STRATEGY PRACTICES AND PRAXIS: A CASE OF SELECTED SOUTH AFRICAN BUSINESS SCHOOL ALUMNI

by

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Declaration

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I, the undersigned, **Amkela Ngwenya**, declare that this dissertation, **Strategy Practices and Praxis: A Case of Selected South African Business School Alumni** is my own work, and that all the sources I have used or cited have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I subjected the dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality. This work, or part thereof, has not been previously submitted for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

29 November 2019

Signature	**Date**

Acknowledgements

For capacitating me to will and to do, to my Almighty God through His son Jesus Christ, I give all the honour and the glory, "for in Him we live, and move, and have our being", Acts 17:28 "*in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*." Colossians 2:3.

Although academic research may at times appear as a solitary endeavour, it is by no means an individual effort. The successful completion of this dissertation is indebted to several professionals who oftentimes went beyond the call of duty to offer me invaluable support and scholarly guidance. Their efforts resulted in this piece of scholarly work which will likely add, though negligibly, to the extant literature on management education in South Africa and beyond.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my 80 year old beloved mother, Fikile Ngwenya. Despite her conspicuous lack of formal education, as a woman of substance and rare determination, she valued education so much that she defied the odds stacked against her to make sure I got at least a basic education. The words of wisdom she once shared with me some 25 years ago have carried me through the whole of my academic journey – the culmination of this dissertation is in honour of those words. Admittedly, she has always been my source of inspiration. Then of course to my wife Sisa and the girls: Girly, Dudu, and Andile. Thank you so much for your love, support, patience, and understanding; your sacrifices were worthwhile!

Definition of Key Terms

This dissertation features words and phrases that may be new to the reader or that may have a different meaning in everyday language. To assist the reader in understanding the meaning of certain words and phrases as used in the dissertation, some unfamiliar words and phrases, and those that may have a generally different meaning in everyday language are defined below:

Aporias: the unresolvable dilemmas, disjunctions, problematics, uncertainties, puzzles and paradoxes of [strategising] (Chishtie, 2012; Kinsella & Pitman, 2012).

Bricolage: "the artisan-like inventiveness" (de Certeau, 1984: xix) by which strategy practitioners make do with the startegy tools and frameworks at their disposal to produce *intentful* activities that characterise their day-to-day strategising (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006) emphasis added.

Epistémé: analytically rational scientific knowledge that is universal, invariable, and context-independent that generates universal management principles that are codifiable (Clegg, Jarvis, & Pitsis, 2013; Hahn & Vignon, 2019).

Gambit: an action that is taken at the beginning of a situation that is intended to provide some advantage (Nikmehr & Farahman, 2013).

Graduateness: the state of being a highly knowledgeable, professionally skilled, communicatively competent, and ethically sound graduate ready to effectively work in complex and varied work environments (Grant, 2010).

Performation: the process whereby socio-technical arrangements are enacted, to constitute so many ecological niches within and between which statements and models circulate and are true or at least enjoy a high degree of verisimilitude (Gond, Cabantous, Harding, & Leamonth, 2016).

Pedagogy: the act of teaching and its attendant discourse of educational theories, values, evidence and justifications. It is what [teachers] need to know, and the skills [they] need to command, in order to make and justify the kinds of decisions that constitute teaching (Alexander, 2008).

Performative: [in strategy, this entails the ability of strategy concepts] to influence practical reality in such a way that their premises, or their predictions have the power to produce the outcomes they describe (Cabantous & Gond, 2011).

Performativity: the thesis according to which [strategy concepts] perform, shape, and produce the outcomes they describe (Gond et al., 2016).

Phronésis: the ability to synthesise universal knowledge with a particular knowledge of a concrete situation [to make sound judgements and take appropriate action] (Nonaka & Toyama, 2007).

Scholarship: an art of teaching and learning that looks for, and builds interconnections between theory and practice, and effective diffusion of relevant knowledge to learners (Boyer, 1990).

