actors in this section.

Table 6.13: Theme 1: Practitioners (own compilation)

PHEI A	PHEI B
Category: Owner(s)	
CEO as committed owner; emotionally attached to the organisation; experiences pressure; relishes the fight for survival; impulsive decision-maker; forceful; entrepreneurial.	Two siblings as managing directors; driven and committed; impulsive; entrepreneurial; conservative management style; provide reciprocal sisterly support; added family dimension.
Category: Top and middle managers	
Diverse personalities; dynamic and passionate; committed and loyal; have limited time/are very busy; some are inexperienced and not yet competent; academic manager links middle managers with top management.	Passionate; very busy; academic manager links top and middle management; not enough experts; teamwork
Category: Roles and inputs regarding strategizing	
Perceived meaningful vs unimportant roles; strategy-implementation role; limited input - not always valued; no constructive feedback.	Limited input - not always valued. not part of management.
Category: Feelings experienced	
Empowered; energised; positive; frustrated; negative; powerless; unhappy; disappointed; disheartened; undervalued; diminished creativity; not part of management; withdraw; do own thing; different predispositions.	Positive; meaningful; enjoyment; overwhelmed; undervalued; robot/puppet; distrust; frustration; negativity; emotional strain; alone.

The following discussion is based on the categories and dimensions, as depicted in Table 6.13. In addition to the owners of the respective PHEIs, the top managers and owners are discussed, their perceived roles and inputs, as well as their consequential feelings experienced.

Owner(s)

The owners stand central to strategy-related goings on at both organisations. Because the owners strongly influence how things are done at the respective PHEIs; it is imperative to explore their characteristics that relate to their mindset and dispositions, when interacting with others during episodes of praxis. Leaders are instrumental in creating, growing and changing a group's culture (Schein, 2017:26). This rings especially true in this case, where the executive leaders are also the owners of the respective PHEIs.

As sole owner of PHEI A, the chief executive officer (CEO) experiences a lot of pressure; as he feels that the future of the organisation and its employees, rests squarely on his shoulders. He, however, draws inspiration from his conscription days where he was fighting the enemy; he is still a 'brave soldier battling enemies' within a hostile South African higher education (HE) landscape:

Yes, I think that I come from an environment of fighting. Um, I was in similar positions in my army-career, where you literally had to fight for your life. (INT:10:67).

This fighting spirit of the CEO and his self-perceived sole responsibility for the organisation's future makes for a strong-willed, sometimes abrasive personality, who wants to control interactions:

...because he is the alpha male, he has to have the last say. (INT:3:60)

Yes, he is the alpha male, this is his place; and it is what he says it is. (INT:11:24)

...because it hurts people, because he is tough, and he can become very personal with certain people. (INT:11:30)

The majority shareholder-sisters of PHEI B similarly feel that they control the destiny of the organisation, which they have established from scratch. Whereas the CEO relishes the fight and thrives on conflict and is regarded as very forceful by his personnel at times, the sibling directors seemingly do not particularly like conflict. From my interviews with the managers, as well as with the directors themselves, it is evident that the directors are, however, prepared to fight like protective mothers for their organisation when needed. Both the CEO and the sisters (directors) are fully financially, and therefore personally, committed to their organisations, where they are the full-time main actors in their organisations. The following interviewee discussions regarding PHEI B illustrate this point:

So, we physically made our own furniture. It was really from scratch like when the dear Father created the earth. There was nothing... (FG:3:63). For them it's a 24-hour business. So, if something comes up, they run with it. But I'm not in 24-hour service of [PHEI B name withheld], understand? (INT:5:29)

Where the CEO stands alone in fighting elements outside and within his organisation, the sisters share a special bond, as allies in their daily struggles in ensuring their organisation's survival.

It is very seldom that we ever decide [independently from each other] – the two sisters stand by each other. (INT:3:39)

This special bond has, however, been severely tested by the introduction of the respective sisters' children as employees of PHEI B. This is not only straining the relationship between the owners; it also strains their relationships with the employees within the organisation, where some feel that the owners' children receive preferential treatment – even though some of them are supposedly underqualified:

No, it [family members working at PHEI B] influences the personnel absolutely negatively [non-family employees] ...but also the business itself... (INT:8:51)

It...it is starting to influence us... and I still think that blood is thicker than water. Um, so sides are being taken when family is involved (INT:1:34)

Even though their conduct typifies a 'great leader', as opposed to a 'great groups' approach to strategic management (Ireland & Hitt, 1999:45), the CEO, as well as the two directors want to believe that they operate on a teamwork basis within their respective organisations. Selected interviewees of PHEI A maintained that the CEO is not really a team player:

He is an individual that operates under the assumption that this is my place and I will run it the way I want. (INT:3:13)

The CEO and the directors are passionate people with entrepreneurial spirits; they are driven; making decisions impulsively to the occasional ire of the top and middle management of both organisations. Most interviewees described the CEO of PHEI A as impulsive; the CEO admits this:

...especially under pressure... I immediately become fire chief. (INT:10:58). ...He reacts to things without thinking it over. (INT:1:28). Um, because his personality is very impulsive. (INT:2:11).

Interviewees at PHEI B similarly found the owners impulsive; and they maintain that this compromises effective strategizing:

[name withheld] and [name withheld] are two very fast-moving directors. Um, sometimes I think it is to our [PHEI B] own detriment, because we are moving too fast sometimes. And sometimes decisions are taken and implemented too soon, not well thought through; and then, about six months down the line, we face a bit of a problem and then we have to go back and reverse this whole thing... (INT:6:3)

Interviewees at PHEI A likewise argue that the CEO's impulsiveness problematises strategizing:

Um, and it makes it very difficult to think strategically about the place and also to think about long-term plans for the place, because he makes his plans as he walks. (INT:2:14)

Top and middle managers

The group of codes within this category relate to the characteristics of the different top and middle managers who interact as strategy actors at the two case study organisations.

With top and middle managers from different sections and academic departments across the organisations, diverse personalities among them are to be expected. This sometimes leads to conflict, as PHEI A interviewees described:

So, one has to manage carefully in the meeting. Yes, it is a whole package of people to handle. (INT: 10:41)

"The diverse personalities sometimes lead to conflict in meetings." (INT:11:22).

The managers of both organisations share a passion for their students. Like with PHEI A, top and middle managers alike at PHEI B declared their passion for what they do

Absolutely, absolutely! This is my passion and I love what I do... (INT:8:45). Yes [my passion is to help people] ... It is absolutely [a calling], yes. (INT:6:38).

Both organisational groups report that they are extremely busy; they are mostly caught up with operational issues that leave them with very little time to engage in strategizing; as one manager at PHEI A claims:

Top management just has too little time to sit and talk for hours. It is a luxury that we do not have. (INT:10:45)

Whereas some middle managers at PHEI A question the competency of certain top managers to engage in strategizing, one director at PHEI B reported that they need more qualified/knowledgeable people to take the organisation forward:

And we can have discussions until we are pink, purple and blue; we shall have to invest in the expertise of people. (INT:4:36)

There is a significant divide between the top and middle managers at both organisations, where the top managers and specifically the CEO at PHEI A and the directors at PHEI B rarely engage in strategizing with middle managers. Middle

managers, thus, rarely have a direct say in corporate strategizing. Corporate strategizing is thus mainly a top management endeavour at both organisations:

At [PHEI B], the middle management, of which I am part of, does not participate in any strategic planning of the business. (NS:7:4)

Middle management is more involved in strategy implementation, as well as devising strategies within their sections to make these sections and their programme offerings more competitive against the offerings from other PHEIs. The respective academic top managers at both organisations serve as the link between top management and the academic middle managers. Decisions, from middle management meetings with the academic managers are presented to top management at PHEI A, and to the directors at PHEI B, where they ultimately decide whether to accept or to discard these decisions. In concurrence with PHEI B, interviewees at PHEI A acknowledge that the academic top manager is their link with top management, and that the academic manager protects their interests during top management interactions. They report that there is a strong team spirit among the middle managers and the academic top manager:

So, she [academic manager name withheld] really fights for us; she fights for the academic side. (INT:5:33)

So, yes, she [academic manager] is the intermediary between the head of departments and top management. (INT:9:18)

The CEO of PHEI A, as well as one director at PHEI B. spoke about the teamwork among top management; but this sentiment is not really shared by the other interviewed non-owner top managers at both organisations.

Roles and inputs regarding strategizing

Meaningfulness refers to the importance that employees assign to the purpose of their work; in this case, strategizing (Hatin & Milne, 2016:61). This meaning of work is described by Hatin and Milne (2016:62) as a pivotal contributor to the individuals' meaningfulness of life; personal and work outcomes are supposedly related to one's perceived meaningfulness of work. I specifically pulsed interviewees on their perceived role in strategizing at their organisation and how meaningful it is to them. This perceived role and evolving meaning ascribed to ongoing strategizing encounters over time influences individuals' predisposition when they enter subsequent encounters. This aspect is further addressed in Section 6.6. Whereas some managers

at PHEI A declared that they perceive their strategizing roles as meaningful, others, especially middle managers, stated that their roles are not meaningful to them when it comes to strategizing.

Many middle managers at PHEI A reportedly have very a limited strategizing input, because they are, according to them, not regarded as important role players. Where middle managers do offer strategic inputs in meetings with the academic top manager, who takes it to top management, they reportedly do not receive feedback. Middle management's strategizing role is seemingly more to implement strategies that are formulated by top management:

We do not have a direct say [in strategizing] (INT:9:20.) It makes one feel that you, with a manager's main purpose is to carry out the tasks expected by top management, but, with very limited input. (NS:9:11)

Many middle managers felt that their strategic inputs were not valued:

He [CEO] isn't really interested in what you are saying. (INT:12:5). I have submitted proposals on...but it was totally disregarded; nothing came from it. (INT:3:26)

Top managers and middle managers alike at PHEI B feel that they have very limited strategizing inputs and that these inputs are not always valued by the directors. Two top managers commented that they even felt like not being part of management even though they are designated as the top managers:

...However, as a member of the management team that consistently and frequently (need to) engage in business strategizing, I have limited; influence and I am called upon sporadically to make inputs. (NS:5:13)

Feelings experienced

In asking the interviewees about their perceived strategizing roles, I also asked them how this made them feel. Some managers experienced positive emotions regarding their strategizing roles at PHEI A. One manager felt empowered, another energised; while some are positive about their roles in the academic future of the organisation; this included a few middle managers, as well as a top manager. Most middle managers, as well as a top managers, however, harboured various negative feelings linked to their limited and undervalued strategic inputs. These feelings included frustration; powerlessness; unhappiness, disappointment; and diminished creativity.

This led to some managers withdrawing from organisational activities and focusing on doing their own thing and on their own students:

Um, oh no, no, sad; I feel disheartened. I feel disheartened, because I give a lot of myself, my time and my knowledge and then I feel disheartened and asked if I really have a role to play in this organisation. (INT:9:28). So, I have changed my total vision and approach. From being part of the bigger picture at [PHEI A] to trying to be the best in my class for my students. (INT:3:36)

Managers at PHEI B similarly reported feelings of meaningfulness, positiveness and enjoyment; but they linked many negative feelings to their limited and undervalued strategic inputs, as well as abrupt changes. In addition to feeling undervalued; managers reported frustration; negativity; emotional strain; feeling distrusted; and feeling like a robot or puppet:

Hmm. I must...I must be honest; many times, we feel like we...we are just robots that have to do these things. (INT:1:11)

One managing director at PHEI B admitted to sometimes feeling overwhelmed by her responsibility to keep the organisation financially viable. Relating to family dynamics and resultant conflict, one managing director at PHEI B revealed that she sometimes felt alone, with no one to talk to.

Managers reported different predispositions when engaging in episodes of strategy praxis. These predispositions are shaped by their experiences over time of how things are done, including how they make sense of strategizing engagements, including their consequential feelings. Managers described entering interactions, among others, with aggressive predispositions, predispositions of resignation (“I cannot change anything anyway, so why even try?”) and disengaged pre-dispositions (“do what you want, I do not care anymore”). One top manager at PHEI A described her predisposition when entering meetings:

...I am sometimes going to meetings with more of an aggressive attitude or with a bit of a negative mindset, because I know what they are going to say what must be done and then we have to do it. (INT:6:46)

The analysis in Theme 1 follows the current study’s subscription to an interactionist viewpoint. Based on the analysis of various researchers’ work, Chapter 3 offers a

description of this viewpoint: Social interaction constitutes a perpetual social process with subjective actors, in this case strategy practitioners, attempting to influence each other through interactions and evolving relationships. These interactions and relationships include negotiations, and renegotiations, resulting in shared meaning or a shared reality between the members interacting (Rummel, 1979; Turner, 1988:13; Urry, 2001:7). Actors attempt to influence each other through interactions with others that are shaped by observable, conceptual and physiological dispositions and manifestations (Turner, 1988).

These interactions also conversely influence the dispositions of the actors; as they interact over time. The above therefore links to the reported feelings of the managers, their meaning making, subjectively constructed realities and eventual dispositions when engaging in episodes of strategy praxis at the respective organisations of the current study. Within a strategizing context, this current study of the top and middle managers follows the call for a socially informed view of strategy actors' actions as discussed in Chapter 2. Johnson *et al.* (2003), mention the need for strategists to improve their strategizing skills as opposed to implementing general textbook-based instructions. In the analysis of the practitioners of Theme 1, top managers' knowledge and experience were questioned (PHEI A) and the need for knowledgeable and experienced strategy actors were reported (PHEI B).

6.6.2 Theme 2: Practices and environmental context

Whereas Theme 1 deals with the actors that interact, Theme 2 relates to the organisational strategy-related practices, as well as the intra and extra-organisational context that frame strategy-related interactions. Practices, in the current study, refer to the tools and institutionalised techniques or procedures used in strategizing, as these are influenced by intra- and extra-organisational factors (Whittington 2006). As discussed in Chapter 3, the current research subscribes to a rational-irrational dualism, as described by Scott (2004:2): while social interaction and its irrational peculiarities involves the main focus of the current study. It is thus imperative not to disregard the possible influence of rational, formal structures on how things are done within organisations. This section explores these structures, namely the strategizing

practices (strategizing tools, techniques and procedures) of PHEI A and B within their own respective internal and external operating environments.

This includes exploring the possible influence of these environmentally contextualised practices on how practitioners engage and socially interact during strategizing episodes. An outcome of strategizing, namely the resultant competitive advantages is also addressed in the context this theme. Table 6.14 depicts this theme's different categories of codes, as identified in the thematic analysis of the naïve sketches and interviews.

Table 6.14: Theme 2: Practices and environmental context (own compilation)

PHEI A	PHEI B
Category: External environment	
Public vs private: limited space in publics; perceived private inferiority; research vs skills training; collegiate vs business culture; private smaller class size. Challenges: Distrust of private providers; stringent regulation; competition; difficult strategizing; decolonisation; diploma disease; affordability; inadequate schooling system.	Public vs private: publics' choice of students; perceived private inferiority; zero privates-subsidies; privates' market alignment; research vs skills training. Challenges: CHE-requirements; new accreditation requirements; inadequate schooling system; no critical thinking; changing student needs; decolonising education.
Category: Internal environment	
Business vs academia; limited funds; fight for survival; halted growth; flat management structure; one strong academic department; demographic makeup.	Business vs academia; limited funds; financial pressures; unknown brand; low student numbers; student/parent attitudes; weaker student abilities; students with personal issues; articulation problems; high lecturer turnover; micro-management
Category: Strategic direction/intent	
Unclear; focus on niche markets; change needed.	University college; community involvement; comprehensive marketing; market-aligned curricula.
Category: Strategizing	
Weekly top management meetings; monthly middle-management meetings; one-on-one sessions with middle managers; annual session; informal strategizing; top-down.	Not formally planned; directors with managers as advisors; middle management meetings; annual session; three-year cycles; old-fashioned- top-down.
Category: Decision-making	
Made by top management; CEO ultimately make the decisions; business concerns dictate decision-making; decisions are	Owners make decisions; limited decision-making power; directors override decisions; not always consulted; impulsive; strategic preference to business decisions.

overruled; impulsive abrupt changes; starts with a dream.	
Category: Evaluating the strategizing process	
Strong leader view; inefficient and ineffective; no clear long-term vision; crisis management/coping with challenges; waste of time; limited platforms; conflicting messages; poor communication; not integrated.	Impulsive; lacking structure; executive vs non-executive managers; not integrated; no platform for strategizing around crucial matters; no transparency/communication; abrupt changes; not effective; crisis management/coping with challenges; waste of time.
Category: Competitive advantages	
Academic reputation; smaller classes; practice orientated; safety/security; uniqueness.	Smaller classes and personal attention; practice orientation; high throughput rate.

The following section entails a discussion of the categories and codes, as depicted in Table 6.14.

The external environment

This category relates to the context in which the two organisations of the current study operate and compete against other providers, as perceived by the interviewees. Discussions with both PHEI A and B interviewees firstly revolved around the differences between private providers and their public counterparts, and secondly the various challenges that the respective organisations face in their daily operations. Regarding the differences between private and public providers, both organisations' interviewees mentioned the perceived inferiority of private provision within the South African higher education (HE)-landscape. PHEI A-interviewees maintained that while people rate private secondary schools highly, they perceive private HE-providers as substandard to their public counterparts.

They also suggested that private providers provide many academically weaker students with a second chance to enter the higher education framework:

I think that, regarding the comparison between private and public providers, the perception that a university is preferred, is still valid. Privates are not perceived to be on this level yet. (FG:9:20). I think some our students might have been the average type at school; and I think that they struggle to cope at public universities. Here he stands out; and he realises that he really has the ability to become a leader or above average. (FG:12:15)

One manager at PHEI B stated that they try to inform students that privates must also subscribe to the same requirements and evaluations as publics; a fact that the media has a responsibility to emphasise in their reporting on HE-issues. Both organisations' interviewees remarked that privates follow more of a practical skills educational approach as opposed to publics that focus more on research. PHEI A-interviewees touched upon the limited space at publics amidst a pressing need for higher education in South Africa; a need that privates can address. They also alluded to the notion that privates have smaller classes, providing more individualised attention to students as opposed to publics where students are merely numbers.

Yes, it's true, and because we are smaller, you notice individual needs. You can help students that struggle or need extra assistance; at publics they will get lost. (FG:12:16)

One manager also referred to the business-like nature of privates versus a more collegiate orientation at publics; these organisations (publics) are supposedly more viewed as shared society assets. In linking with this, PHEI B interviewees claimed that, because privates receive no government-subsidies unlike their public counterparts, they need to offer market-aligned qualifications:

...because our revenue, um, everything is generated, um, from sales of training... (INT:3:10)

Regarding the challenges that they face, PHEI A managers mentioned that the HE-fraternity still distrusts private providers with the public provider-orientated Council for Higher Education (CHE) that supposedly dislikes privates, making life difficult for them through stringent regulation:

And, also in the bigger picture of education, CHE [Council on Higher Education] do not like privates. And they like white privates less, and white Afrikaans privates even less. (INT:1:43)

PHEI B-managers concurred in alluding to the strict CHE-requirements for privates. One manager referred to new challenging CHE-requirements that they will have to adhere to. Both groups of interviewees contended that the South African schooling system is becoming increasingly inadequate in preparing students for HE-studies, shifting this responsibility to HE-lecturers and support personnel. PHEI B managers continued by stating that students are not exposed to critical thinking and problem solving in secondary schools where the focus of assessment is predominantly on knowledge-recall.