Symbiosis: a process by which interspicies (different concepts) make dissimilar demands on their environments such that they supplement one another's efforts or effects, and thus become mutually interdependent (Astley & Fombrun, 1983).

Simplexity: a synthesis between requisite complexity of thought and appropriate simplicity of action (Colville, Brown, & Pye, 2011).

Strategising: the actions, interactions and negotiations of multiple [strategy] actors and the situated practices that they draw upon in accomplishing their activities (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007).

Strategy-as-practice: a distinct field of research that studies strategic management as a situated, socially accomplished activity a focus on micro-level social processes and practices that characterise strategy and strategising (Johnson, Melin, & Whittington, 2003; Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009)

Strategy practices: a nexus of doings and sayings [by strategy practitioners in their strategising] (Schatzki, 2012).

Strategy practitioners: professional individuals who are engaged in the doing of strategy (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009).

Strategy praxis: a morally-committed kind of action that draws on theoretical, technical, and practical forms of knowledge that constitute the traditions of the field of [strategy] (Kemmis & Smith, 2008).

Téchné: this is context-dependent, pragmatic, variable, and craft knowledge that is oriented towards tangible products (Kinsella & Pitman, 2012).

Abstract

This integrated study examined the nexus between the theory and the practice of strategy. Given the nature of modern-day public and private business enterprises in South Africa and the rest of the world, management education should equip practitioners with knowledge and skills suitable for complex, dynamic, eclectic, and uncertain practice contexts. That is, management education should be playing a critical role in shaping and guiding the business community in the 'management' and 'administration' of business in the country. However, criticisms in management literature suggest that management education is not relevant to practice. Despite such criticisms, there is relatively little empirical evidence in the country on practitioners' experiences with the relevance to practice of their management education in general and strategy education in particular. To this end, this study set out to develop a better understanding of the dynamic and nuanced interplay between strategy theory and strategy practice through a survey and interviews with selected business school alumni in professional practice. Statistical analyses were performed on quantitative data, while thematic analysis was performed on qualitative data. The survey findings of the study reveal a positive and significant relationship between academic rigour and practical relevance of strategy theory, while phenomenological findings reveal that practical relevance of strategy theory is largely constructed by practitioners according to their contextual demands. Strategic management appears to rest on the dynamic interplay between strategy theory and strategy practice within a complex and eclectic management environment.

Keywords: *Business schools; management education; business school graduates; professional practice; strategy-as-practice; strategy practices; strategy practitioners, strategy praxis*

Opsomming

In hierdie geïntegreerde studie is die verband tussen strategieteorie en -praktyk ondersoek. Bestuursopleiding moet praktisyns toerus met die kennis en vaardighede wat die komplekse, dinamiese, eklektiese en wisselvallige omgewing in openbare en private maatskappye in Suid-Afrika en elders in die wêreld vereis. Met ander woorde, bestuursopleiding moet leiding gee in die bestuur en administrasie van maatskappye in die land. In die literatuur word aangevoer dat bestuursopleiding irrelevant is. Daar is egter min empiriese bewys dat bestuursopleiding, en strategieopleiding in die besonder, ontoepaslik is. Om hierdie rede is ‘n studie van die dinamiese en genuanseerde wisselwerking tussen strategieteorie en -praktyk onderneem. Onderhoude is gevoer met en ‘n opname is gedoen onder sakeskoolalumni wat in die praktyk staan. ‘n Statistiese ontleding is van die kwantitatiewe data en ‘n tematiese ontleding is van die kwalitatiewe data gedoen. Volgens die opnamebevindings is daar ‘n positiewe en beduidende verband tussen akademiese stiptheid en die praktiese relevansie van strategieteorie. Uit die fenomenologiese bevindings blyk dat die praktiese relevansie van strategieteorie grotendeels deur praktisyns volgens die eise van hulle konteks bepaal word. Blykbaar berus strategiese bestuur op die dinamiese wisselwerking tussen strategieteorie en strategiepraktyk in ‘n komplekse en eklektiese bestuursomgewing.

Kernbegrippe: *Sakeskole; bestuursopleiding; sakeskoolgraduandi, beroepspraktyk; strategie as praktyk; strategiepraktyke, strategiepraktisyns, strategiepraksis*

Kafushane Ngocwaningo

Lolu cwaningo oludidiyelwe, lwacubungula futhi lwabukisisa ukuxhumana okukhona phakathi kwethiyori yeqhingasu kanye nenkambiso yokwenziwa nokufezekiswa kweqhingasu ngendlela ephathekayo nebonakalayo. Uma kubhekwa uhlobo nobunjalo bamabhizinisi, ezikhathi zanamuhla, angaphansi kwesandla sikahulumeni kanye nalawo asezandleni zabantu abazimele eNingizimu Afrika kanye nasemhlabeni wonke jikelele, imfundo yezokuphatha kumele ihlomise ongoti bomsebenzi ngolwazi namakhono adingekayo ezimweni zokusebenza ezinobunkimbinkimbi, ezinomdlandla, eziyingxubevange futhi ezinokungaqiniseki kanye nongabazane. Okusho ukuthi imfundo yezokuphatha kumele idlale indima esemqoka ekubumbeni nasekuholeni umphakathi wabamabhizinisi ekuphathweni nasekulawulweni kwamabhizinisi ezweni. Kodwa-ke, ukugxekwa okuvelayo emibhalweni yezokuphatha kubonisa ukuthi imfundo yezokuphatha, ikakhulukazi imfundo yamaqhingasu, ayinakho ukufanelana nokuhambelana nenqubo-nkambiso yokwenziwa komsebenzi ngendlela ebonakalayo nephathekayo. Lolu cwaningo luhlose ukuthuthukisa nokwakha ukuqonda okungcono maqondana nobuhlobo nokuxhumana okunomdlandla kepha okufihlakele okuphakathi kwethiyori yeqhingasu kanye nenkambiso yokwenziwa nokufezekiswa kweqhingasu ngendlela ephathekayo nebonakalayo, ngokusebenzisa inhlolovo kanye nama-inthaviyu (izingxoxo) nabantu abakhethiweyo abafunde bagogoda ezikoleni zebhizinisi abenza umsebenzi wobungoti. Kwenziwe uhlaziyo lwemininingo egxile ebuningini (*quantitative data*), kanti futhi kusenjalo kwenziwe nohlaziyo-ngqikithi lwemininingo egxile kukhwalithi (*qualitative data*). Imiphumela eyatholwa kwinhlolovo yocwaningo ibonisa ubukhona bobudlelwane obuhle futhi obuphawulekayo impela phakathi kwamazinga-bunyoninco ezemfundo kanye nokufaneleka okuphathekayo nokubonakalayo kwethiyori yeqhingasu, kanti futhi ngakolunye uhlangothi imiphumela yocwaningo ephathelene nezigameko nezimo abadlule kuzona ongoti bomsebenzi ibonisa ukuthi ukufaneleka okuphathekayo nokubonakalayo kwethiyori yeqhingasu kuyinto eyakhiwa ikakhulukazi ngongoti bomsebenzi ngokususela ezidingweni eziphathelene nesimo esithile. Ukuphatha ngokusebenzisa amaqhinga namasu athile kubonakala kuncike ekuxhumaneni okunomdlandla phakathi kwethiyori yeqhingasu kanye nenkambiso yokwenziwa nokufezekiswa kweqhingasu ngendlela ephathekayo nebonakalayo ngaphansi kwesimo sokuphatha esiyinkimbinkimbi futhi esiyingxubevange.