...It's just about facts and the students are... the learners are coached just to pass the exam. That is all. And this is what I experience, even at postgraduate level ... With schools everything is just about knowledge; the lowest level. Now suddenly, our first year must be able to think for himself. He must be able to analyse. He must be able to evaluate. They did not study these things at school. (FG:5:47)

This superficial approach to learning seems to be spilling over to the HE-landscape where PHEI A-managers claim that students select qualifications based on their potential to secure a job rather than on its intrinsic value; so-called diploma disease.

Both interviewee-groups acknowledged the challenge of decolonising education: to be more Africa-orientated in its philosophical underpinnings. This is something that PHEI A with a markedly white and Afrikaans character could especially struggle with. PHEI A-managers further alluded to tough competition from public and private providers alike that makes it very difficult for the organisation to grow its student-numbers. This competitive environment together with a depressed economic climate, political undercurrents, strict regulations and rapid change supposedly problematises strategizing. They also stated that HE is expensive; PHEI A's programmes are expensive and many students cannot afford it. PHEI B's managers identified one last challenge, namely changing student-needs. They suggested that lecturing and assessment should adapt accordingly.

...because we are not working with and old, old generation student anymore. We are working with new kids that should keep us on our toes with new methods and how they are going to learn and understand problem solving. (FG:1:29)

The public versus private references by many interviewees of PHEI A and B alike is in line with the findings from the theoretical investigation of the South African higher education landscape in Chapter 4. Managers recognise the public and institutional establishment's dislike and distrust of private HE-providers. The interviewees were well aware of the notion that the South African society regard private providers as substandard to their public counterparts. The reported challenges that the two organisations of the current study face seem to confirm most of the generic challenges like zero subsidies; stringent regulation, tough competition and decolonisation identified in Chapter 4. The managers of PHEI A and B alike proposed that the South African HE-landscape represent a very difficult environment for them to survive and

this impacts upon their strategizing (strategizing regularly revolves coping with external challenges as described further on in this section). This is in line with the conclusion proffered in Chapter 4 that private HE-providers in South Africa have their work cut out to survive in a strict regulation framework where public providers seemingly have financial, as well as perceptual advantages over their private counterparts.

The internal environment

There are two pervasive issues that seems to underpin all strategizing interactions and decision-making at both organisations. Firstly, limited funds and the subsequent constant struggle for financial survival means that the owners of the respective private providers tend to favour business/financial considerations. As indicated in the previous section, the private providers of the current study must battle negative market and establishment-perceptions; subsidised public HE-providers; as well as other private providers in their quest to be profitable. One should keep in mind that they are businesses after all. This leads to the second pervasive issue, namely the divide between business and academia. There is a constant clash of wills between what is deemed best for the business and what is deemed best for the students and academic integrity. As mentioned before, it is as if the academic, non-owner managers feel perpetually compelled to moderate the owners' business-orientated reasoning and behaviour in favour of academic considerations. This business-academia schism seems to frame most episodes of strategy praxis at both PHEIs. Like acknowledged by all PHEI A-interviewees, the interviewed managers at PHEI B identified finances as their biggest challenge:

“Finances definitely [is PHEI B’s biggest challenge].” (FG:6:33). “Because we have a, we are now, we feel, this is where we are constrained. Um, in the fact that we, um, we do not have the budget to realise all of these expectations.” (FG:4:34)

The CEO of PHEI A described the significant impact of the company's financial challenges and its constant fight for survival on its strategizing:

... The financial component plays in on you; your strategic planning...I think, in my opinion, it makes an enormous impact. (INT:10:9). So, I have to literally fight for the survival of the business. (INT:10:67)

Like their PHEI B counterparts, PHEI A interviewees acknowledge the distinct duality between business and academia at their organisation:

Yes, yes, so it is, ag [sic] always that problem: on the one side you have 'it is a business and a business is there to grow and to make money' and on the other side you have academia...it is probably that, that balance, that is a rather difficult thing. (INT:10:90). There must just be bums on seats so that the money can come in, because everything is about money and getting the budget to balance. So, you are half regarded as a ringing money-making machine. (INT:3:38)

Both organisations have quite flat management structures as they are relatively small in comparison to public providers. This, according to some PHEI A-managers, significantly limits their career growth opportunities at the organisation. Both organisations are also experiencing slow to halted growth in student enrolments. PHEI A however has one very popular qualification that is bursting at the seams with students. Even though this qualification is touted as the benchmark for the other qualifications, they simply cannot replicate its successes; in fact, they have been experiencing an annual decline in student enrolments for a few years now. Another internal challenge that PHEI A is grappling with, is their white, Afrikaans character that seems to attract the patronage of a certain type of student. This characteristic, by the successful qualification manager's own admission, is a major reason for the one popular qualification success. It however also seems to be the organisation's biggest downfall, as it limits its potential market-size for the other qualifications. The managers of the other struggling qualifications felt very strongly that the organisation has to shed its Afrikaans and white nature, in order to turn around declining enrolment-figures. PHEI A is thus seemingly at a crossroads regarding its demographic makeup and market approach. In alluding to the fragmented nature of strategizing at PHEI A, one manager claimed that they offer various qualifications in English, but that the marketers are still stubbornly focusing on soliciting a predominantly white, Afrikaans market.

Nobody likes it when I say that White Afrikaans is still [PHEI A's] attraction. I am trying to change it in my department and some of the other departments obviously. (INT:1:44). We positioned ourselves as ready for the job, and not as the final bastion of Afrikaans, or the Afrikaner nation. We [their academic department] introduced English, thereby attempting to increase student numbers; but it never worked. I do not know why. (FG:1:61)

Some of the other internal issues reported in PHEI B include the fact that the organisation is still a relatively unknown brand. Some middle managers felt that they are being micro-managed; the directors supposedly do not trust them, or their abilities. This stands in contrast to the CEO at PHEI A who gives managers general directives or objectives; and they expect managers to find a way to realise them. The lack of urgency that middle managers are subjected to at PHEI B represents a major source of frustration; and this may account, in some way, for the high personnel turnover reported at this organisation. Managers at PHEI B also suggested that their students are academically weaker than their public counterparts. This leads to articulation-problems; as these weaker students, who were given a pathway into higher education by means of a business certification, struggle to succeed in the following diploma. PHEI B-Interviewees further stated that many of their students have personal/psychological issues that problematize study at large public institutions with large classes. Lecturers therefore must consider much more than just the academic wellbeing of students at times. Managers at PHEI B also referred to the attitude of students and some parents, where they expect automatic results in the vein of: "You had better make me pass, because I pay your salary".

Both PHEIs of the current study resemble the dominant typology of private providers in South Africa, as described in Chapter 4: both are profit-seeking; they are quite small with less than a thousand registered students; and they operate from large urban centres. They were established through personal investment; and they rely on student-fees as their sole source of income. Because of this and the fact that they receive no subsidy; these organisations' battle for financial survival; since this is a pervasive reality. The organisations are, therefore, almost forced to favour business considerations during strategizing instances. Neoliberalism-aligned thinking, in which the students are treated as paying customers (Winkler, 2018) and where students are encouraged to adopt this thinking by choosing the qualification that would yield the best economic return is evident. The consequential divide between business and academia, a symptomatic feature of contemporary higher education. It is quite clear at both organisations of the current study, where the owners seem to favour business and the non-owners are academia-aligned. This duality between business and academia is a major source of conflict, as well as negotiations and renegotiations with PHEI A and B alike.

Strategic direction/intent

There seems to be very little clarity on the vision of PHEI A among managers:

...it is as unclear as the ways of the Lord. (INT:3:8)

Um, and we never talk about it. Because our strategy is, we do not know where to; or what our five-year plan is. (FG:6:48)

Managers are quite unanimous in their call for a change in the organisation's current approach to the market. As alluded to in the previous section, this organisation seemingly needs to reflect upon how they want to be viewed by society, including their customers: as a bastion for a white Afrikaans culture, or as a provider that caters for a diverse number of students. The CEO did mention that PHEI A focuses on niche markets. Even though some qualifications are quite generic, the very popular qualification mentioned in the previous section represents a niche-offering.

PHEI B's one managing director maintained that they are striving to be recognised as a 'university college' within a supposed future South African HE-provider framework. This would mean introducing postgraduate qualifications. Tying in with its practice-orientation, PHEI B presumably focuses on market-aligned qualifications; this communicates a message to students that the organisation's qualifications increase their chances of securing a job:

...the marketers always talk about 'having an edge'. It is to really say...if we can get to a point and say: "listen, 90 per cent of our students get a job within six months of qualifying." Then we have an edge. (FG:5:4)

One managing director revealed that they plan to follow a comprehensive marketing approach. The aim is presumably not to just focus on recruiting students, but also to emphasise their seamless progression through the different levels of their qualifications, as well as securing employment. One top manager added that, at PHEI B, they plan to become more involved in community engagement, thereby increasing their social presence.

The lack of a clear vision and clear approach to the market at PHEI A might allude to the organisation's lack of formal, structured goal-directed strategizing; strategy seemingly resembles 'a pattern in a stream of actions' (Mintzberg & Walters, 1985). Both organisations do offer commerce-related qualifications that require less

resources to present. This is once again in line with the approach followed by most private providers, as described in Chapter 4. Both organisations do, however, also successfully focus on niche-offerings. With the generic qualifications, both organisations still focus on individualised attention, as well as on a practical approach. The course tuition fees are high; since the organisations must rely on class fees as their only source of income. In evaluating the case study organisations' overall approach to the market, both can therefore be regarded as following a differentiating strategy, according to Porter's generic strategy typology (Henry, 2018:117).

Strategizing

PHEI A holds weekly top management meetings. These regular meetings are not exclusively held for strategy-purposes, but strategizing does take place from time to time. A monthly middle management meeting is held between the academic manager, who is a top manager and the academic middle managers. The financial top manager is responsible for disseminating information to the various non-academic first-line managers, who do not engage in strategizing activities; they thus fall outside the scope of the current study. The academic manager discusses the decisions taken by top management at the monthly middle management meetings. In addition to operational issues, middle managers will discuss strategic issues; and they will provide suggestions, as collectively decided upon to the academic manager to take to the next weekly top management meeting. The academic manager also has one-on-one sessions with each academic middle manager, in order to discuss individual departmental issues. Any strategy-related inputs are also tabled here to take to the next top management meeting. There are annual strategy sessions, where all employees are present; but this event is more of an information session where the CEO discusses the past year's activities and results; s/he then and talks about the future; no strategizing takes place here.

Strategizing at PHEI A does not consist of a formalised, planned process; it rather happens as the need arises for it; as one top manager maintains:

It [top management meeting] isn't very formal; it is like a discussion. We deliberate things and everyone has his opinion over what is right and what is wrong. And according to this, we decide. It is not as if there is a secretary and notes and everything. [CEO name withheld] takes the notes by himself. (INT:11:15)

With PHEI B, strategizing is controlled by the two managing directors. There are no regular meetings. The managing director-sisters discuss strategic issues between each other. They sometimes involve their children and the directors are gradually increasing their children's involvement, who are employees at the organisation. The directors will then also involve some or all of the top managers on an ad hoc basis when their inputs are needed; almost like consultants that are called in for advice. As with PHEI A, the academic top manager holds regular meetings with the middle managers. Top management decisions are conveyed to the middle managers by the academic manager during these meetings. Middle managers discuss strategic issues, among other issues, and make decisions that are then taken to the managing directors for consideration by the academic manager. Middle managers can also request an audience with the directors on an individual basis to make suggestions or offer strategic input. There is also an annual strategy day, but also only in name, because it resembles an information-session. The directors are not even present at these annual sessions. The financial managing director claimed that she does create some strategic plans that span three-year cycles; and that one top manager is roped in to provide advice. These plans are, however, not formally drafted or implemented; and they are not effectively communicated to the rest of the organisation. Strategizing is, therefore, quite an informal activity at PHEI B. One top manager claimed that they never engage in formal strategizing at PHEI B:

Since I have joined PHEI B in [year withheld], I have never participated in formal strategic planning, e.g. by way of an annual strategic business planning event for a full day. (NS:5:2)

Decision-making

At PHEI A, the top management team makes the strategic decisions. The CEO ultimately makes the final decisions, either by trying to manipulate the top managers into accepting his decisions, or by trying to force them to accept them. As mentioned earlier, business concerns are favoured during decision-making. The CEO sometimes overrules decisions, as mentioned by an interviewee:

It was rather like 'I [the CEO] decide and what do you say about this? Okay, but I still decide in any case.' (INT:5:2)

Decisions are sometimes impulsively made; but they can also be changed abruptly. The CEO revealed that everything starts with a dream; he then makes decisions that are sometimes risky, in order to make those dreams come true.

With PHEI B, the owner-directors make the final decisions. Whereas the CEO of PHEI A usually makes decisions within the top management framework at the weekly meetings, the managing directors, who are also the majority stakeholders, will make decisions at will, but usually consult their top managers for advice before they decide; if this is deemed necessary. This is confirmed by one top manager:

So, I have, in short, a consulting role. I do wield some influence, but to eventually say: "yes, we do it" or "no, we are not doing it": no way! (INT:5:4)

The third director who is not involved in the management of the organisation, is usually just informed about decisions that were made from time to time. Like with the CEO of PHEI A, decisions are sometimes impulsively made and changed. The directors sometimes overrule decisions made by the managers. As with PHEI A, business considerations take preference in decision-making.

Evaluating the strategizing process

At PHEI A, the CEO believes that the buck stops with him; that he is the one who must secure the survival of his organisation. He is the dreamer; and he must do what it takes to realise that dream for the organisation, even if it means overriding decisions and alienating employees. Managers describe planning, formulating and implementing strategy at PHEI A as being inefficient and ineffective. The organisation has no long-term vision, with strategizing mostly done reactively in dealing with crises or coping with challenges in an unplanned manner. There are limited platforms available for managers to strategize within this top-down strategizing environment. Strategizing is not integrated; many managers have decided to do their own thing. Plans and decisions are poorly communicated, and conflicting messages are being conveyed to managers and employees. Certain managers have consequently concluded that strategizing is a waste of time at PHEI A.

There is also sometimes frustration at simple inefficiency in the planning, decision-making and implementation processes. (NS:1:10)

No, not at all. Nothing comes from it [strategizing sessions]; so it is an actual waste of time. (NS:3:4)

PHEI B-interviewees have rated strategizing as being impulsive with strategies that can change in an instant. The strategizing framework is lacking structure. Even top managers reported feeling like outsiders; like consultants to the owner-directors, who dictate how things are done. As with PHEI A, managers deem strategizing at PHEI B as being uncoordinated, with limited platforms for strategizing, especially around crucial matters. Strategizing is also mostly reactive in dealing with crises and coping with challenges – with no transparency and little communication within this top-down process. Some managers, like some of their counterparts at PHEI A, consequently, conclude that strategizing is a waste of time:

Why must one waste all that time, because all our decisions are just vetoed? You sit here for an hour or two in a meeting, but it gets overturned, because someone thinks differently. So why must we waste that time? To me it is wrong. (INT:5:40)

Both PHEIs have no formal strategizing programmes with sessions specifically designated for strategy-making. Strategizing is ad hoc; and it seems to mostly revolve around dealing with challenges and crises; and it happens at the whim of the respective owners of the organisations. This is comparable to the emergent nature of strategizing, where strategies emerge in a web of actions and interactions (Mintzberg & Walters, 1985:257). The volatile South African HE-landscape, like most modern business environments, links to chaos and complexity theorists' call for strategizing to be non-linear, moving from 'the borders of stability and instability (Henry, 2018:18). This stands in contrast to a traditional top-down strategizing culture at both PHEIs, where strategies are formulated at the top; and the rest have to implement them (Ireland & Hitt, 1999:45).

Strategizing is thus traditional in terms of the leadership approach; but it is not linear and static in nature, as described in traditional strategizing models. The owners of both organisations want to control decision-making; and they are very reluctant to relinquish control. It is as if they feel that they alone can secure the future of their organisations. This links with a great leader view, as opposed to a great groups view, where it was traditionally believed that the CEO as a 'lone ranger'; has the sole responsibility for the strategic leadership of an organisation (Ireland & Hitt, 1999:45). The contemporary great groups view, however, postulates that it is impossible for leaders to operate alone in ensuring the prosperity of organisations within uncertain and turbulent modern business environments, which are typified by tough competition. Organisations must

proposedly rely on the collaboration of groups of people across the organisation (Ireland & Hitt, 1999:46).

Competitive advantages

As described in Chapter 2, and supported by Henry (2019:4), most researchers in the field of strategy agree that the purpose of strategy is to create competitive advantages; since competitive advantages enable companies to compete with other organisations. Henry (2019:16) further maintains that the true test of a competitive advantage is in the marketplace. It is for this reason that the one quantitative phase that deals with student choice factors was also introduced in the case study of the current research. The managers' description of PHEI A's areas of competitive advantage, in other words, reasons why students choose to study at the organisation, is very much in line with the survey results dealing with PHEI A students' perceptions, as reported on in Section 6.5. Managers identified safety/security as important factors of student choice, especially a safe campus environment, where the HE-provider is creating a safe environment for its students. The managers further identified the academic reputation of lecturers and qualifications, as well as small classes for better learning and lecturer-support, as important selling factors for PHEI A. Both these perceived competitive advantages coincide with the importance of academic issues reported by student-respondents in the quantitative phase. Managers further regarded PHEI A's practical approach and work integrated learning (WIL), as being effective in preparing students for a job. It therefore also represents a major selling point for the organisation, according to the managers.

In the survey, students concurrently rated employment prospects very highly. Managers further reported their organisation's uniqueness, as being attractive to students. This links up with safety and security, as PHEI A's unique Afrikaans and white character represent something that is familiar to them; something that makes them feel safe. It thus seems that the managers know what PHEI A's areas of competitive advantage entail; as they identified the same top three factors as representing competitive advantages for PHEI A, as the student-respondents in the survey. Safety and security, employment practices and academic issues can, therefore, be identified as distinctive areas of competitive advantages for PHEI A.

The managers at PHEI B contended that smaller classes and subsequent personal attention; as a practice orientation aimed at preparing students for a job; as well as a high throughput rate that constitutes the main reasons for students to register at this organisation. As described in Section 6.5, students rated employment prospects; safety and security; and academic issues as the most important factors that have influenced their choice of HE-provider, in that specific order. Table 6.10 in Section 6.5 depicts internship/practicum programmes as one of the inter-related items of the most important choice-factor for PHEI B-student respondents, namely employment factors.

By the same token, small classes (for better learning), as depicted in Table 6.11 in Section 6.5, represents one of the interrelated items of academic issues, the third most important choice factors for the student-respondents. The managers were seemingly on the right track by identifying the above items, as important areas of competitive advantage. It is just the high throughput rate that seemingly does not represent a particularly important item in students' choice.

From the above, it seems that the interviewees have a good idea of the areas of competitive advantage for their respective organisations, as perceived by their students, especially PHEI-A interviewees. It further seems that, as described in Section 6.5, the survey-respondents of both organisations identified the same factors as most important in influencing their choice of HE-provider. The three most important factors are safety and security, employment prospects and academic issues. As described in Section 6.5, this is in line with some local studies like that of Wiese (2008), who identified safety/security issues, as well as employment prospects as consistently being the most important choice-factors for students at six south African public universities. Bezuidenhout (2013) also identified safety/security issues, as well as employment prospects, as being the most important choice factors at the same two organisations of the current study. The importance of academic issues, specifically the item of smaller classes for better learning, is in concurrence with a study among 1600 independent colleges by the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (2011) in the United States. The current study identified smaller classes for better lecturer-student interactions, as a very important characteristic of private providers. As described in Section 6.5, the identification of safety and security, as most important factor, stands in sharp contrast to various international studies where

safety/security is not even listed, as an option for students in surveys. It is interesting to notice that even in the absence of a structured, goal directed strategizing, the managers at both PHEIs seem to mostly know what their areas of competitive advantage consist of.

6.6.3 Theme 3: Praxis

The strategy actors; the processes, tools and techniques; the internal and external organisational context; as well as the resultant competitive advantages, as addressed in the previous themes, serve as a comprehensive backdrop to describe strategizing sessions. This theme relates to what really happens during these episodes of strategy praxis, with specific reference to the social interactions between the strategy actors during these sections. Table 6.15 depicts the categories and codes of this theme.

Table 6.15: Theme 3: Praxis (own compilation)

PHEI A	PHEI B
Category: interaction	
Diverse personalities; top management interaction-dynamics; little interaction between top and middle managers; interaction between top academic manager and middle managers; interaction at the annual strategizing session.	Different personalities. Owners vs non-owners; top management interaction-dynamics; little interaction between directors and middle managers; interaction between top academic manager and middle managers; bond between middle managers.
Category: interaction techniques and dealing with conflict	
Manipulation (CEO page 58); Rationality; aggression; ADD CEO TECHNIQUES Conflict during meetings; avoiding conflict; reaction to conflict	‘stand my ground’; ‘I am the boss’; reducing conflict, keeping quiet; talk to a family member; choosing the right time; using facts; drafting documents

This section describes the categories and codes, as depicted in Table 6.15.

Interaction

This section warrants a longer discussion; since social interaction is largely a construct of the current study. Social interaction episodes entail the actors attempting to influence each other (Turner, 1988; Godwyn & Hoffer Gittel, 2012). This includes using communication; conflict; politics; power; negotiations; impression management; dramaturgy; and social skills. (Turner, 1988). Group behavioural dynamics, including

the stages of group development; as well as group properties (roles, norms, status, size, cohesiveness and diversity) (Robbins & Judge, 2013) may also shape the interactions. Gibson *et al.* (2012), further stress the importance of conflict; power; and politics in shaping interaction. This section thus deals with the above-described latent factors, or undercurrents, that create a socio-cultural space for the interaction to take place (Rummel, 1979), in this case, within the episodes of strategy praxis.

In linking to practitioners, as described in Theme 1, it is necessary to again look at the strategy actors in top management at PHEI A and B and their different personalities. Determining different theory-founded personality types falls outside the scope of the current research. The current study rather reports on certain interviewee traits as self-reported, reported by other managers and observations from my field notes. The CEO of PHEI A is, by his own admission, a dreamer, a driven person, who wants things to happen immediately:

So, I might be the dreamer. We must go bigger, further, we must do other things..”
(INT:10:38)

The CEO and one of the other three top managers have very strong, dominant personalities. One manager is soft-spoken and less assertive, who wants things to work out; she is touted by one manager as rather a doer than a fighter. This manager sometimes struggles to hold her own during interactions with the dominant strategy-actors and admits to sometimes getting hurt in the process:

There are two very strong personalities, and, for me, these two personalities can be very dominant at times, so that the other two members just keep quiet and just accept...and it hurts me. (INT:6:44)

The fourth top manager is very quiet; she would rather air her opinion after heated interactions are over:

I am, of course, the calm [quiet] one. [name withheld] is not a shrinking violet, and [name withheld] is just trying to sort out everything... (INT:11:17)

Among the owners and top managers of PHEI B, who mostly interact during strategizing episodes, the owners and one top manager have very strong personalities; people that will stubbornly stick to their point:

...[top manager name withheld] has a strong personality and [he or she; gender withheld] is very strong on the point [he or she] stands for...and [he or she] is opiniated, because [he or she] knows [his or her] role, but [the director, name withheld] and [director name withheld] is just like that. (INT:5:19). [I have a] very strong personality. Yes, yes, I lead it mostly. (INT:3:37 I have a very strong personality, yes. (INT:4:14).

Comparable to the soft-spoken manager at PHEI A, the one PHEI B top manager is not as forceful, as the other; and he wants the team to agree, so that the job at hand can be done.

...a weak point of mine is that I am not assertive enough...Many times I feel that, between us four, I am one that stands here and the other three are very much the same in terms of personality... (INT:5:25)

- ***Interaction-dynamics between the top managers***

With PHEI A, the top management, as well as middle management seemingly collectively regard themselves as the counterbalance to the forceful CEO; they must constantly reign him in; as he is the passionate dreamer and they are realists, concerned about the academic and logistical implications of impulsive decision-making:

...Mr. [CEO name withheld] is rather quick to say and do things. And then we must try and rein him in... (INT:11:17)

He means that this is his place. It is his place and, if he says it is like that, it is like that. Then it takes a few weeks to get him to think differently. (INT:11:24)

The CEO of PHEI A mentioned that he expects his personnel to share his entrepreneurial views; to 'run' with him, but to his disappointment, they do not; since they are caught up in the day-to-day operational issues.

Like PHEI A interviewees, the top managers of PHEI B who are not directors, as well the middle managers that were interviewed seem to canvas for the academic interests of the organisation, in order to offset the two managing directors' business focus. One top manager describes this battle:

So, um, but I still find it difficult to reconcile academia and the business. And this is where I will be like a fox terrier over and over again. (INT:6:16)

Episodes of strategy praxis are shaped by the interaction-dynamics especially between the top managers; this is where most of the strategizing happens in PHEI A. The CEO, as a dreamer, has a grand vision for the organisation; he wants it to grow and prosper. He constantly seeks ways to make this happen, but the organisation must constantly negotiate challenges and crises; it was mentioned earlier that the organisation's strategizing mostly entails reacting to these challenges and crises. One middle manager described how the organisation perpetually reacts to the changing requirements of the Council for Higher Education (CHE):

But CHE goes and says something, and then we react. (INT:1:20) Our vision is reactive. (FG:1:54)

The CEO feels that he is the best equipped to face these challenges and to take the organisation forward; and he will do it forcefully if he must. The CEO a driven and impatient person who makes decisions spontaneously; he want things to be done instantly. This compels the rest of the top management team to remind him of the operational and academic constraints; to try and stop him from making rash decisions. Strategizing will usually happen where The CEO will include an item on the top management meeting agenda for deliberation. This item might, for example, relate to a new idea of the CEO, or happenings within PHEI A, or its operating environment that needs urgent attention. This item is then discussed at the meeting, where the CEO makes his point and then tries to get the top managers' buy-in; he, in his own words, tries to manipulate them into thinking that they made the decision that he has already taken before the interactions. If this approach does not work out, he will get more forceful. Intense verbal conflict follows; this is something that the CEO, an ex-soldier who is used to battling the enemy, relishes and views as healthy for the organisation. He thus does not take push back from the other top managers personally; it seems to encourage him to fight even harder for what he wants:

Okay, it is rather easy. It is, put the point up for debate. Ask for inputs; discuss the inputs. And then, as the inputs come, evaluate them and talk back...And this will normally happen after the whole thing has been deliberated; or you will try to get buy-in from everyone and try to keep ... So, the first prize is to say that the whole team made the decision. Second prize is being a bit more dictatorial ['we will do what I say']; while the third prize is the fire brigade. The building is burning, and the fire chief reacts [immediately and decisively]. So, one moves between those personalities. And my personality is fire chief-inclined, especially under pressure.

Um and then I continue. So, it is the nature of the risk that will determine how quickly and how decisively you are going to make the decision. (INT:10:58)

One manager still referred to the very heated and loud arguments between the CEO and the former academic director, irrespective of who were in the vicinity. If the CEO still does not make headway, he will eventually claim that he is the owner, and the only one with money tied up in the organisation. The others are only employees and the final decision therefore lies with him. These strategizing episodes regularly end with the CEO getting his way, despite the other managers' misgivings as claimed by a top manager:

And then we will arrive at the meeting and then it will be one of the agenda points and then he will mention his plan, why he wants to close and this and this. Then we get the opportunity to talk about it, but he has already made his decision. (INT:6:38)

Many times, these impulsive decisions do not work out; and they must be changed over time; because the CEO was not prepared to wait and do further research before acting. Other dynamics include two of the top managers, who are, according to certain interviewees, underqualified and are just there to get paid for doing a job, take sides and are sometimes teaming up against one top manager, who is very committed to what she does. The CEO and one top manager, who are dominant, also sometimes 'walks over' the more soft-spoken manager and that hurts her by her own admission.

With PHEI B, the two managing directors are the majority shareholders; and they are sisters, who established the organisation together. They have worked very hard to build PHEI B to where it is today, and it is very hard for them to relinquish any form of control. One manager has admitted that they are, however, slowly beginning to involve other managers more. When any one of the sisters thinks of an idea, she will always contact the other one, even if this is after hours to deliberate the idea and possible decisions:

The one will never decide on something without informing the other...but it could be a WhatsApp that says: 'listen, I have this problem' or 'this is it, what do you think?' Hmm, it is a, almost a...a bond that we have fostered through the years, you know, it is just how it is. You 'cc' one just quickly...It is, you know, family dynamics. This is how it works. (INT:3:40)

They will then decide whether, and to what extent, the top managers need to be involved to advise them. The directors thus almost view the top managers as consultants, rather than as full-fledged team members. It must be said though that the directors of PHEI B do value the knowledge and experience of the top managers; and has come to rely heavily on their advice; but it is still advice that they still ultimately decide whether to use it or not. One top manager commented on being used as consultant:

In my opinion, I am used primarily as a consultant on particular matters when needed, although I am a member of the management team. (NS:5:10)

...they respect my opinion, but there were a few times that I have experienced where they literally said: This is how we are going to do it where [top manager name withheld] came out and said: "We have now discussed it for about half an hour, or an hour; and we are still not listened to." (INT:5:30)

As mentioned earlier, the two managing directors and one top manager have very strong personalities with many strategizing sessions typified by significant conflict; where these managers stubbornly stick to their own points-of-view. The one top manager is less assertive; a reconciler who tries to mediate in attempting to get everyone to work together in getting things done, even if this means having to compromise.

And then I am in the minority. So, I almost have to compromise the keep the thing moving forward, over and above mediating... (INT:5:26)

Two top managers at PHEI B have developed a close bond; a type of strategic alliance in their endeavours to gain traction for their ideas and influence decision-making during strategizing engagements with the directors. The one manager likens it to a game of chess, where they must strategize when and where they must make their moves; or they position themselves to achieve what they want:

And this is how our processes work is that [sic] and it is almost like in terms of playing chess. We chat about the things first, but my opinion carries weight. So, when [top manager name withheld] says: "listen, I have already discussed this with me, and these are [his or her gender withheld] suggestions, we've reached consensus on this and this, this is our suggestion". (INT:5:13)

Family dynamics also play an important role at PHEI B, where the directors' children are slowly being involved in strategizing sessions. Conflict emanates from managerial issues with their children; this is putting a lot of strain on the managing directors; and it negatively influences their relationship with each other:

On many days, this [family dynamics] causes me to want to give up. (IN:4:49)

- **Limited interaction between top and middle managers**

There is no formal platform for middle managers to strategize with the top management team, other than the monthly middle management meetings and one-on-one sessions between the middle managers and the academic top manager. This leads to the middle managers' frustration at not being included in the strategic goings-on of PHEI A:

The most enduring feeling over the years has been one of frustration, particularly when it comes to decisions that may affect my own department. (NS:1:1)

At PHEI B, the situation is very much the same, when the directors do not strategize with the middle-management team. They seem to be avoiding conflict with the middle managers and the rest of the employees for that matter; as there is no instance of any engagement with employees as a group. They use the academic manager, as a buffer between them and other managers. They do, however, allow an audience to individual middle managers on an ad hoc basis, where these managers must make a formal appointment with one or both directors to present their suggestions:

...our directors cannot handle conflict. (INT:8:32)

- **Interaction between the academic top manager and the middle managers**

Episodes of strategy praxis happen at the monthly middle management meetings and sometimes at the one-on-one meetings between the academic top managers and the middle managers at PHEI A, as described earlier. There are, however, very few of these strategizing instances; and they seem to get lost between the myriad of operational issues that are deliberated at these meetings. Interactions at these meetings are much more genial, with the academic top manager allowing for open communication; and they seem to value everyone's inputs. The atmosphere is generally described as being positive.

An 'us versus them' feeling among middle managers towards the owners is evident at both PHEIs:

Yes, yes, we can, we manage better among the departments; and I feel that it puts everyone at ease to also provide inputs. And everyone shares their knowledge. It is rather amazing to me. (INT:5:12)

There are instances of conflict, but it is well-managed; and it largely ends in amicable conclusions. Decisions taken here or suggestions made, are then tabled at the weekly top management meetings by the academic manager. These decisions are frequently overruled; or no feedback is provided to a point where many middle managers have decided to withdraw from engaging in any form of strategizing; and they then settle for doing their own thing. Some middle managers have also reported that the academic manager sometimes harbours feelings of resignation; informing the managers that she would take the ideas or decisions to top management; but they are not going to listen to her anyway:

When I talk about these things, she [the academic director] just says: "ag, it will not help if I tell [CEO name withheld]"; or she says: "Let me try and tell him", but then I do not get any feedback from her side anyway. (INT:3:33)

One manager harboured negative feelings about the monthly meetings and claimed that the ones with the loudest voices were the only ones that were heard; and that there is a break in trust at the one-on-one sessions.

The interaction between the academic manager and middle managers is very similar at PHEI B; where the work relationships among the middle managers and with the academic top manager are generally positive. Middle managers' voices are heard, and they are encouraged to participate at the middle-management meetings that are chaired by the academic top manager:

She [academic manager] listens to suggestions, yes. And she is open to listen; she does not have a dictatorial leadership style...She provides leadership, she sets a good example; and if things are communicated to us regarding stuff that need changing, the motivation is there to change. (INT:7:9)

Decisions and suggestions are then also taken to the managing directors; but these decisions are also over-ruled, and very little feedback is provided. This leads to the same emotions of frustration with managers, coming to a point that these frustrations are touted by one manager as being a major reason for the high turnover rate among academics at this organisation; this manager duly left PHEI B a few weeks after participating in the semi-structured interview of the current research:

...and this is where the frustration in the workplace happens to us specifically. And this why we lose very good employees, because people – it is not that they do not like their jobs; rather their opinions are not valued. And to act on that frustration, it is easier to resign. (INT:8:28)

- **Middle managers share a bond**

Middle managers are “brothers in strife”, as one manager called it at PHEI B. Another middle manager stated that they “have each other’s backs”. This refers to the middle managers sharing a bond in facing the challenges within the organisation.

interaction techniques and dealing with conflict

Interviewees have reported different techniques that they employ in dealing with conflict, or in attempting to get their ideas accepted. As mentioned in a previous section, the CEO of PHEI A has admitted to trying to manipulate people into thinking that they are making the decisions; and the academic top manager at PHEI A also sometimes engages in subtle manipulation with managers:

“I will sell it in such a way that the people eventually think that it is actually their viewpoint ...” (INT:6:22)

Concurrently, top managers and even middle managers at PHEI B attempt to manipulate situations and the managing directors, in order to get what they want. One middle manager, for example, waits for the right time to engage with the directors, or sometimes uses a family member of the directors to get a positive response from them. Other interaction techniques reported at both organisations include becoming aggressive and loud; being uncompromising - ‘standing my ground’; compromising; being rational; presenting facts; drafting documents and biding one’s time; as well as declaring that ‘I am the boss and the final decision lies with me’.

Manipulation alludes to the terms of ‘phronesis and mētis’ as described in Chapter 5. Phronesis refers to ‘practical wisdom or intelligence’ that is gained through experience:

the ability to act aptly in social situations (Chia & Rasche, 2015); whereas *phronesis* refers to practical intelligence within an ethical or moral framework; *mētis* may have an 'unsavoury' connotation: the practical intelligence to react to situations in 'underhanded' or opportunistic ways, reversing fortunes and getting away with it – a type of 'street-smart' or 'cunning intelligence' (Chia & Rasche, 2015). This *mētis* or cunning intelligence is evident in the CEO of PHEI A wilfully trying to manipulate the top management team into accepting his decisions, or where the two top managers supposedly teamed up against the other top manager. *Phronesis* is apparent in the way in which top managers of PHEI B, in a chess game fashion, play the right moves to get traction for their inputs.

Conflict is unavoidable and managers have ways of dealing with it. As mentioned, the CEO of PHEI A relishes conflict and heated arguments and sometimes promotes conflict. He claims that they “play the ball” during these arguments. It seems that it does not affect some managers – one top manager says that the screaming does not bother her; and she says that she just keeps quiet during these conflict situations. One top manager, however, admitted that it hurts her emotionally. The managing directors at PHEI B do not particularly relish conflict; but they will engage in heated discussions, when this is deemed necessary. Other ways of dealing with conflict, as reported include keeping quiet; trying to avoid it; and reducing it by trying to calm things down, or to compromise.

6.7 A SYNTHESIZED CASE STUDY SYNOPSIS

This section provides a summarised, synthesized description of the cases within the two different organisational settings. Table 6.16 provides a summary of the salient findings from the case analyses. These findings are explicitly related to the research questions, and ultimately to the research aim of the current research in Chapter 7. It must be noted though that Chapter 7 explicitly links the current study's salient findings to the different research problems and the research aim. The sub-processes of social interaction at the two case study organisations, as depicted in Table 6.16, warrants a longer discussion; since it addresses the aim of the current research, namely, to gain a deeper understanding of social interaction and its influence on strategizing at the two organisations.

Table 6.16: Salient findings from the case analysis (own compilation)

<p>The owners dictate how strategizing is done</p> <p>The owners are fully committed financially and fully involved in the day-to-day management of their organisations. They consequently try to control strategizing and struggle to let go; to give organisational employees more agency in strategizing.</p>
<p>Strategizing is top-down</p> <p>Strategizing is mostly done by the owners with inputs from top management. Middle managers have limited inputs in strategizing; they mostly implement strategies drafted by top management.</p>
<p>Strategies mostly emerge in dealing with crises and challenges</p> <p>The organisations engage in very little to no formal strategizing. Strategizing mostly entails reacting to challenges and dealing with crises.</p>
<p>Strategizing is ineffective</p> <p>Most interviewees regarded strategizing as ineffective; some even considered it as a waste of time. Strategies are not transparent; and there is no shared vision within the organisations. The organisations' enrolments are stagnating; and they do not know how to remedy this.</p>
<p>The competitive advantages are known</p> <p>The organisations mostly know why students chose to enrol in their programmes. The question is whether these competitive advantages are communicated well enough within a very competitive environment, and whether pursuing other competitive advantages might appeal to a broader section of the market.</p>
<p>Three sub-processes social interaction shape strategizing</p> <p>Chosen strategies and eventual strategic outcomes are significantly shaped by the social interaction between the strategy practitioners of the respective case study organisations within unique intra- and extra-organisational contexts. This social interaction consists of three sub-processes that are interwoven with the strategic endeavours of the case study organisations.</p>

6.7.1 The three sub-processes of social interaction

As described in Chapter 3, the interactionist paradigm views organisations from a relational perspective (Godwyn & Hoffer Gittell, 2012). Critchley (2012) suggests that,

in its simplest form, organisations merely represent a group of people continuously interacting and creating shared meaning; a subjective reality. Interactionism in organisations thus entails continuous interactions and evolving relationships (including negotiations) between individuals, resulting in shared meaning or reality, identity and connectedness (Godwyn & Hoffer Gittel, 2012). Turner (1988) maintains that the actors try to influence each other during these interactions. Within this interactionist paradigm, the current study subscribes to Turner’s (1988) three sub-processes of social interaction, as they are depicted in Figure 3.3 of Chapter 3, and again shown in Figure 6.2.