Amagama asemqoka: *Izikole zebhizinisi; imfundo yezokuphatha; abantu abafunde bagogoda ezikoleni zebhizinisi; umsebenzi wobungoti; iqhingasu njengenqubo-nkambiso; izindlela, izinqubo kanye namathuluzi okwenza iqhingasu; abenzi beqhingasu; ukuhamba nokuqhubeka komsebenzi wokwenziwa kweqhingasu*

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CHAPTER 1: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

> "*The genuine enquirer... does want the true answer to his question: if he is inquiring into whether cigarette smoking causes cancer, he wants to end up believing that cigarette smoking causes cancer if cigarette smoking causes cancer, and that it doesn't if it doesn't and that it is a lot more complicated than that if it is a lot more complicated than that*" – Susan Haack.

1.1 Introduction

In performing their management practices and praxis, by and large, management practitioners draw on academic knowledge and skills. That is, management practitioners in professional practice meld theory and practice. By implication, the relationship between academe and business is an entrenched, unique and symbiotic one that should ideally be rooted on open collaboration and mutual trust. However, such a relationship has largely been characterised by some tensions, with academe, business schools in particular, being criticised for failure to serve the needs of business with distinction (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Ghoshal, 2005; Paton, Chia & Burt, 2014; Kieser, Nicolai & Siedl, 2015). Business schools command considerable influence in the Global North, and yet they are regarded as intellectually fraudulent (Parker, 2018). Primarily, at issue is that business schools emphasise the scientific rigour of their academic offerings at the expense of the practical relevance of the knowledge and skills produced. Bennis and O'Toole (2005) argue that business schools have quietly adopted an inappropriate model that embodies academic rigour instead of graduate competence as a sole measure of excellence.

As Gulati (2007) notes, since surfacing in the late 1950s and early 1960s, debates on the disconnect between rigorous academic scholarship and practical relevance of management education have not abated. According to Finch, Falkenberg, McLaren, et al. (2018), the topic of the academic rigour and the practical relevance of [management] education remains important and hotly contested among scholars, practitioners, and policymakers. The role of business education has been increasingly questioned and even posited to have contributed to some business failures (Currie, Knights & Starkey, 2010; Clegg, et al., 2013). That said, management education is critically important in developing better management practitioners and practices (e.g. Elmuti, 2004). The debates and discourses on the practical relevance of management education have given rise to the need to gather empirical evidence about the extent to which business schools inculcate relevant knowledge and skills in their graduates to prepare them for a world of work (Jarzabkowski, Giulietti, Oliveira, & Amoo, 2013).

1.2 Background and Context

According to Khurana (2007), business education in the 1950s was noticeably of a low intellectual standard and lacked direction. Alluding to the above thesis, Gordon and Howell (1959: 4) describe the business school of the day as an uncertain giant that is gnawed by doubt and harassed by the barbs of unfriendly critics that seek to serve several masters but is assured that it serves none well. Most business schools claim a dual mission to educate practitioners and to extend the frontiers of knowledge through research (Pierson, 1959; Bennis & O'Toole, 2005). Bennis and O'Toole (2005) note that historically, business schools have emphasised the former over the latter. The business school of the first half of the twentieth century was akin to a trade school that dispensed rather mechanical, cracker-barrel management education (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Thomas, Sheth & Lorange, 2013). Against this background, the Ford Foundation and the Carnegie Foundation commissioned research studies on the state of management education and the purpose of business schools in the United States. Following the publication in 1959 of the findings and recommendations of the reports that culminated from those studies, the 'trade school' orientation changed rapidly (Thomas et al., 2013). Granted, the objectives of both the Ford and Carnegie reports were not just to present a set of findings, but to prod business schools out of their complacency and instigate change (Khurana, 2007). The result of this change was the idea of a [business] school that is driven by science (Parker, 2018). Besides the Ford and Carnegie reports, the rapid swing towards a research-based model of management education was also influenced by a confluence of other factors, such as the belief that the Cold War would be won through strong management and business schools scrambling for academic legitimacy (McLaren, 2019). However, Gulati (2007) notes that the management education pendulum appears to have swung too far towards academic rigour, trumping practical relevance in the process.