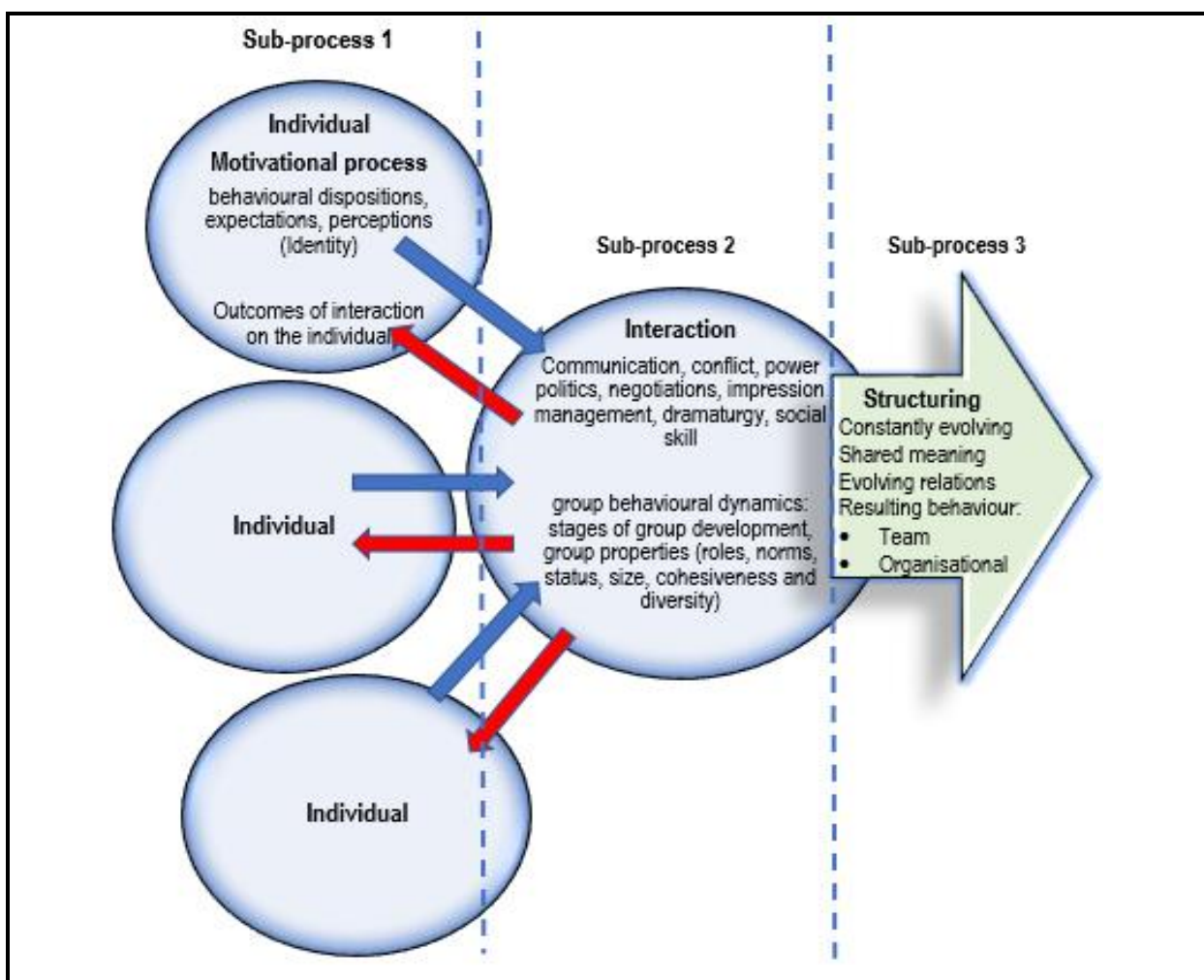


Figure 6.2: The three sub-processes of social interaction (Adapted from Turner, 1988)

As described in Chapter 3, the researcher has incorporated the work of various authors (Snyder & Swann, Jr., 1978:160-161; Rummel, 1979; Knights & Willmott,

2011:213-215; Vaara & Whittington, 2012:20; Robbins & Judge, 2013:39-68; Strydom 2013:20); in augmenting Turner's (1988:16) three sub-processes, as depicted in Figure 6.2. The idea is that social actors have a certain predisposition (motivation or willingness to interact) to interact in a situation (motivational process). The actual interaction (interaction process) will then be repeated over time, leading to mutual understanding and an organised structure (structuring process). Each sub-process consists of various variables that shape the sub-process, as well as the other two sub-processes. This social interaction process regarding the strategizing praxis episodes is consequently briefly discussed in this section.

6.7.1.1 Sub-process 1: motivational process

For the two organisations, various individual predispositions (willingness to interact) were identified among the strategy actors under Theme 1. These predispositions are shaped by individual motivational factors of the different actors, including their different personality traits (behavioural disposition), their feelings following interactions, as well as their meaning-making and subsequent evolving identities following perpetual interactions over time. These predispositions, together with what the actors expect to happen during different episodes of praxis, what they think or believe of their fellow actors, as well as the perceived importance of the specific strategizing session, will shape the way in which they interact. Certain managers of the two PHEIs experienced positive emotions, like feeling empowered; energised; positive; enjoyment; as well as experiencing meaningfulness. Negative emotions included frustration; negativity; powerlessness; unhappiness; disappointment; distrust; emotional strain; feeling disheartened; feeling undervalued; feeling overwhelmed; feeling like a robot or puppet', as well as not feeling part of the organisation. These predispositions are also shaped by the managers' experiences over time of how things are done at the organisation, including how they make sense of strategizing engagements. Managers described entering interactions with aggressive predispositions; a predisposition of being the alpha-male that dominates the interactions; predispositions of resignation ("I cannot change anything anyway, so why even try?"); disengaged pre-dispositions ("do what you want, I do not care anymore"); as well as withdrawing from strategy-making activities.

6.7.1.2 Sub-process 2: interaction

The actual interaction during the episodes of strategy praxis at the two PHEIs, as discussed in Theme 3, entailed strategy practitioners trying to influence each other through interaction techniques, like manipulation; becoming aggressive and loud; using conflict; being uncompromising- “standing my ground”; compromising; being rational; presenting facts; drafting documents and choosing the right time; working through others, as well as declaring that “I am the boss and the final decision lies with me”. Evolving dynamics that also influence these interactions include owners’ and other managers’ negotiations and renegotiations around business versus academic interests; family dynamics; taking sides; and heated arguments. Managers displayed different personality traits, including dominant people who are uncompromising, softer-spoken people who are sometimes dominated; peacemakers who are willing to be compromised; as well as quiet people, who choose to strategize when heated debates have settled down. Strategizing episodes are also characterised by conflict, including heated arguments at times. Managers react in different ways to this conflict – from relishing it, to avoiding it, to trying to reduce it through mediation and compromising.

6.7.1.3 Sub-process 3: Structuring

The interaction process with all its intricacies gets repeated over time, resulting in shared meaning between group members. Gibson *et al.* (2012:399), refer to the viewpoint that organisational structure is represented by the activities of ‘patterned regularity’. Through interaction, the group’s actors create knowledge and share facts (Shen, 2013:71). This links with Foucault’s writings on power exchanges between group members in producing knowledge; a battle to create *truth*, or the rules in creating shared meaning (Peach, Jr. & Bieber, 2015:27-28). Strategizing episodes at PHEI A usually take place during weekly top-management meetings, where the CEO tries to dominate the proceedings and other top managers trying to reign him in. Strategizing-related decisions from middle managers get presented to top management, for their final consideration. Strategizing episodes at PHEI B are characterised as discussions between the managing directors, who then consult other top managers, as needed in strategy-making. Family members are also sometimes involved in these processes. Top managers’ inputs are increasingly being relied upon at PHEI B by the directors.

The resultant feelings and meaning-making shape managers' predisposition over time; and thus, the cycle continues.

Structuring also includes how these interactions influence the creation of strategies and the eventual competitive advantages at the PHEIs. From an organisational behavioural viewpoint, Robbins and Judge (2013:25-29) refer to the outcomes of interactions on an individual, group and organisational level. In addition to individuals' 'attitudes', 'satisfaction' and 'performance', the group's 'cohesion' and 'functioning', and ultimately, the organisation's 'profitability' and 'survival,' These are all shaped by repeated interactions and subsequent structuring processes (Robbins & Judge, 2013:25-29). At the organisational level, the current study investigated the strategies and competitive advantages resultant from perpetual social interactions. Many strategies at PHEI A and B seem to emerge from dealing with challenges and crises. Strategies are not formally planned or drafted; but they mainly emerge in a pattern of activities and decision-making. The specific strategy-related decisions taken (mostly in reacting to challenges/crises) seem to be dependent on the constant negotiations and renegotiations between the owners, who favour business-inclined strategies and top managers who are championing academic causes.

Although not planned deliberately, both organisations do have competitive advantages that managers correctly identified and that are attractive to several students. Both organisations' inability to grow their registered student numbers might pose the question whether these competitive advantages are valued enough, or by a large enough audience; and if they are, whether they have been sufficiently communicated to the market.

6.7.1.4 The external and internal context

The external and internal business environment that enables and constrains strategizing in the PHEIs, as discussed under Theme 2, should not be disregarded. Even though the external organisational environment of the two PHEIs entails a South African HE-landscape that poses tough challenges like zero subsidies for private providers; a negative perception of private providers; a racialised legacy; strong competition; and a depressed economy, the potential of this industry is evident in the

growing business investment in this industry, as described in Chapter 4. The current strategy-related processes, tools and techniques are overall mostly viewed by the interviewees of both case-study organisations as being ineffective.

6.7.2 Final thoughts

From the above discussion, as well as the narrative records in Section 6.6, it is evident that strategizing at the two organisations of the current study does not entail a rational process that is purposefully planned and implemented in a linear fashion, as is instructed in many strategy manuals. Strategizing manifests itself within an intricate web of social interaction within the organisations. It entails messy, informal, unplanned activities, that mostly emerge from the interaction between people with emotions that create shared meaning; a subjective reality over time within unique organisational contexts.

6.8 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Chapter 6 has provided a discussion of the findings of the current research, aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of social interaction, as a social mechanism in shaping strategizing. A case-study approach was employed to conduct the current research within a pragmatic worldview that frames the current study. The case study was further guided by a qualitatively driven mixed-method approach that awarded primacy to social interactionism, strategy as practice, and the practical turn approach; social interaction, as a social mechanism; as well hermeneutics ('verstehen') and heuristics (practitioners' problem-solving nature) (Friedrichs & Kratochwil, 2009:706).

An initial comprehensive narrative record with rich descriptions and verbatim quotes was constructed for both case study settings (organisations), based on a thematic analysis of the transcriptions of the naïve sketches; semi-structured interviews; and focus group discussions of the respective case study organisations. The results from a quantitative survey regarding student choice were also incorporated. Because this initial analysis is very comprehensive, it is not included in this chapter; but it has been made available at the following website address for perusal: https://drive.google.com/open?id=1Ez73sugdDuKleVhbF_BVWPY9HqEHCJxb. This

was followed by a cross-case study context report, in which the findings from the two case study settings were compared. This report entailed a refined version from the initial analysis: it contained less codes; and irrelevant information was omitted. This chapter lastly offered an integrated narrative report on the social interaction processes that shaped strategizing at the two case study organisations. Unlike many studies that aim to provide generic descriptions of how strategy should be done, the current research set out to explore strategizing, as a function of social interaction. The findings included rich descriptions with verbatim quotes that offered an account of strategy actors' lived experiences regarding strategy-related activities and interactions. The findings indicated that strategizing at the organisations does not entail a rational and linear process; it rather represents strategy actors' practices that are shaped by a myriad of variables within a network of social interaction between these actors within unique contexts that simultaneously enable and constrain these practices. The final chapter provides a summary of the main findings of the current research; and it links it to the main research problem, as well as the supplementary investigative research questions, including an introduction of a conceptual framework to guide future research aimed at understanding social interaction, as a social mechanism in shaping strategizing.

Chapter 7 also offers some recommendations for future research, regarding the chosen approach of the current research.

CHAPTER 7: RESEARCH CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Heeding the call for strategy research to evolve from a “managerial-economist perspective” to an “empirically informed social science” (Clegg *et al.*, 2011:13), the current research set out to investigate strategy as a function of social interaction. No academic work could be found that specifically investigates strategizing within an interactionist paradigm; focusing on continuous interactions and evolving relationships (Godwyn & Hoffer Gittell, 2012:xvi). Understanding how social interaction as a social mechanism shapes strategizing was consequently the aim of the current study. The socially informed, practice-based strategy-as-practice perspective allows for an integrated exploration of the actual strategizing activities or practices (praxis) of strategy actors (practitioners), as well as the processes and tools of strategizing (practices). As a social interactionist paradigm calls for the understanding of phenomena, the strategy-as-practice perspective offered an appropriate lens through which strategizing was interrogated in the current research. The current study further endeavoured to pragmatically link the socially interactive strategy praxis of actors to the strategic outcomes of organisations.

Furthermore, no literature addresses the actual strategizing practices of strategy practitioners in the South African private higher education institutions (PHEIs). The current research explored strategizing within two small South African profit-seeking PHEIs; these two organisations resemble the most prevalent private higher education (HE) providers within this industry. The current research consequently set out to expand the body of knowledge concerning the strategizing practices of strategy actors within a South African private higher education context. The envisaged main contribution of the current study was, however, to expand the body of knowledge regarding the influence of social interaction, as a social mechanism in shaping strategy. The current research also strived to offer a conceptual framework to investigate social interactions and their impact on competitive strategy-making in different contexts: analytical generalisation in a qualitative fashion that presupposes

evolving subjective realities within unique situational contexts, as opposed to generic applied objective realities. The structure of the thesis is summarised below and depicted in Figure 7.1:

Chapter 1 provided a background to and motivation for the current study. The research aim that is elucidated by the main research question and sub-questions was also presented. This was followed by a brief description of the research's main constructs.

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 encompassed the literature review for the current research. Chapter 2 offered a critical investigation of organisational strategy. The divergence in scholarly thought in this discipline was introduced. Dominant strategy paradigms were further examined, as well as topical issues, like competitive advantage and value.

Chapter 3 examined literature related to the strategy-as-practice perspective, as a sociology-based alternative to the main strategic thought paradigms. Social interaction within an organisational and in the strategy making context was also investigated. Chapter 3 further identified, justified and described the theoretical framework that guided the empirical phase of the current research.

Chapter 4 provided the empirical research context for the current study, namely two small private higher education institutions in South Africa.

In Chapter 5, the case study design details were framed within the current study's aim and resultant research questions; the research proposition; the theoretical framework; the research context; the philosophical underpinnings; as well as the research approach.

The findings of the current research were reported in Chapter 6. The chapter included a cross-case study context analysis report where the findings from the two case study settings were compared. Narrative reports included rich descriptions substantiated by verbatim participant-quotes for both selected organisations of the case study. This chapter also contained an integrated interpretive, theory-related narrative report on the social interaction processes that shaped strategizing at the two case study organisations.

The purpose of Chapter 7 is to describe the new theoretical contributions of the current research. This is done by means of explicitly addressing the respective research questions of the current study. This includes a proffered conceptual framework for investigating social interaction and strategizing. This is followed by conclusions drawn from this inductive research. Finally, this chapter also describes the current study's limitations and offers some recommendations for future research. The structure of Chapter 7 is depicted in Figure 7.1

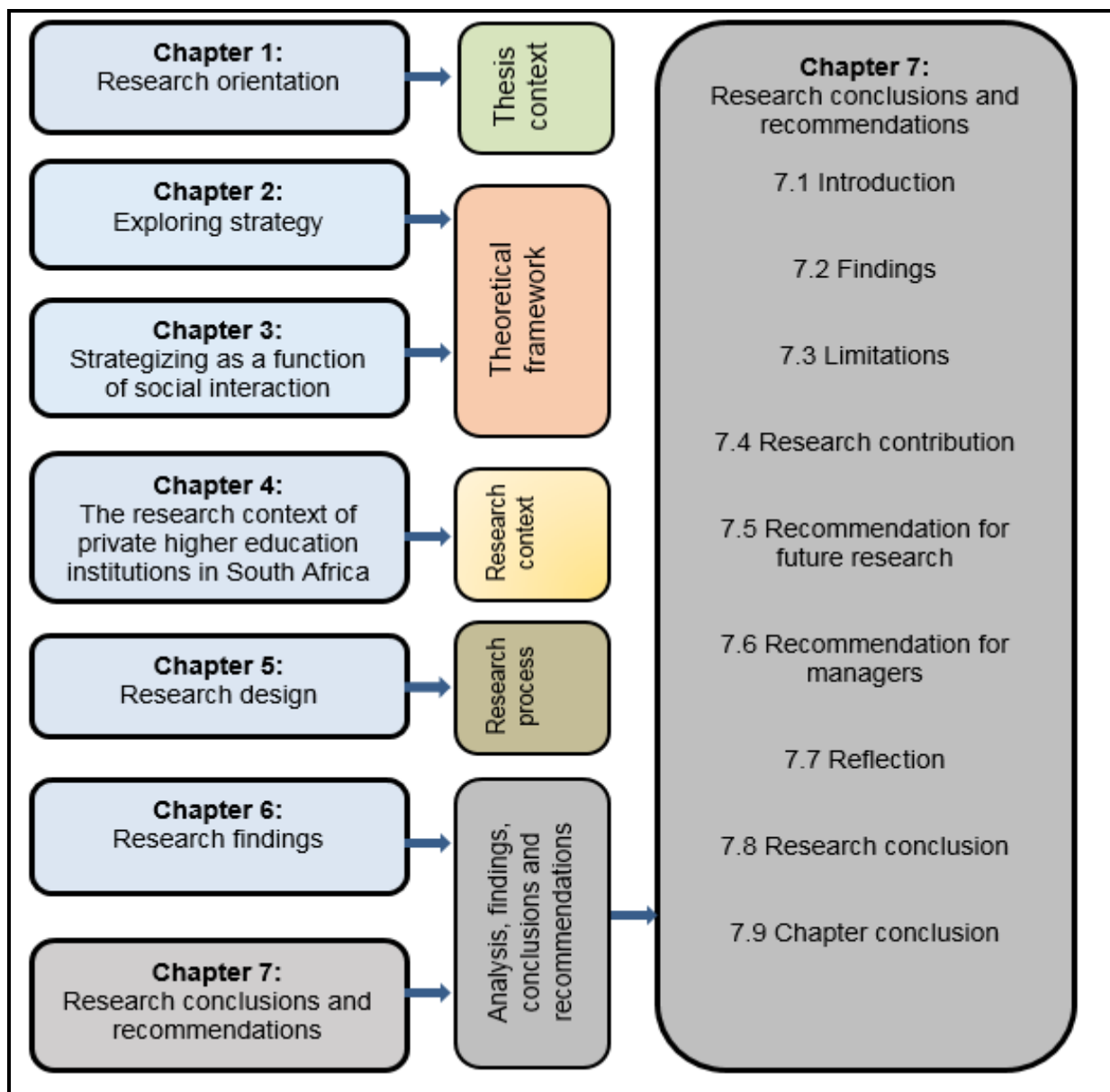


Figure 7.1: The structure of Chapter 7 (own compilation)

7.2 FINDINGS

The aim of the current research was to gain a deeper understanding of social interaction as a social mechanism in shaping strategizing, and to present a conceptual framework to guide further inquiry in this area of interest. As described in Chapter 5, to realise this aim, the current study employed a case study research design to collect; analyse; interpret; and report the empirical data. The case research was done within two different research settings, namely two small South African private higher education institutions. The main cases entailed the episodes of strategy praxis between strategy actors at the two case study organisations. As described in Chapter 5, Section 5.8.1.2, the subcases, namely the practitioners and the practices of the respective case study organisations formed an integral part of the current research. This is because they are instrumental in elucidating the social interactions between practitioners during episodes of praxis. These subcases are consequentially part and parcel of analyses and reporting of the findings, in order to eventually create a better understanding of how social interaction shapes strategizing within the case study organisations.

The current study subscribes to an interactionist perspective in regarding strategizing as a function of social interaction. Within a pragmatic worldview, this qualitatively driven mixed methods social research consequently employed naïve sketches, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions to solicit the lived experiences of the top and middle managers, as they interacted during episodes of strategy praxis. The empirical research consequently yielded rich descriptions validated through verbatim quotes of strategy actors' social interactions during different episodes of strategy praxis. To facilitate a deeper understanding of these strategy praxis episodes and how they lead to strategy outcomes, these rich descriptions also addressed the motivations and actions of the individual strategy actors (practitioners), the external and internal organisational context of interactions (practices), as well as the respective competitive advantages of the two case study organisations. A quantitative survey was employed to identify the organisations' areas of competitive advantage, as perceived by their students. These survey-results were also compared with the two PHEIs' areas of competitive advantages, as perceived by the managers. The current research, accordingly, aimed to offer explanatory insights

into how social interaction, as a social mechanism, shapes the strategizing practices of strategy actors (micro-level), and ultimately, the strategic outcomes of organisations (macro-level). To realise this overall research aim, the main and sub-research questions of the current study are answered in this section.

7.2.1 The main research question

- What are the strategizing practices of top and middle managers, as they socially interact at two small South African private higher education institutions?

Section 6.6.3 provides a comparison between the strategizing practices of top and middle managers of the two PHEIs of the case study; while Section 6.7.1.2 provides an integrated synopsis of the strategizing practices, as part of a sub-process of social interaction. The findings discussed in Section 6.6.3 and 6.7.1.2 are also linked to existing theory. Strategizing episodes are not formally planned; they are mostly reactive; and they take place, in order to deal with challenges, or impending crises.

Most strategizing sessions at the two case study organisations seem to be underscored by conflicting business and academic interests: the company owners impatiently want to advance their business-aligned plans; while the rest of top management is trying to delay rash decision-making, in order to allow time for academic considerations. Strategy-making sessions are, therefore, characterised by perpetual negotiations and renegotiations that relate to the business and academic interests of the organisations. During strategizing episodes, strategy actors try to influence each other through interaction techniques, like manipulation; becoming aggressive and loud; using conflict; being uncompromising - “standing my ground”; compromising; being rational; presenting facts; drafting documents and choosing the right time; working through others; as well as declaring that “I am the boss and the final decision lies with me”. This relates to authors’ descriptions of social interaction episodes that entail the actors attempting to influence each other (Turner, 1988:13; Godwyn & Hoffer Gittel, 2012:xvi). This includes using communication; conflict; politics; power; negotiations; impression management; dramaturgy; and social skills. (Turner, 1988:13). The above description seems to confirm Strydom’s (2013:27) suggestion that actual interaction between different individuals is mostly described

through group and team dynamics, where, within these groups or teams, factors like communication, conflict, power and politics, as well as negotiations, enjoy particular attention.

Managers display different personality traits: there are dominant people who are uncompromising; softer-spoken people who are sometimes dominated; peacemakers who are willing to compromise; as well as quiet people, who choose to strategize when heated debates have settled down. Evolving dynamics that also influence these strategizing interactions include family relations; taking sides; and heated arguments. Strategizing episodes are also characterised by conflict, including heated arguments at times. Managers react in different ways to this conflict: from relishing it, to avoiding it by attempting to reduce it through mediation and compromise. It is noteworthy that managers engage in manipulation techniques. This manipulation is sometimes described in terms of “*phronesis* and *mētis*”, as described in Chapter 5. *Phronesis* relates to “practical wisdom or intelligence” that is gained through experience: the ability to act aptly in social situations (Chia & Rasche, 2015:44). Whereas *phronesis* refers to practical intelligence within an ethical or moral framework, *mētis* has an “unethical” connotation: the practical intelligence to react to situations in “underhanded” or opportunistic ways, reversing fortunes and getting away with it - a type of “having street smarts” or “cunning intelligence” (Chia & Rasche, 2015:44). This *mētis* or cunning intelligence is evident in one owner wilfully trying to manipulate the top management team into accepting his decisions, or where the two top managers supposedly teamed up against the other top manager.

Phronesis is apparent in the way in which top managers, in a chess game fashion, play the right moves to get traction for their inputs. A notable difference between the two PHEIs of the current study relates to the way in which the respective organisations are managed by the owners. With PHEI B, the owners keep a tight rein on all goings on in a micro-management fashion. All levels of strategy praxis (including strategy-making and strategy implementation) are thus centrally controlled. With PHEI A, however, corporate strategizing is driven by the CEO and top management, but lower-level strategizing (including strategy-making and implementation) are not always monitored; and it is frequently left to the middle managers, who tend to do their own thing in an uncoordinated fashion. Schein (2017:26) maintains that leaders are

immersed in creating the group's culture, as well as the continuation or changing thereof. The owners, therefore, significantly influence the "beliefs, values and behavioural norms"; the way things are done (Schein, 2017:21) at the respective PHEIs of the current research. The owners, as committed executive managers, entrepreneurs and strong personalities have a dominating impact on the organisational culture of the respective case-study organisations.

From the description of strategizing episodes in the case-study organisations, it is evident that they do not involve in rational discussions around planned agendas, to objectively select the best strategies to follow. Strategizing sessions usually entail ad-hoc sessions, where people with emotions engage to promote their business, or academically aligned interests, where conflict sometimes leads to heated arguments. Vaara and Whittington (2012:20) mention that humans are "social beings" that they rely on different relational skills to perform. Concomitantly, selected strategies at the two case-study organisations are frequently not dependent on objective reasoning, linked to a clear plan or vision, but rather on who was successful in getting their ideas to be accepted by the group.

7.2.2 Investigative research question 1

- What motivation processes influence top and middle managers at two small South African private higher education institutions, when they engage in strategizing interactions?

Section 6.6.1 provides a comparison between the top and middle managers, who engage in strategizing at the two PHEIs of the case study. Section 6.7.1.1 provides an integrated synopsis of the strategizing practices, as part of a sub-process of social interaction. The findings discussed in the said sections are also linked to existing theory. As depicted in Figure 6.2, managers described different individual predispositions (motivation to interact), when participating in strategizing sessions. As described in Section 3.4.1 in Chapter 3, these predispositions are shaped by the individual motivational factors of the different actors including their different personality traits (behavioural disposition), their feelings following interactions, as well as their meaning-making and subsequent evolving identities, following perpetual interactions

over time. These predispositions, together with what the actors expect to happen during different episodes of praxis, what they think or believe of their fellow actors, as well as the perceived importance of the specific strategizing session, will shape the way in which they interact (Rummel, 1979; Turner, 1988:15; Knights & Willmott, 2011:213; Strydom, 2013:20).

Certain managers within the two PHEIs experience positive emotions, like feeling empowered; energised; positive; enjoyment; as well as experiencing meaningfulness. Most managers on top and middle management level feel undervalued and underutilised, regarding their strategizing roles at both case study organisations. The resultant negative emotions include frustration; negativity; powerlessness; unhappiness; disappointment; distrust; emotional strain; feeling disheartened; feeling undervalued; feeling overwhelmed; feeling like a robot or puppet, as well as not feeling part of the organisation. These predispositions are also shaped by the managers' experiences over time, on how things are done at the organisation, including how they make sense of strategizing engagements. Managers described entering interactions with aggressive predispositions; a predisposition of being the alpha-male, who has to dominate interactions; predispositions of resignation ("I cannot change anything anyway, so why even try?"); disengaged predispositions ("do what you want, I do not care any longer"); as well as withdrawing from strategy-making activities.

As mentioned, managers have different personality traits, or general behaviour dispositions that will also shape the way they interact during strategizing interactions. The strategy actors thus react differently on what happens during interactions over time. Different personality traits among the managers of the two PHEIs that strategize include driven, dominant people who are uncompromising, more softly spoken people, who are sometimes dominated and get hurt by arguments and conflict; peacemakers who are willing to compromise, in order to promote harmony and keep things going forward, as well as quiet people, who choose rather to strategize when heated debates have settled down.

7.2.3 Investigative research question 2

- What situational factors influence strategizing at two small South African private higher education institutions?

Section 6.6.3 provides a comparison between the strategizing practices of top and middle managers of the two PHEIs in the case study, including rich descriptions with validating participant quotations of the strategizing practices, namely the strategy-related processes, tools and techniques at the two case study organisations. The descriptions and quotes also included other internal organisational issues and challenges, as well as issues and challenges within the case study organisations' external environment. The situational factors referred to in Investigative Research question 2 thus comprise all the above-listed aspects. Section 6.7.1.4 provides an integrated synopsis of the situational factors that influence social interaction during strategizing episodes. The findings discussed in Section 6.6.3 and 6.7.1.4 are also linked to existing theory.

Regarding the external environment; the interviewed top and middle managers identified the most salient issues that typify the South African higher educational (HE) environment and specifically the private HE-environment, as described in Chapter 4 of the current study. These issues mostly pose significant challenges to PHEIs, including the two PHEIs of the current study. They include South Africa's public HE-fraternity's mistrust of private providers and people's negative perception of private providers; strict regulation of higher education institutions (HEIs); zero government-subsidies for private providers; a racialised HE-legacy; strong competition; a need to decolonise the HE-experience; as well as a depressed economy. Despite all these challenges, the potential of this industry is evident in the growing business investment in the HE-industry, as was described in Chapter 4. Another noteworthy trend described in Chapter 4 pertains to large listed higher education companies that are systematically acquiring small HE-providers like the two companies of the current study. This may represent a threat to the smaller companies who find it increasingly difficult to compete against their large counterparts. It however also provides an opportunity for small PHEI-owners to sell their companies to these macro-PHEIs.

Regarding the internal organisational environments; both PHEIs of the current study resemble the dominant typology of private providers in South Africa, as described in Chapter 4: both are profit-seeking; both are quite small, with less than a thousand registered students; and they operate from large urban centres. They were established through personal investment; and they rely on student-fees, as their sole source of income. The fight to stay financially viable amidst zero subsidies; a depressed economy; negative perceptions of private provision; as well as a very competitive environment represent some of the perennial internal challenges that frame most strategic interactions at both PHEIs. Strategizing at these organisations consequently requires a balancing act between soliciting the patronage of paying customers and ensuring the academic integrity of programme offerings. There is a consequential divide between business and academia; between the business owners and the other managers that pervasively features at strategizing instances.

Other challenges are described in the said sections in Chapter 6; and they are subsequently highlighted in this section: Both PEHIs have no formal strategizing programmes with sessions specifically designated for strategy-making. Strategizing is ad hoc; and it seems to mostly revolve around dealing with challenges and crises that can happen at the whim of the respective owners of the organisations. This is comparable with the emergent nature of strategizing, where strategies emerge in a web of actions and interactions (Mintzberg & Walters, 1985:257). The volatile South African HE-landscape, like most modern business environments, links to chaos; and complexity theorists' call for strategizing to be nonlinear, moving "between the borders of stability and instability" (Henry, 2018:18). This stands in contrast to a traditional top-down strategizing culture at both PHEIs, where strategies are formulated at the top; and the rest are obliged to implement them (Ireland & Hitt, 1999:45): strategizing is thus traditional in terms of the leadership approach thereof; but is not linear and static in nature, as described in traditional strategizing models. The owners of both organisations want to control decision-making; and they are very reluctant to relinquish this dominance; they consequently struggle to involve all managers in strategizing. It is as if they feel that they alone can secure the future of their organisations. This links with a great leader view, as opposed to a great groups view, where it was traditionally believed that the CEO as a 'lone ranger' has the sole responsibility for the strategic leadership of an organisation (Ireland & Hitt, 1999:45; Ehlers & Lazenby, 2019:53).

The contemporary great groups' view however postulates that it impossible for leaders to operate alone in ensuring the prosperity of organisations within uncertain and turbulent modern business environments, which are typified by tough competition. Organisations must proposedly rely on the collaboration of groups of people across the organisation; collaborations of organisational citizens (Ireland & Hitt, 1999:46; Ehlers & Lazenby, 2019).

Various managers within the two case study organisations describe planning, formulating and implementing strategy, as being inefficient and ineffective within a strategizing framework that lacks structure. It is deemed impulsive with strategies that change in an instant. The organisations reportedly have no long-term vision; and there are limited platforms available for managers to strategize within this top-down strategizing environment. Strategizing is not integrated; many managers at one organisation have decided to do their own thing. Plans and decisions are not transparent; and they are poorly communicated; and conflicting messages are being conveyed to managers and employees. Certain managers have consequently concluded that strategizing is a waste of time.

7.2.4 Investigative research question 3

- To what extent is strategy-making within two small South African private higher education institutions deliberate, or emergent in nature?

From the discussions in Section 6.6.3, it is evident that strategizing at both PHEIs is quite informal. It lacks in structure and deliberate planning. Strategizing is mainly reactive; and it comprises dealing with challenges and crises. The long-term visions of the organisations are unclear, and their decisions are impulsively made. This links to Clegg *et al.* (2011:118), reporting that: "Strategy at Google emerges from a web of interactions that are neither planned nor centrally controlled." Strategy supposedly emerges from the everyday activities and discussions at this company. Mintzberg and Walters (1985:257) question the traditional notion that strategies are centrally formulated and then implemented. The above authors propose that the strategy-formation process should consider multiple ways in which strategies can be shaped. They maintain that intended strategies may lead to realised strategies through

deliberate actions; but these strategies might not realise, even if deliberate action was taken. They further state that sometimes strategies “emerge in spite of, or in the absence of intention”. Mintzberg and Walters (1987:257) go as far as labelling strategy as “patterns in streams of actions”. The above authors conclude that no strategies are exclusively deliberate or emergent; but rather they tend to lean towards one of the opposing sides (deliberate or emergent) in a continuum. The emergent theme plays a central role in strategy-as-practice perspective, where primacy is awarded to the everyday, micro-practices of strategy actors (Whittington, 2015). Many strategies at the case study organisations emerge through uncoordinated, non-deliberate actions.

In considering the continuum-typology of Mintzberg and Walters, it can thus be concluded that strategies at the case-study organisations lean towards the emergent side of the continuum.

7.2.5 Investigative research question 4

- What are the areas’ competitive advantage of two small South African private higher educational institutions, as perceived by their customers (students)?

In addition to reporting on the areas of competitive advantage of the two organisations of this case study, and comparing these advantages, this section will also refer to the PHEIs approach to their markets, as well as their strategic directions.

As discussed in Section 2.7.2 in Chapter 2 and Section 6.5 in Chapter 6, authors like Rasche, (2008:77); Clegg *et al.* (2011:48); Rindova *et al.* (2012:147-148); Sminia (2014:8); and Henry (2018:16) claim that that competitiveness stands central to strategy, and that competitive advantage is most commonly used by strategy researchers to explain superior performance. Furthermore, as discussed in Section 2.7.3 of Chapter 2, the current study favours a value-perspective on competitive advantage and subsequent performance, as supported by authors like Kotler and Keller (2009:54-59); Clegg *et al.* (2011:150); Du Plessis (2012:5); Brijbal, Paramasur & Roberts-Lombard (2014:355); as well as Henry (2018:16): By procuring, creating, developing and employing idiosyncratic resources, capabilities and activities, organisations aim to, in a cost-effective way, present distinctive product offerings that

provide meaningful superior value to targeted customers. This could lead to the creation of meaningful competitive advantages, ultimately leading to superior performance. Meaningful competitive advantage, within this context, can thus be regarded as an attribute/ benefit or feature unique to a product offering (in relation to competitors' offerings; something that they cannot copy) providing superior meaningful value to customers. Henry (2018:16) concurrently maintains that the true test of a competitive advantage is in the marketplace. With this in mind; the current research included a quantitative survey among the registered students of both PHEIs of this case study, regarding the factors that influenced their choice of the HE provider that they are currently studying. This survey was conducted in 2018. The results of this survey are described in Section 6.5. The areas of competitive advantage as perceived by the top and middle managers at the two case study PHEIs were also investigated; and they are described in Section 6.6. The perceived areas of competitive advantage, as perceived by the managers and students were subsequently compared, in order to ascertain whether managers knew what their organisations' areas of competitive advantages are.

As described in Section 6.5 and depicted in Table 6.8, overall, students rated employment prospects; safety and security; and academic issues, as the most important factors that have influenced their choice of HE-provider, in that specific order. This is in line with local studies like that of Wiese (2008), who identified safety/security issues, as well as employment prospects, as constantly being the most important choice-factors for students at six South African public universities. Bezuidenhout (2013) also identified safety/security issues, as well as employment prospects, as the most important choice factors at the same two organisations of the current study in a similar survey conducted in 2012. The importance of academic issues, specifically the items of smaller classes for better learning, is in concurrence with a study among 1600 independent colleges by the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities (2011) in the United States. The current study identified smaller classes for better lecturer-student interactions, as a very important characteristic of private providers. As described in Section 6.5, the identification of safety and security, as the most important factor; however, this stands in sharp contrast to various international studies, in which safety/security is not even listed as an option for students in surveys. It is interesting to note that even in the absence of a

structured, goal directed strategizing, the managers at both PHEIs seem to mostly know what their company's areas of competitive advantage consist of. Both organisations are also experiencing slow to halted growth in student enrolments. This is happening even though the managers seemingly know what their areas of competitive advantage are; they know why their students chose their organisation to study at. Even though contemporary South African PHEIs face numerous challenges, the private South African HE-environment shows significant potential measured against the substantial investment therein as described in Chapter 4. This raises the question of whether the current case study's PHEIs need to create new areas of competitive advantage to attract more students, or whether these organisations are ineffective in their market communication strategies: are their competitive advantages compelling enough? Or are their key differentiators not communicated well enough to their potential markets?

The current study also set out to ascertain whether the student groups of the two PHEIs differed in the importance that they have assigned to different choice factors in deciding where to study. In addition to a descriptive analysis of the possible overall difference between respondent group answers (PHEI A versus PHEI B), an Independent Samples *t*-Test was employed to statistically test the below-formulated null hypothesis.