In South Africa, the founding of the first business school in the country, the Graduate School of Management, by the University of Pretoria in 1949 saw the introduction of contemporary lessons on scientific management (Council on Higher Education, 2004). Since then, the business management education landscape in the country has evolved into a multi-disciplinary teaching and learning enterprise that seeks to address complex and diverse management issues (Kleyn, 2018). Since the dawn of democracy, management education in South Africa has seen significant reforms and changes in curricula (Ruggunan & Spiller, 2018). Despite such developments, the legitimacy of business schools in the country, and the relevance to practice of the knowledge and skills they produce are increasingly questioned. At issue in particular, is whether South African business schools should aspire to be locally relevant as well as internationally recognised for excellence (Nkomo, 2015; Anorld, 2017). In an era of international business, South African management education curricula should seek to develop and maintain a balance between contextual demands of practice and the universal imperatives of business (Hofmeyr, 1990). Reportedly, business schools in South Africa and continental Africa attempt to maintain a balance between mimicking Western models of management education and country specific differentiations (Thomas, 2017). To this end, Nkomo (2015) argues that the management education relevance problem in South Africa is therefore, not so much about a curriculum gap between the theoretical and practical preparation of managers, as it is about the relevance of management education to the developmental priorities of the nation. Within a global management landscape, business school management education should subscribe to the imperatives of universal principles of management, while being mindful of the contextual nitty-gritties of local needs and practical demands of practitioners.

Some South African business schools command respectability at a global level, attracting rankings by the respected Financial Times and Eduniversal. In 2018, a total of 19 South African business schools made it to the Eduniversal rankings, with 2 of them achieving the prestigious 5 palmes on the rankings. The Eduniversal Evaluation System assigns between 1 and 5 'Palmes of Excellence', with 5 palmes signifying that the business school has a strong global influence. Locally, the Financial Mail and PMR.africa conduct an annual MBA survey, the primary objective of which is to investigate which MBA programme in the country has the best reputation among employers. According to Furlonger (2019) the MBA content, programme design, pedagogics, and outcomes in the country are changing. The MBA curricula of all the business schools whose alumni participated in the study, offer strategy as a second-year compulsory module with between 6 and 24 credits. Generally, the stated primary objectives of these business schools in offering the strategy module, is to equip students with the perspectives, frameworks, and tools for effective strategising for integrated and sustainable enterprise development. Business school graduates are employed across industries and sectors of the South African economy, and at different levels of management authority.

1.3 Problem Statement

There has been much discussion surrounding rigorous academic scholarship and practical relevance of business school produced management education in recent times (Chia, 2014a). In particular, the strategy body of knowledge has been criticised for not being actionable in practice (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006), especially given the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity of the 21st century environment within which strategy is being practiced. In response to such criticisms, scholars have undertaken extensive research studies, which have culminated in a magnum corpus of knowledge on the state of business school produced management education (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Ghoshal, 2005; Chia, 2014b; Kieser, et al., 2015).

As posited by Kieser et al. (2015) the practical relevance of management education is an ongoing concern for many business school academics. Though such concerns mainly relate to business school management education in the United States, the situation in South Africa (Oluwajodu, Blaauw, Greyling, & Kleynhans, 2015) may not be entirely different. That said, the practical relevance of South African business school produced management education, strategic management education in particular, has not been sufficiently studied empirically. The fact, therefore, is that very little is known about the practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge and skills inculcated by South African business schools in their graduates. To fill this gap in extant literature, the current study empirically examined the dynamic and nuanced interplay between strategy scholarship and strategy practice in South Africa.