H₀: The respondents at two small private higher education institutions in South Africa do not significantly differ in the importance they assign to different factors that influence them in their choice of an educational institution.

The null hypothesis was not rejected; as there was no statistically significant overall difference in the importance that the two different groups assigned to different factors that influenced them in their choice of an educational institution. With the concluded descriptive analysis results, as well as the non-rejection of the null hypothesis, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference in the importance of the various factors that reportedly influenced respondents at two different private higher education providers in South Africa in their education institution of choice.

Regarding the case study organisations' strategic direction and approach to the market: from the analysis of the collected research data, as reported in Section 6.6, it is evident that both organisations offer commerce-related qualifications that require less resources to present. This is in line with the approach followed by most South African private providers, as described in Chapter 4. Both organisations do, however, also successfully focus on niche-offerings. With the generic qualifications, both organisations still focus on individualised attention, as well as on a practical approach. The course tuition fees are high, as the organisations must rely on class fees as their only source of income. In evaluating the case study organisations' overall approach to the market, both can therefore be regarded as following a differentiating strategy, according to Porter's generic strategy typology (Henry, 2018:117). From the interviews with its managers, it is evident PHEI A is grappling with its white, Afrikaans character that seems to attract the patronage of a certain type of student. This characteristic, as discussed in Section 6.6.2, is the main reason for the organisation's biggest course offering's success. This qualification that is bursting at the seams with students is the only offering that is currently growing, and it is proposedly carrying the organisation. It however also seems to be the organisation's biggest downfall, as it limits its potential market-size. According to the other qualification-managers, the organisation must shed its Afrikaans and white character, in order to turn around declining enrolment-figures with the other more generic qualifications. PHEI A thus needs to reflect upon how they want to be viewed by society, including their customers: as, in the words of one interviewee, a "bastion for a white Afrikaans culture", or as a provider that caters for a diverse number of students.

7.2.6 Social interaction as a social mechanism that shapes strategizing

Addressing the main research question and the first four investigative questions facilitates the understanding of social interaction, as a social mechanism in shaping strategy at the two case study organisations. Section 5.7.3 of Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the use of social mechanisms in social research. A social mechanisms-approach provides explanatory insights on the real world; it identifies and analyses social mechanisms, in order to explain empirical happenings (Hedström & Swedberg, 1998:7). The current study aims to present a causal mechanism scheme, as the building block in building theory regarding strategizing as a function of social

interaction. A description of a typology of social mechanisms is provided in Section 5.7.3 of Chapter 5: According to Gross (2009:368), a social mechanism (S) refers to the process by which an input (I) leads to an outcome (O). This social mechanism can only be comprehensively understood by investigating all the actors involved in this process, and ascertaining why and how likely responses manifest, based on the actors' 'habits of cognition and action' when facing problem situations. Hedström and Swedberg (1998:7) provide a similar discussion on the working of social mechanisms. Social research, at the basic level, investigates individuals' actions as they socially interact with other individuals – a micro-level analysis (Edling & Rydgren, 2016:1137). Situational variables that affect individuals are regarded as being at the macro level. Concomitantly, the organisational outcomes resultant from collective individual actions are also viewed as at the macro level. This is why Hedström and Swedberg's model is also called a macro-micro-macro model. Figure 7.2 depicts a typology of social mechanisms within an organisational strategizing context, based on Hedström and Swedberg's (1998:7) work on social mechanisms.

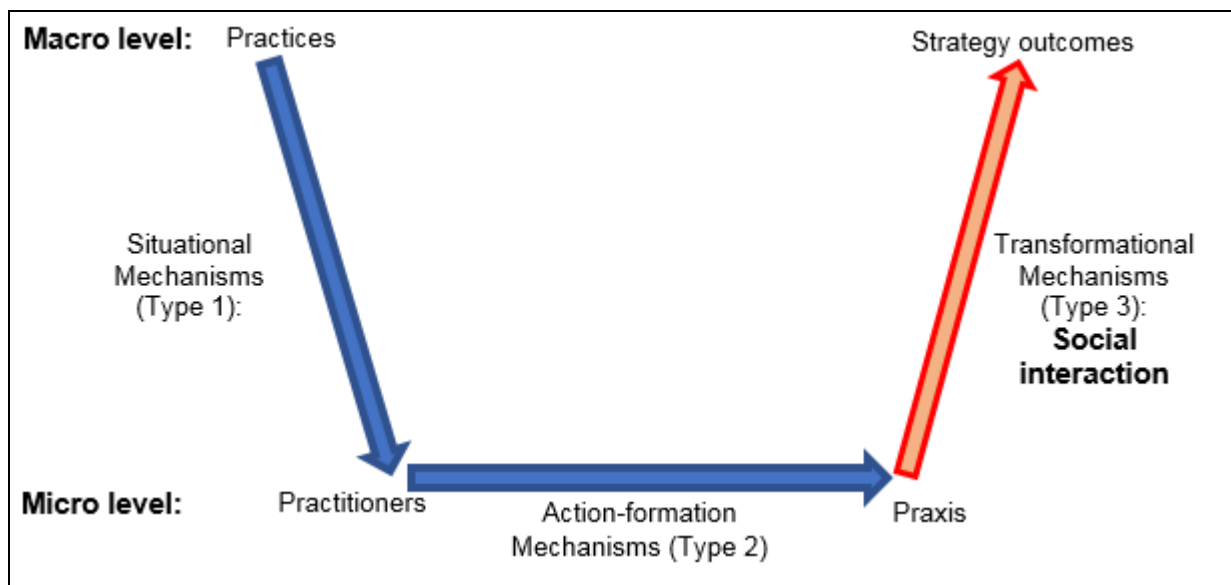


Figure 7.2: A typology of social mechanisms in strategizing (Adapted from Hedström and Swedberg, 1998)

Figure 7.2 illustrates the strategizing process at the PHEIs of the current study that is based on Hedström and Swedberg's (1998:7) adapted version of Coleman's (1987,1990) boat diagram. Social research, at the basic level, investigates individuals' actions as they socially interact with other individuals- a micro-level analysis (Edling &

Rydgren, 2016:1137). Situational variables that affect individuals are regarded as being at the macro level. Concomitantly, the organisational outcomes resultant from collective individual actions are also viewed as at a macro level. Therefore, Hedström and Swedberg's social mechanisms-typology depicted in Figure 7.2 is also called a macro-micro-macro model. This macro-micro-macro model facilitates a conceptualisation of collective social action. The focus of this explanatory discussion is on the micro-macro relationship between praxis (episodes of strategy praxis) and strategy outcomes (areas of competitive advantage) as it is shaped by social interaction as transformational mechanism (Type 3 as indicated in Figure 7.2). To facilitate a better understanding of this transformation, it is essential to investigate the effect of macro-level events or situational variables on individuals (Type 1, macro-micro), as well as how these individuals assimilate these effects and consequently choose to act (Type 2, micro-micro). These two processes will impact upon how these individuals choose to engage in strategy praxis. These two processes (Type 1 and 2) are comparable to the integrative strategy-as-practice perspective that considers the organisational processes, tools and techniques that influence strategy practitioners and way they engage in strategy praxis (Whittington, 2006:618). It is for this reason that the current research included an integrative investigation of the strategy practices, practitioners and their praxes of the two case study organisations.

Section 6.7.1 of Chapter 6 links the reported research findings to Turner's Social interaction model (1988:15) as discussed in Section 3.4.1.3 of Chapter 3: The three sub-processes of the social interaction model were applied to strategizing at the two case study organisations. The three sub-processes include 1), the individual motivational process and consequential willingness or predispositions to interact; 2), the actual interactions; followed by 3), the structuring process. These social interaction sub-processes elucidate how social interaction serves as a social mechanism in shaping strategy and consequently strategic outcomes. As described in Section 7.2.1 that relates to the rich descriptions and validating participant-quotations provided in Chapter 6, relational dynamics between top and middle managers and among family members; the different interaction techniques, negotiations and renegotiations; as well as the conflict and ensuing heated arguments, all represent social interaction instances between strategy actors that collectively engage in strategy praxis.

Regarding the resultant strategy outcomes: Turner's (1988:16) third sub-process of social interaction, namely structuring following the actual social interaction during episodes of strategy praxis, serves to further explain how social interaction shapes strategizing, including strategizing outcomes. This sub-process is comprehensively described in Section 6.7.1.3 and basically entails shared meaning created between group members from repeated interaction processes with all its intricacies over time. The strategy actors create knowledge and share facts through repeated interaction. Repeated interactions and the subsequent the structuring of relationships, shape how things are done and what courses of actions are to be taken in the group (Shen, 2013:71). Structuring as described in the current research, is comparable to Schein's (2017:21) broad definition of group culture which broadly entail shared accumulated learning between the members of the group. This learning, according to Schein (2017:21), leads to shared beliefs, values and norms among group members. Structuring also relates to Foucauldian perspectives on power exchanges between group members in producing knowledge; a battle to create 'truth' or the rules in creating shared meaning (Peach, Jr. & Bieber, 2015:27-28). In addition to individuals' 'attitudes', 'satisfaction' and 'performance', the group's 'cohesion' and 'functioning', and ultimately, the organisation's 'profitability' and 'survival' are all shaped by repeated interactions and subsequent structuring processes (Robbins & Judge, 2013:25-29). Strategies are not formally planned or drafted, but mainly emerge in a pattern of activities and decision-making. The specific strategy-related decisions taken, mostly in reacting to challenges/crises, seemingly depend on the perpetual negotiations and renegotiations between the owners who favour business-inclined strategies and top managers who are championing academic causes. Student-perceived areas of competitive advantages were mostly correctly identified by the managers of the respective PHEIs. Both organisations' inability to grow their registered student numbers might beg the question whether these competitive advantages are valued enough or by a large enough audience; and if they are, whether they are sufficiently communicated to the market. Social relations and subsequent social structures are further viewed as dynamic (Shen, 2013:65); the structuring process is thus constantly evolving. The addition of new members or situational changes will change how things are done in the group; these changes will then also manifest on organisational level.

The current research consequently regards strategizing as a social phenomenon where social interaction serves as social mechanism to explain how strategizing manifests within organisations. This mechanism entails individual strategy actors who enter episodes of strategy praxis with different motivational process-driven predispositions to interact. These practitioners attempt to influence each other by employing different interaction techniques. Structuring follows repeated interactions over time and a consequential negotiated and renegotiated shared identity between the strategy actors. Relational structuring entails forming a shared meaning regarding aspects like group functioning, roles, relationships, rules of engagement and activities. This interpersonal structuring then determines the strategy activities and decisions and subsequently the strategic direction and competitive positioning of the organisation. Structuring is dynamic and constantly evolves as strategy actors leave or join the group. Changes in situational or contextual factors, like new strategy processes or techniques or challenges, will also change how the members interact and how they will strategize. Strategy-making thus mainly emerges in a pattern of activities and decision-making, as negotiated and renegotiated between strategy practitioners over time. Social interaction and subsequent relational structuring thus serve as social mechanisms that mediate how organisations strategize and how they arrive at their strategic outcomes. The identification and analysis of social interaction as a social mechanism represents an attempt to start opening the 'black box' of strategizing; thereby revealing what actually happens during episodes of strategy practice. This stands in stark contrast to traditional writings that shy away from the messy realities of strategizing by prescribing rational steps to take in strategizing. It has to be noted, however, that the individual thoughts and motivation of various different actors and their consequential motivation to interact, how they interact and then make individual and shared meaning represent a complex set of variables that would be problematic to reduce into parsimonious theory with a set of actions, elements and relationships.

7.2.7 Investigative research question 5

- Can a conceptual framework be constructed to guide further studies regarding how social interactions between managers shape strategizing?

As described in Section 5.2.2, a conceptual framework describes the main elements or variables and their interrelationships to be investigated when researching a phenomenon (Miles, Huberman and Saldanã 2014:23). A confirmatory conceptual framework for investigating strategizing as a function of social interaction was constructed after the completion of the current research project. This framework will proposedly serve as a map for future research in the said field. This framework represents a refined version of earlier more exploratory frameworks that guided the current research. The framework was constructed by considering various aspects suggested by Ravitch and Mittenfelner Carl (2016:36), including the research questions (Chapter 1); the theoretical framework (Chapter 2, 3 and 4); with the macro (Chapter 4) and micro (Chapter 5 and 6) organisational contexts of the two organisations of the current study; philosophical disposition and consequent research design (Chapter 5); as well as the researcher's motivation and personal goals (Chapter 7). In contrast to offering definitive answers to the research questions that are generalisable to the overall population, the conceptual framework proffers working (as opposed to final) research propositions to be developed/built through subsequent research in other situations - analytical generalisation is thus envisaged (Yin, 2012:19). The conceptual framework is presented in Figure 7.3 on the next page

From Figure 7.3, it is evident that perpetual social interactions within various episodes of strategy praxis are influenced by different strategy practitioners with varying personal predispositions and subsequent motivations to interact, as well as organisational practices (tools or mechanisms and processes) and the broader extra-organisational environment. Ongoing social interactions lead to negotiated and renegotiated shared and contextualised meaning; and subsequently the relational structuring between group members – the activities and rules of engagement between social actors. This firstly shapes unique organisational practices (the way things are done – processes, as well as the strategy tools that are employed and how they are employed – the techniques). The ability to develop unique and heterogeneous mechanisms and processes refers to an organisation's dynamic capabilities, as proposed by the Resource based view. This is facilitated by a deliberate process of knowledge management, where organisations learn which combinations of processes and mechanisms facilitate their competitiveness. Secondly, group structuring from ongoing social interaction during episodes of strategy praxis determine the

organisational structuring and the subsequent behaviour. Structuring refers to the choice of strategy-related activities to engage in and how they should be executed in facilitating the competitiveness of an organisation. These activities include, among others, deciding on a strategic direction for the organisation, selecting a market approach, as well as creating meaningful and sustainable competitive advantages. Organisational structuring also refers to the notion that organisational structure is created through activities of 'patterned regularity': strategies emerge from repeated group activity.

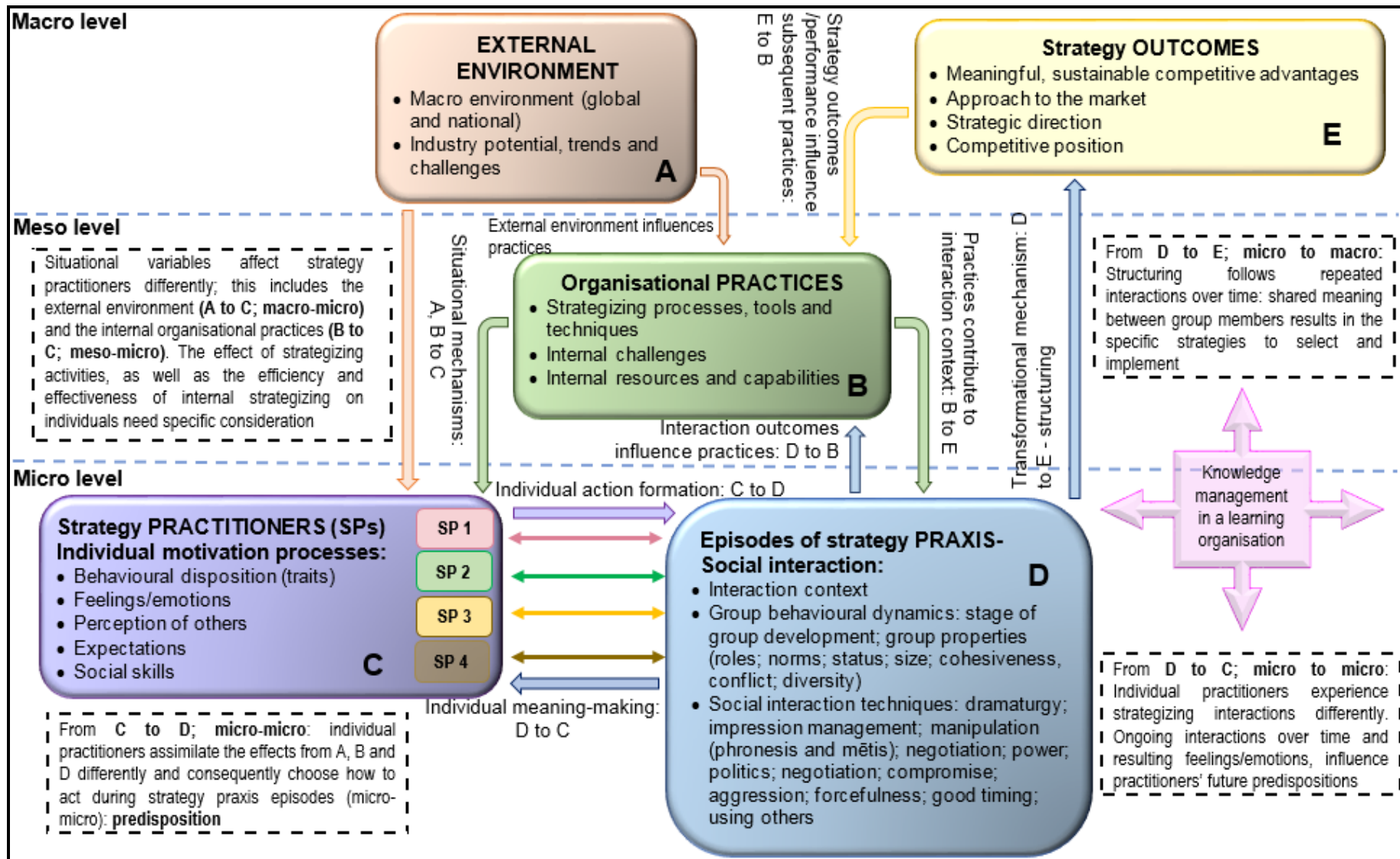


Figure 7.3: A conceptual framework of strategizing as a function of social interaction (own compilation)

In short, the current study subscribes to the idea that an organisation is essentially a product of the ongoing social interaction between its members. While acknowledging influences from rational, conflict and functional points of view, this study follows an interactionist perspective, focusing, at a micro-level, on the interactions and relationships between individuals, including negotiations and renegotiations, resulting in shared meanings or a shared reality between organisational members. Simply observing interactions is not good enough in clarifying their role in shaping competitive positions. These interactions are complex; and they need to be understood in terms of the interacting actors and their motivation to interact, as well as the organisational and societal context of these interactions.

7.3 LIMITATIONS

Care was taken to employ the necessary measures to facilitate the scientific rigour of the current research. Because this social research followed a qualitatively driven mixed- method approach, there are certain limitations that need to be described.

This qualitative research involved in-depth analyses in generating rich descriptions of the lived experiences of a limited number of participants at only two organisations. The findings of the current study cannot, therefore, be generalised to other organisations outside this study. Furthermore, with less than a thousand enrolled students each, these two organisations are small players in the South African HE-landscape. The case study organisations of the current research fit the profile of a typical private HE-provider in South Africa.

There are, however, a few large, listed PHEIs; and research at these large organisations might yield different results. Even though the current research included a large sample of the target population, the overall number of participants was still low. Data saturation was reached; it is, however, not possible to confirm whether non-participant managers would have reported the same experiences as did the sample-members. The quantitative survey results could, however, be generalised to their respective target populations, as they complied with the appropriate requirements of generalisation.