1.4 Thesis Statement

A corpus of management literature bewails the gap between academic rigour and the practical relevance of management education. The debates are that business schools emphasise the scientific rigour of their academic offerings over the practical relevance to practicing managers of the knowledge and skills produced. However, as Kieser et al. (2015) argue, much of the debates that are advanced are based on programmatic studies that are often uncritical and partly ideological. Importantly, the nature of the relationship between academe and business has not been thoroughly investigated and clearly explained. Academe and business, it appears, exist in a relational exchange, where their differences, rather than similarities, are what make each matter to the other. To this end, the thesis advanced in this study is that South African business school alumni in professional practice draw on their strategy academic knowledge and skills in their practice of strategy and they have a positive experience with the application of such knowledge and skills. To test this thesis, the study adopted an integrated research design built on a survey and phenomenology.

1.5 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to *examine* and *conceptualise* the relationship between the academic rigour and practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge and skills produced by South African business schools.

1.6 Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to gain a better understanding of the dynamic and nuanced interplay between management education and management practice.

1.7 Research Questions

In conducting this ‘integrated study’ the researcher sought to answer the following primary and secondary research questions:

1. What is the *relationship* between strategy theory and strategy practice in South Africa?

1.1. What is the *nature* of the relationship between academic rigour and the practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge and skills produced by South African business schools?

1.2. What is the *extent* of the relationship between academic rigour and the practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge and skills produced by South African business schools?

2. How is the *relationship* between strategy theory and strategy practice constituted in South Africa?

1.8 The Research Model

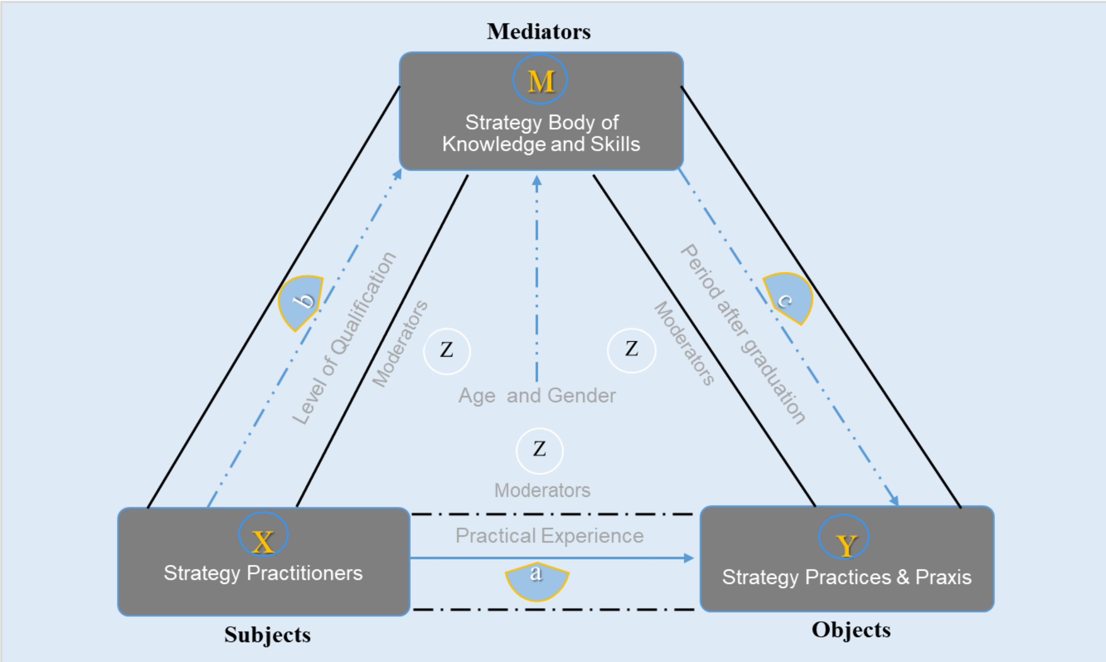
The current study was conducted under the guiding and organising theme of strategy-as-practice, a sub-field of strategy research, which is primarily concerned with what strategy practitioners do in their day-to-day strategising. The practice turn in strategy provides for the analyses of micro and everyday activities that constitute the labour of strategy (Whittington, 2006). In performing their strategy activities, strategy practitioners draw on theoretical knowledge resources and stocks of skills to potentiate and improve their practice. The primary focus of the current study is the mediating role of strategy knowledge and skills between strategy practitioners and their day-to-day mundane strategy practices and praxis. Strategy knowledge and skills are important in strategy doing by strategy practitioners. In their day-to-day doing of strategy, drawing on their knowledge and skills, strategy practitioners perform, shape, enact, and re-enact strategy practices and praxis.