The current study involved an in-depth investigation of the lived experiences of participants using multiple methods. This consequential analysis, interpretation and reporting took a very long time to complete. These descriptions are based on the inquiry of lived experiences reported at one point in time. These experiences could have changed if inquiry had happened at another time.

In looking at strategizing, as a relational social activity, and in trying to open the 'black box' of strategizing, a complex set of variables and relationships are revealed. It would be very difficult to reduce into theory, together with a set of actions, elements and relationships. Understanding of this social interaction, as a social mechanism in strategizing calls for significantly more inquiry.

As the current study reports on the lived experiences of participants and subscribes to the notion that reality is subjectively created within unique contexts, confirming the objective reality of findings in a positivistic fashion is not possible.

7.4 RESEARCH CONTRIBUTION

The current research makes various contributions to the existing body of knowledge on strategizing within an interactionist paradigm; focusing on continuous interactions and evolving relationships within an organisational context. The contributions are situated within empirically informed social science research; it addresses the actual strategizing practices of strategy practitioners in South African private higher education institutions (PHEIs).

7.4.1 Strategy as a function of social interaction

Firstly, the current study investigated an unexplored avenue of strategizing research, namely strategizing as a function of social interaction. The current research, in an in-depth manner, examined how social interaction and all its intricacies between the strategy actors before, during and after episodes of strategy praxis, shapes the strategizing activities of these actors within unique organisational contexts over time, and ultimately shape the strategy outcomes of organisations. As called for by contemporary sociologists in the Practice turn, the social actor was placed in the

centre of investigation. This included reporting on the lived experiences of individual actors, regarding their actual strategizing practices. The current study, however, also linked these actors and their activities to a relational ontology; their actions were described, as they related to individual and shared meaning-making and structuring within repeated social interactions over time.

7.4.2 A strategy-as-practice lens

Secondly, the current research viewed strategizing through a strategy as practice lens; since it allows for placing the social actor at the centre of investigation; and it values the practicality of knowledge. The current research contributes to the strategy-as-practice perspective in a novel way; since a lot of focus is placed on the social interactions between strategy actors. Chia and Rasche (2015:44) maintain that, even though most strategy-as-practice studies purport to prioritise social practice, they do not truly embrace a relational ontology; they are still anchored in a traditional strategy research 'building worldview'; and they tend to offer explicit knowledge: simplistic, evidence-based research, thereby providing superficial theoretical accounts of strategy (Denzin, 2012:85). To truly understand the social practices of strategizing, the current research is anchored in a 'dwelling worldview', consequently offering a view into the 'tacit dimension' or the 'black box' of strategy: those unseen antecedent and non-deliberate elements of strategy making and strategic outcomes. The current study proposes that social interaction between strategy participants serves as a social mechanism in mediating organisational strategizing. This view into the 'block box' of strategy revealed an intricate web of social interactions, influences and consequences. Even though the current research does not come close to providing a comprehensive theory, regarding social interaction and strategizing, a heuristically minded toolbox view of scientific social knowledge posits that the core of theoretical knowledge consists of mutually compatible "causal mechanism schemes".

The understanding of the social world supposedly increases; as the collection of the compatible causal mechanisms grows. Explanatory insights are duly offered on how social interaction mediates the transformation from the strategy-praxis episodes to the strategy outcomes of an organisation. This empirical outcome thus, in toolbox-view fashion, serves as a building block of accumulating social science theory. The current

study will hopefully spark the other researchers' interest in similar studies within different contexts .

7.4.3 A conceptual framework

The current research thirdly proffers a conceptual framework to guide future research aimed at understanding social interaction, as a social mechanism in shaping strategizing in different settings: analytical generalisation instead of statistical generalisation is offered – a better understanding is offered, rather than statistical confirmation and generalisation.

7.4.4 Strategizing in small higher education institutions

Even though the current research focuses on understanding strategizing, as a social activity, it fourthly offers a comprehensive investigation of the South African higher education landscape (HE). The current research consequently contributes to the body of knowledge of HE, with a specific reference to private provision in South Africa. The proliferation of private providers and their integral role in the HE-landscape demand attention from the research community. The main findings regarding private provision in South Africa include the fact that private higher education institutions have their work cut out, to survive and prosper in a framework of strict regulation, where public providers seemingly have financial, as well as perceptual advantages (quality concerns regarding private providers) over their private counterparts.

From a strategic perspective, it was mentioned that private HE-providers need to create sustainable competitive advantages, in order to successfully compete against other players within the challenging South African HE-landscape; public and private providers alike. Their business-like nature and their subsequent client-orientation broadly represent the private provider cohort's competitive advantages over their public counterparts.

The current study also offers a view into the goings on of two typical PHEIs in South Africa, namely small profit seeking companies, with less than a thousand enrolled students that mostly offer popular qualifications that do not require large capital

investment to operate. On a practical level, the two case study organisations may find it useful to peruse the reported findings; as this may help them to improve their strategizing efforts. The findings pertaining to the PHEIs of the current study may provide a useful basis for future research in small private providers in higher education. Also presented in Chapter 6, Table 7.1 provides a summary of the salient findings from the analysis of the research data; as it pertains to the two PHEIs of the current study.

Table 7.1: Salient findings from the case analysis at two small PHEIs (own compilation)

<p>The owners dictate how strategizing is to be done</p> <p>The owners are fully committed financially and fully involved in the day-to-day management of their organisations. They consequently try to control strategizing and struggle to let go; to give organisational employees more agency in strategizing.</p>
<p>Strategizing is top-down</p> <p>Strategizing is mostly done by the owners with inputs from top management. Middle managers have limited inputs in strategizing; they mostly implement strategies conceived by top management.</p>
<p>Strategies mostly emerge in dealing with crises and challenges</p> <p>The organisations engage in very little to no formal strategizing. Strategizing mostly entails reacting to challenges and dealing with crises.</p>
<p>Strategizing is ineffective</p> <p>Most interviewees regarded strategizing as ineffective; some even considered it as a waste of time. Strategies are not transparent; and there is no shared vision within the organisations. The organisations' enrolments are stagnating; and they do not know how to remedy this.</p>
<p>The areas of competitive advantage are known</p> <p>The organisations mostly know why students chose to enrol in their programmes, including employment prospects; safety and security; and academic issues (smaller classes for better learning). The question is whether these areas of competitive advantage are communicated well enough within a very competitive environment; whether they are compelling, or distinctive enough; and whether pursuing other competitive advantages might appeal to a broader section of the market.</p>
<p>Middle managers share a bond</p>

Because of the limited interaction between top and middle management, middle managers seem to share a bond; they support each other in getting things done. As a middle manager remarked that they are all “brothers in strife”; they support each other in coping with the challenges they must face.

Three sub-processes of social interaction shape strategizing

Chosen strategies and eventual strategic outcomes are significantly shaped by the social interaction between the strategy practitioners of the respective case study organisations within unique intra and extra organisational contexts. This social interaction consists of three sub-processes that are interwoven with the strategic endeavours of the case study organisations.

7.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Potential future research areas were identified in addressing the research questions of the current study.

As mentioned in the previous section, the current research investigated strategizing, as a function of social interaction. The current study reported on participants’ lived experiences of how strategizing is done, and specifically on how organisational members interact when they strategize. Opening this black box has revealed a myriad of human thoughts, actions and interactions. Understanding these interaction-based structuring processes at a micro-level would elucidate the emergence of strategies within organisations, as they compete at a macro-level. Further studies will provide more building blocks in developing theory regarding strategy as emergent from human interactions.

The strategy-as-practice perspective does not explicitly endeavour to link strategizing activities to some sort of performance measurements. Whittington (2007:1578) refers to the process approach to strategy that promotes the linkage of strategizing to strategic outcomes. Whittington (2007:1578) suggests that the strategy-as-practice perspective differs from dominant strategy approaches, by rather focusing on a deep understanding of strategic activities, rather than on performance. The problem with

this is that a science needs to add some value; the study of strategic management should ultimately facilitate better organisational performance.

Currently, there is no convincing evidence of a positive correlation between strategic management practice and superior organisational performance (Thomas, *et al.*, 2013:1119). As discussed in Section 7.2.5, competitiveness stands central to strategy; and competitive advantage is most commonly used by strategy researchers to explain superior performance. Future strategy-as-practice research should therefore consider linking its investigations of the strategizing activities of strategy practitioners to organisational competitiveness and superior performance, in order to prove itself as a science, or as being pragmatically valuable to organisations. Regnér (2012:195-196), for example, calls for the use of a strategy-as-practice perspective in attempting to understand the emergence of competitive positioning. The current research heeded Regnér's (2012:195-196) call for linking practitioners, practices and praxis to outcomes in a more concrete way. This researcher hopes that future strategy-as-practice research will follow suit.

As discussed in Section 5.7.2.1, Chia and Rasche, (2015:47) suggest that a focus on “phronesis” and “mētis” (as opposed to epistemology only) will elucidate the situated, dispositional and transactional nature of strategy making with strategy emerging as a pattern of coping or “wayfinding” actions in unfolding situations. The study of mētis; unsavoury, less ethical ways actors find to get preference for their ideas or decisions during strategizing interactions, presents an interesting avenue for future research. This messy real-world strategizing is not described in most research or strategy handbooks, although it is a reality that plays a pivotal role in the eventual choice of strategies.

As described in Section 4.5.5 of Chapter 4, private providers play a critical role in addressing South Africa's pressing need for higher education. There are more than 120 registered private HE-providers in South Africa; most of these providers are quite small, with less than a thousand registered students at any given time. Further studies of the private HE-industry within the broader South African and global HE-landscape could facilitate the enhancement of private provision's reputation and its role. Further

studies reporting on the strategy-related goings on of other providers might assist organisations to improve their own strategy-related interactions.

7.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT

The current research revealed various managers' distinct lack of involvement in strategizing, as well as the strategizing interactions perceived as being destructive at the two PHEIs of the current study. This led to negative emotions and behaviour, which in turn, compromised organisational performance. The below recommendations are mostly tendered for the respective owners' consideration in potentially addressing the above-mentioned issues.

7.6.1 More inclusive strategizing is needed

The owners should heed the call for more inclusive strategizing. The PHEIs are required to be competitive within a contemporary environment typified by tough economic conditions, various challenges and numerous competitors. To achieve this, a diversified team of managers dispersed throughout the organisation that shares the responsibility for the future of the organisation is pivotal. Furthermore, instead of following a traditional top-down strategizing approach, involving managers more intimately in strategizing could lead to their increased commitment. Ireland and Hitt (1999:46) stated: "When allowed to flourish, as involved leaders, people spark greatness in each other".

Comprehensively involving organisational 'citizens' (Ireland & Hitt, 1999:46) at all levels throughout the respective organisational levels might also address the lack of clear communication and the consequential unintegrated strategizing.

7.6.2 More proactive strategizing is needed

As discussed in Section 7.4.4, strategizing at the two PHEIs of the current study is reactive in coping with the challenges and dealing with crises. While contemporary business environments are turbulent; and sometimes, this necessitates unscripted

actions, at least some form of deliberately planned, structured, proactive and coordinated strategizing effort linked to a clear vision and strategic intent is needed.

7.6.3 Conflicting business and academic interests should be addressed

As mentioned in Section 7.2.1, most strategizing instances at the two PHEIs seem to be underscored by conflicting business and academic interests. The owners who favour business interests and the rest of the top and middle managers championing academic interests, should explore ways to jointly assimilate these business and academic interests. Owners and managers alike should realise that it is imperative for these two sets of interests to support each other. Realised business objectives should support academic rigour, which should in turn, when communicated effectively to target markets, support improved business performance.

7.6.4 The pivotal role of social interaction should be acknowledged

Managers, especially the owners, should recognize the importance of the role of social interaction in strategizing at the two PHEIs. As discussed in Section 7.2.2, leaders play a critical role in creating, maintaining and changing organisational cultures. The respective owners of the PHEIs should realise that they are largely responsible for how things are done at their organisations. This includes setting the tone for social interactions during episodes of strategy praxis. Interviewees from both organisations reported numerous issues pertaining to social interactions that impair efficient and effective strategizing.

The participants attributed most of these issues to “owner-wrongdoing”; issues that in many cases affect the managers negatively. The owners need to contemplate how their conduct during strategizing interactions affects different managers with different personalities. They need to realise that people are emotional beings; and that supposedly irrational feelings shape the way they interact. The owners need to create a safe environment that embraces the inputs from different managers with different personalities; and one that is conducive to meaningful interaction. The owners need to consider softening their ‘dominate at all cost’ approach. The CEO of the one case study company should reconsider his domination through aggression/fear attitude.

The sibling-owners of the other company should also address the negative consequences of family dynamics at the organisations; how it affects the other managers and their subsequent strategy-related interactions.

7.6.5 Strategic changes are imperative

Both companies face a constant battle for survival amidst enrolment figures that have stagnated over the past few years. It is evident that something needs to change. Relating to the second recommendation presented in Section 7.6.2, these organisations should engage in deliberate, proactive strategizing; they should take stock of their current situation. This includes re-evaluating how things, like strategizing are done. They should decide how to adjust their competitive positioning and/or their subsequent market communication.

7.7 REFLECTION

The purpose of this section is to firstly describe my lens, as the researcher and how it ultimately influenced the composition of the current research. I secondly reflect on my experience and the “doctorateness” of the current research.

7.7.1 My research lens

This section is based on Yin’s (2016:271-294) discussion about composing one’s research and specifically about sharing one’s reflective self and subsequent research lens; and how this shapes one’s declarative self. Because the current research was qualitatively driven and most of the data collection methods were qualitative in nature, as the researcher, I was the primary research instrument. My research lens shaped the scope of the current research, the data collection process; and ultimately my reported findings. This lens has subjective and objective qualities; and it is not bias-free. It is therefore important to reveal the qualities of my research lens by presenting my reflective self. My reflective self thus informs you as the reader on how I came to report the findings of the current research. These reported findings entail a presentation of my declarative self: I am declaring to the reader my findings and my interpretation thereof, following the current research.

My reflective self is expressed in various sections throughout this thesis. In Chapter 4, for instance, after doing a comprehensive literature review, I describe the specific theoretical and subsequent conceptual framework that I have chosen to guide the empirical phase of the current research. In Chapter 5, I reveal my philosophical disposition and consequential research approach. In Chapter 6, I discuss my observations and experiences during the interviews and the analyses. I provide my views on the interpretation of the findings in Chapter 7, as well as future research and managerial recommendations. I also want to reveal my motivation for choosing the current research topic, as well as myself, together with my experiences in life, as the researcher.

- ***Why I chose this topic***

As a lecturer in strategic management, I found it increasingly intriguing that most academic work in this field, especially those selected as student textbooks, basically represented a manual that proffered a few clinical “how to” strategizing steps for managers to follow. These different steps would then be elucidated by means of various case studies. Having had my own business before, I know that things in the real world are not that easy. Textbook-strategizing does not prepare a person to deal with the complexities and the challenges of real-world strategizing. I wanted to explore the importance of unique organisational contexts in strategizing. I wanted to explore the human side of strategizing; managers’ actual doing of strategy; and how they interact with each other when they strategize.

I wanted to explore this practical, “messy”, side of strategizing. I secondly chose to investigate strategizing at private higher education organisations, because I have been lecturing at various private providers on a part time and a fulltime basis for over two decades. I have witnessed this constant battle for survival that these organisations face. I have experienced the politics of strategizing among strategy actors. I have explored the world of private provision in my Master’s study. I, therefore, believe that I have an insider perspective of South African private higher educational institutions. It was consequently for me a logical choice to use private providers, as a canvas, to study this pragmatic, human side of strategizing.

- ***About myself***

I am a 49-year old South African male. I have been involved in higher education for 26 years. Eight of these years were as a full-time lecturer at a public provider. I also owned a small business in an unrelated industry for three years, before selling it. I subsequently have first-hand experience in constantly battling to stay competitive and to survive financially. As a researcher, I have published five articles in peer-reviewed journals and one Master's dissertation. All of these were quantitative in nature. I am the type of person who needs to understand the phenomenon that I am researching. I therefore work slowly and methodically, sometimes to my own detriment.

Before reporting the findings of the current study, I engaged with the collected data of the current research for almost a year in preparing to report the findings. I wanted to make sure that I had gained a deep understanding of the data, and that the voices of the research participants were not lost in reporting the findings.

7.7.2 Reflections on the current research

- ***My experience***

Even though I had a working knowledge of qualitative-research methods, as part of my research methodology lecturing and research-supervision duties, this was the first time that I had ventured into qualitative research on a comprehensive scale. I found this qualitative journey challenging and enriching at the same time. Qualitative research forces one to interact more intimately with the research phenomenon (Yin, 2016:280). I relished the opportunity to converse with the participants; to hear about their worlds; their thoughts and feelings. Various interviewees confessed that it was therapeutic for them to share their stories and feelings with me.

As described in the research findings, the antithesis between profit and academic integrity; between the owners and the employees, underscores a lot of the strategizing-related interactions at the private providers of the current research. Regarding private higher education provision, I have always regarded myself as being on the employee-side, lobbying for the academic interests of the organisation and its students. I have, however, developed a greater empathy with the owners of the

respective case-study companies - I have gained a better understanding of the financial pressure they must constantly deal with; the pressure of being responsible for people's livelihoods, as well as why they have to sometimes make unpopular decisions, with which managers disagree. I have learned about the intrigue and complicated relationships within the case study companies. I have learned about the challenges that the companies and their employees face. I have learned about the good things; and I have learned about the bad things happening; and how these affect the strategic decisions.

This journey has taught me to listen more and to judge less. I have further gained invaluable experience in organising a great amount of qualitative data and making sense thereof; gaining a critical understanding of the data; coherently presenting the data, linking them to the existing theory; and conceptualising the conclusions of the current research. Ultimately, I believe, this research journey has made me a better researcher and a better person.

- ***Reflections on 'doctorateness'***

I have taken great care to conform to various requirements and included different elements to demonstrate the doctorateness of the current research, as suggested by Trafford and Leshem (2008:38). The knowledge gap and the subsequent research questions were clearly stated and elucidated. I presented a theoretical and a subsequent conceptual framework that guided the current research, after engaging fully with the theory that related to the main constructs of the current study. I have presented an explicit description of the research design and have chosen appropriate research methods, data collection procedures and analyses.

Critical discussions included cogent arguments proffered throughout the current research. The findings entailed lucid discussions that were related to extant theory, and ultimately linked to the research questions. All the research questions were answered; including linking it to conceptual conclusions and culminating in proffering a conceptual framework for future research in this field.

7.8 RESEARCH CONCLUSION

The current research was undertaken to investigate the role of social interaction in determining the strategizing activities and the consequential strategy outcomes of organisations. The current study that was guided by pragmatic philosophical underpinnings and a mainly qualitative approach, has placed the social actor at the centre of inquiry within an interactionist paradigm. It has confirmed that strategizing at the two case study organisations is indeed mainly a function of social interaction. It has provided explanatory insights into how social interactions shape the strategizing activities of strategy actors and consequential organisational outcomes. Instead of rational, formal and structured strategizing; the sometimes-irrational interactions and constantly evolving shared meanings and relationships between people, as emotional beings, has largely shaped the strategizing.

It is the social interaction between strategy actors during episodes of strategy praxis that serves as the social mechanism in transforming strategizing intent into strategy outcomes. The current research also proffered a conceptual framework for future social interaction-based studies.

The current research further provided a glimpse into the strategy-related goings on of two small private higher education institutions within the South African higher education landscape. The current study has highlighted the challenges that these organisations face in their constant struggle for survival within a tough economic climate, negative perceptions and zero government-funding. These companies must perpetually deal with crises. The time for formal strategizing is limited. On top of this, people get in the way of book-prescribed sanitised, rational strategizing. Managers lobby, they fight, they negotiate, and they manipulate in an ongoing process of creating shared meaning. Both organisations have strong-willed owners that have a need to control strategizing. Strategizing is informal and comprises mostly reacting to challenges and dealing with crises. Both organisations follow a differentiation strategy; and they offer safety and security; employment prospects; and they also excel in certain academic issues, like small classes for better learning. The proliferation of private providers, significant investment in private higher education, as well as private

provision's important demand-absorption role suggest that there is a definite future for private higher education provision in South Africa. The private providers of the current research will, however, have to make definite changes; if they are to improve their stagnating enrolment figures.

From the above discussion, it is evident that the research aim, as well as all the investigative research questions of the current study were adequately addressed.

7.9 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The purpose of Chapter 7 was to relate the findings reported in Chapter 6 to the research questions; and consequently, to describe the new theoretical contributions of the current research. The main research question and all the investigative research questions were firstly addressed, culminating in a conceptual discussion of social interaction, as a social mechanism in shaping strategizing, in order to address the main aim of the current study. This included the proffering of a conceptual framework to guide future research in the field of social interaction in strategizing. Next, a discussion of the limitations was followed by a discussion of the contributions of the current research. Recommendations for future studies, as well as for the managers of the case study companies were presented next. The researcher's reflections on the current research were lastly followed by a conclusion of the current study.

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APPENDIX A: ETHICS APPROVAL CERTIFICATE

UNISA DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT RESEARCH ETHICS
REVIEW COMMITTEE

23 April 2018

Dear Mr Gerhard Bezuidenhout,

ERC Reference #: 2018_CEMS_BM_069
Name: Mr Gerhard Bezuidenhout
Student #: 55407161
Staff #: 

**Decision: Ethics Approval from
23 April 2018 to 22 April 2023**

Researcher(s): Mr Gerhard Bezuidenhout
E-mail address: gerhard.centurion@gmail.com
Telephone #: 0793992496

Supervisor (s): Prof Annemarie Davis & Prof Johan Strydom
E-mail address: davis@unisa.ac.za & jwstrydom52@gmail.com
Telephone #: 

Working title of research:

Social interactions between strategy practitioners shaping strategy – a case study at two private higher education institutions

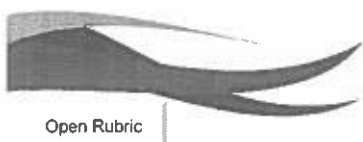
Qualification: D Com Degree

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the UNISA Department of Business Management Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. Ethics approval is granted for 5 years, from 23 April 2018 to 22 April 2023.

The low risk application was expedited by the Department of Business Management Ethics Review Committee on 20 April 2018 in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment. The decision will be tabled at the next Committee meeting on 16 May 2018 the decision was approved on 23 April 2018.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.

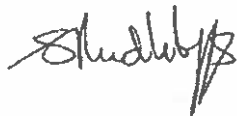


2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the Department of Business Management Ethics Review Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.
5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data requires additional ethics clearance.
7. No field work activities may continue after the expiry date (22 April 2023). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

*The reference number **2018_CEMS_BM_069** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Yours sincerely,



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APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Social interactions between strategy practitioners shaping strategy – a case study at two private higher education institutions

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Gerhard Bezuidenhout and I am doing research under the supervision of Prof A. Davis, Head: Office of Graduate Studies and Research at the College of Economic and Management Sciences and Prof JW Strydom from the Department of Business Management towards a D Com degree in Business Management at the University of South Africa (Unisa). I have received funding from the Directorate Student Funding (Unisa Postgraduate bursary) for registration and research related expenditures. We are cordially inviting you to participate in a study entitled: **Social interactions between strategy practitioners shaping strategy – a case study at two private higher education institutions.**

WHAT IS THE AIM/PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The aim of this research is to gain a deeper understanding of social interaction as social mechanism in shaping strategizing and to present a conceptual framework to guide further exploration of the relationship between social interaction and strategizing.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

You are invited to participate in this study because of your employment as a manager at one of the two private higher education institutions (PHEIs) that form part of this case study research. I received your contact details from the CEO of your organisation. I intend requesting all the managers of your organisation to participate in this study. To participate in this study you need to be employed as a top or a middle level manager. You should thus be a

- a top management committee member,
- a head of department/section head, or
- a campus coordinator.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY / WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH INVOLVE?

The study involves three phases and data will be collected in all of these phases. If you agree to participate, you need to participate in ALL THREE phases.

Phase 1:

This phase will entail the completion of a naïve sketch. Naïve sketches will provide you with the opportunity to write, from your personal point of view, about how you experience strategizing at your organisation. The naïve sketch will take approximately 30 minutes to complete. I will pick up each participant's naïve sketch (document) in person or you can email it back to me.

Phase 2:

This phase will entail a semi-structured individual interview, which will be audio voice recorded. This interview will be conducted at a venue of your choice, for example your office or a conference room. The questions, which will be asked during the interview, will focus on the times when you strategized (devised strategies for your organisation) with your colleagues and how you experienced these strategizing sessions. During the interview, I will be taking notes to ensure that I capture all the information you share with me. The interview should take approximately 60 minutes.

Phase 3:

In phase 3, all participants from Phase 1 and 2 will partake in a focus group discussion, which will be audio voice recorded. I will moderate the discussion where I will introduce certain topics which the group members will discuss amongst each other. No personal or sensitive information will be discussed during this session. Please note that a registered industrial psychologist will be present to assist with the focus group discussion. Whilst the anonymity of each focus group participant, as well as the organisation is assured in any research output emanating from this study, I cannot guarantee the anonymity of each participant, as they will be interacting with other participants. Please note, once again that NO personal or sensitive information will be discussed at the focus group session. Personal information/answers of participants from Phase 1 or Phase 2 will NOT be divulged in the focus group discussion.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY?

Being in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. There is no penalty or loss of benefit for non-participation. If you do

decide to take part, you will be given this information letter to keep and be asked to sign a written informed consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

It is expected that the findings of this research will facilitate a better understanding of how managers interact when they strategize and how these interactions ultimately shape strategic outcomes. I will also be conducting a separate quantitative survey among your organisation's students regarding their perceptions of your organisation's competitive advantages (you will not participate in the quantitative survey). This could allow for an integrated picture of how your organisation's management interactions shape strategizing and ultimately its competitive advantages.

WHAT IS THE ANTICIPATED INCONVENIENCE OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

The only inconvenience that can be foreseen is the time that you will spend to participate in the interview and the focus group discussion, as well as the time needed to write the naïve sketch.

WILL WHAT I SAY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Yes, at all times. In Phase 1 (naïve sketch) and 2 (interview), I, Gerhard Bezuidenhout, will be the only person that will know your identity. No personal or identifiable information will be disclosed in such a way that you as participant can be identified. You will be given a pseudonym (false name, for example, participant A) and you will be referred to in this way in the data. In Phase 3 (focus group discussion), your fellow focus group participants and the industrial psychologist that will assist me, will observe the discussion, but in the research data, all participants will once again be anonymised. Please note that, in Phase 3, no personal or sensitive information will be shared.

In addition to this study, your anonymous data may be used for other purposes like for research reports, journal articles and conference participants. I want to assure you that the confidentiality of information will be protected in all research outputs emanating from the study. No personal or identifiable information will be disclosed in such a way that you as participant can be identified. The organisations of this study will also not be disclosed in any of the research outputs.

HOW WILL INFORMATION BE STORED AND ULTIMATELY DESTROYED?

The electronic copies of the data will be retained for a minimum period of five years after the completion of the study in line with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics by myself. These transcribed word documents emanating from the naïve sketches, interviews and focus group discussion, as well as my field notes will in a locked steel cabinet in my office for future research or academic purposes. The electronic data will be stored on in encrypted files on a password-protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. After this time period has lapsed all information will be permanently deleted (electronic files and records) and paper based information will be shredded.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

No compensation or rewards will be offered to you, for participating in the research. Nor will you incur costs for participating in the research.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL AND INSTITUTIONAL PERMISSION?

This study fulfils the requirements as set out in the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and has received written approval from the Research Ethics Committee of the College of Economic and Management Sciences, Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, or require any further information, or for information regarding any aspect of this study, please contact me, Gerhard Bezuidenhout, the researcher on 079 399 2496, or gerhard.centurion@gmail.com . Should you have concerns about the way in which the research is conducted, you may contact Prof A Davis [012 429 2478; davisa@unisa.ac.za] or Prof JW Strydom [0824497506; Jwstrydom52@gmail.com]. For ethical concerns, the chairperson of the Department of Business Management Research Ethics Committee, Prof S Rudansky-Kloppers, can be contacted at: CEMS-ethics@unisa.ac.za .

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Kind regards,



Gerhard Bezuidenhout (researcher)

APPENDIX C: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

Social interactions between strategy practitioners shaping strategy – a case study at two private higher education institutions

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research, Mr Gerhard Bezuidenhout, has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read and understand the study as explained in the participant information letter.

I had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and I am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty.

I am aware that the findings of this study will be anonymously processed into a thesis and possibly for journal publications and/or conference proceedings.

I understand that the study will entail three phases and that I am invited to participate in all three phases.

By signing this informed consent document I declare that I am willing to participate in a naïve sketch, a semi-structured individual interview, as well as a focus group discussion and to the recording of the semi-structured interview and focus group discussion. I am aware that the researcher cannot guarantee confidentiality in the focus group discussion.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Full Name of Participant:

Signature of Participant: _____ Date: _____

Full Name of Researcher: Mr Gerhard Bezuidenhout



Signature of Researcher: _____ Date: 07/05/2018

APPENDIX D: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW TOPICS TO EXPLORE

The below list represents the topics to be explored in each interview. Questions will not necessarily have to be asked in the exact sequence and in the exact way as depicted below-this is determined by the progression of each unique interview and subsequent probing. Probing on each topic is to be done through questions like tell me more; how do you feel about this?; what is your opinion?; explain; can you give me an example?

1. How do you and your fellow managers interact with each other when engaging in strategizing/strategic planning at work?
2. How do you personally experience the interactions between the managers when they strategize at your organisation?
3. How do you view your role in strategizing at your organisation?
4. How are your inputs/suggestions received during strategizing sessions at your organisation? (possible probing into how the participant [in his/her interaction with the other managers] ensure that his/her voice is heard).
5. Can you describe the process in deciding what strategies are to be followed in your organisation?
6. Do you think that the way in which you and your fellow managers interact during strategizing sessions at work is conducive to ultimately finding the best strategies to follow?
7. Do strategies that your organisation follows usually emerge from formal strategic planning sessions or do they usually just emerge as the organisation copes with everyday challenges?

APPENDIX E: PRINTED QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire: Factors that influence the choice of private higher education institutions by students.

Dear student: This study investigates the factors that have influenced your choice with regards to higher education, as well as how you rate the institution you are currently enrolled at. Your input in answering this questionnaire will be greatly appreciated. Please complete the questionnaire in full and answer the questions honestly. All answers are strictly confidential, no names are required.

Section A: biographical information

<p>1 Indicate your age in years <input type="text"/></p> <p>Please tick the appropriate box with an X</p> <p>2 How long in years have you been studying at your current institution?</p> <p>First year <input type="checkbox"/> 1</p> <p>Second year <input type="checkbox"/> 2</p> <p>Third year or more <input type="checkbox"/> 3</p> <p>3 What is your gender?</p> <p>Male <input type="checkbox"/> 1</p> <p>Female <input type="checkbox"/> 2</p> <p>4 What is your ethnic background?</p> <p>Asian <input type="checkbox"/> 1</p> <p>Black <input type="checkbox"/> 2</p> <p>Coloured <input type="checkbox"/> 3</p> <p>Indian <input type="checkbox"/> 4</p> <p>White <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p> <p>Other <input type="checkbox"/> 6</p> <p>4.1 If other, please specify: _____</p> <p>5 How did you become aware of this educational Institution you are currently enrolled at? You may choose more than one option</p> <p>Friend <input type="checkbox"/> 1</p> <p>Media, press, radio, internet or TV <input type="checkbox"/> 2</p> <p>The institution itself (school visit or open day) <input type="checkbox"/> 3</p> <p>Family member <input type="checkbox"/> 4</p> <p>Teachers <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p> <p>Other <input type="checkbox"/> 6</p> <p>5.1 If other, please specify: _____</p> <p>6 What was the main reason for your studies?</p> <p>Higher income <input type="checkbox"/> 1</p> <p>Better job opportunities <input type="checkbox"/> 2</p> <p>Status <input type="checkbox"/> 3</p> <p>Personal development <input type="checkbox"/> 4</p> <p>Other <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p> <p>6.1 If other, please specify: _____</p> <p>7 Who is paying for your tuition? You may choose more than one option here</p> <p>Self <input type="checkbox"/> 1</p> <p>Parents/ family <input type="checkbox"/> 2</p> <p>Loan <input type="checkbox"/> 3</p> <p>Bursary from your education institution <input type="checkbox"/> 4</p> <p>Company bursary <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p> <p>Other <input type="checkbox"/> 6</p> <p>7.1 If other, please specify: _____</p>	<p>8 Including this institution, to how many higher education institutions did you apply?</p> <p>1 <input type="checkbox"/> 1</p> <p>2 <input type="checkbox"/> 2</p> <p>3 <input type="checkbox"/> 3</p> <p>4 <input type="checkbox"/> 4</p> <p>5 or more <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p> <p>9 Was this institution your:</p> <p>First choice? <input type="checkbox"/> 1</p> <p>Second choice? <input type="checkbox"/> 2</p> <p>Third choice? <input type="checkbox"/> 3</p> <p>Fourth choice or worse? <input type="checkbox"/> 4</p> <p>10 If this institution was not your first choice, why did you register here? (if this institution was your first choice, go to question 11)</p> <p>Name only the main reason</p> <p>I was not selected at the other institution(s) <input type="checkbox"/> 1</p> <p>I could not afford the other institution(s) <input type="checkbox"/> 2</p> <p>The other institution(s) was too far from home <input type="checkbox"/> 3</p> <p>The other institution(s) did not offer the study course that I wanted to enrol for <input type="checkbox"/> 4</p> <p>The other institution(s) was unsafe <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p> <p>The other institution(s) did not offer tuition in my home Language <input type="checkbox"/> 6</p> <p>I applied too late at the other institution(s) <input type="checkbox"/> 7</p> <p>Other <input type="checkbox"/> 8</p> <p>10.1 If other, please specify: _____</p> <p>11 Why did you register with this private institution and not a public institution like a university? Name only the main reason</p> <p>I wasn't accepted at a public university <input type="checkbox"/> 1</p> <p>I didn't take the prerequisite subjects <input type="checkbox"/> 2</p> <p>I applied too late at a public university <input type="checkbox"/> 3</p> <p>The university did not offer my study course <input type="checkbox"/> 4</p> <p>This private institution's course was better <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p> <p>This private institution was closer to my home <input type="checkbox"/> 6</p> <p>This private institution was less expensive <input type="checkbox"/> 7</p> <p>This private institution offered tuition in my home language <input type="checkbox"/> 8</p> <p>This private institution is in a safer environment <input type="checkbox"/> 9</p> <p>Other <input type="checkbox"/> 10</p> <p>11.1 If other, please specify: _____</p> <p>12 To what extent did your parent(s) / guardian influence your choice of education institution? Mark the most applicable statement</p> <p>My parent(s)/ guardian decided for me <input type="checkbox"/> 1</p> <p>My parent(s)/ guardian influenced me a lot <input type="checkbox"/> 2</p> <p>My parent(s)/ guardian influenced me a little bit <input type="checkbox"/> 3</p> <p>My parent(s)/ guardian didn't influence me at all <input type="checkbox"/> 4</p> <p>I'm not sure <input type="checkbox"/> 5</p>
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13. Indicate the level of **IMPORTANCE** (left column) of the following variables to you, when you selected a higher education institution. You thus have to state how important the factors in the column below were to you in deciding where to study. Also indicate the level of your **EXPERIENCE** (right column) of the following variables related to the institution you are currently enrolled at. You thus have to rate how you experience the variables in the column below at the institution you are currently enrolled at. **Please tick the appropriate box with an X**

IMPORTANCE (when you selected a higher education institution)					EXPERIENCE (how you rate the institution you are currently enrolled at)							
Not important at all	←————→				Very important	Not good at all	←————→				Excellent	N/A Not applicable
1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5			

	IMPORTANCE					EXPERIENCE					N/A
	Not important at all (1)				Very important (5)	Not good at all (1)				Excellent (5)	
Location of the institution	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Safe/secure parking facilities on campus	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Short distance to the institution	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Availability of public transport	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
A safe/secure campus	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Hostel accommodation	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Private accommodation near the institution	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Academic reputation of the institution	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
No protests/campus unrest	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Sport facilities/ teams of the institution	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Reputation of the lecturers at the institution	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Availability of information about the institution	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Marketing activities of the institution	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Financial assistance (e.g. bursaries and loans)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Well-equipped computer facilities	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Well-equipped library facilities	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Safe accommodation on/near campus	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Recreation facilities	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Small classes for better learning	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Low class fees	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Reasonable admission requirements	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Attractive campus	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Safe/secure neighbourhood surrounding the campus	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Spacious, well equipped classes	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Cafeteria on campus	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Administrative staff approachable and informed	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Bookstores conveniently located/ stocked	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Easy registration process	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Academic staff who is approachable	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Reasonable tuition payment terms	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Offers a wide range of study courses	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Provides for social activities	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Provides a variety of internship/ practicum programmes	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Industry links (e.g. contact with employers)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Student focused/good customer service	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Reputation for high rate of students completing courses	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	

Effective induction programme for new students	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
International links (e.g. study- & job opportunities)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Employment prospects (e.g. possible job opportunities)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Flexible study mode (e.g. evening classes)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Image of the institution	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Free Wi-Fi	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Most graduates from this institution secure jobs	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Low food prices on campus	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	
Tradition (my brother/ sister or parents went there)	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	

14. Any additional comments you would like to make regarding the higher education institution you are currently enrolled at?

Thank you for completing the questionnaire.

APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

FOCUS GROUP TOPICS TO EXPLORE

Instead of **asking** participants how they interact with each other during strategizing and how they experience this (this was done in the naïve sketch and semi-structured phases), the purpose of the focus group session is rather to **observe** how the participants interact with each other when they discuss (amongst each other) selected topics related to strategizing. The below list represents the topics to be covered. The questions below may not be asked in the exact sequence and exact way as depicted -this may be shaped by the progression of the discussion and the need to involve all the participants in the discussion. As discussed in the ethics application document, no personal or sensitive questions are asked. Some probing questions and questions to promote discussions between participants may include, amongst other: can someone build on that?; can you give me an example?; can you add anything else?; and can you give me an example?

1. What are the challenges that your organisation faces as a private provider within the South African higher education landscape?
2. What is the role of strategic planning (strategizing) in mitigating the challenges that your organisation faces?
3. What is your understanding of competitive advantages?
4. Reflect upon your organisation's competitive advantages.
5. Should strategies result from formal strategizing sessions or should it emerge from everyday actions directed at coping with challenges?