By its very nature, strategy is patently performative. In his seminal work, *How to Do Things with Words*, Austin (1962) describes specific utterances that do not report or describe an action or a situation but produce it. When a marriage officer says, 'I declare you husband and wife' at a wedding ceremony, the utterance, other than describing a situation, actually does something. Such an utterance changes one's identity (Kornberger & Clegg, 2011) and is therefore performative. Austin's insights have found resonance in organisation studies. In the field of strategy, strategy theories and concepts bring into reality the actions they describe and frame. To paraphrase Kornberger and Clegg (2011) strategy does not so much describe the strategy activities as it brings them into reality. Kornberger and Clegg contend that strategy is performative in that it constitutes its subjects and shapes its objects – strategy practitioners and strategy practices and praxis in the current study. When strategy practitioners are immersed in performative acts of strategising, according to Vásquez, Benchrki, Cooren, and Sergi (2018), they draw on knowledge and skills which perform the practices that in turn enact strategy.

As performativity brings theory into reality (Gond, Cabantous, Harding, & Learmonth, 2016) the association of socio-material elements create felicitous conditions for theoretical knowledge to enact the real-world (Ligonie, 2018). This socio-technical assemblage involves concepts and models themselves, sets of activities and social interactions (Cabantous & Gond, 2011). Performativity shifts the focus from whether a theoretical concept provides an accurate depiction of reality, to whether and under what conditions it produces such a reality (Mackenzie, 2007). In strategy practice, such an undertaking directs attention to the ways in which theoretical concepts mobilise strategy practitioners and their practices and praxis to bring about the reality they promote (Ligonie, 2018). As a result, strategy represents neither a neutral tool nor a mere technique, but constructs its object through the means of accounting for, normalising, and representing phenomena as objects of strategy (Kornberger & Clegg, 2011). Alluding to the interconnectedness of theoretical knowledge and practice, Cabantous and Gond (2011) advance the notion of performative praxis, a set of activities that enable theories to become social reality. Considering the above, the concept of performativity was embraced in the current study in order to illuminate the theoretical understanding and empirical characterisation of the interaction between strategy practitioners, their knowledge and skills, and their strategy practices and praxis in the '*performation*' of strategy, D'Adderio (2008).

The thesis advanced in this study is that, in performing their day-to-day strategising activities, strategy practitioners draw on their strategy academic knowledge and skills. Strategising, as a socio-material activity, therefore, melds theory and practice. To give effect to the objective of the study and to place the study in its proper context, the research model graphically depicted in Figure 1.1 was adopted as the study's organising framework. The research model facilitates the understanding (Sarens & De Beelde, 2006) of demographic variables that may mediate or moderate the use of strategy knowledge and skills in practice settings. As the model depicts, the strategy body of knowledge and skills (M) plays a mediating role between strategy practitioners (X) and their strategy practices and praxis (Y). However, the strategy body of knowledge does not provide a complete mediation, as the practitioner's practices and praxis are likely also influenced and shaped by practical experience gained from the field. That is, the mediational power of strategy knowledge and skills is moderated by practical experience of the strategy practitioner.

Figure 1.1: The Research Model



Source: Own compilation

The notion of performativity alluded to above, suggests that the interaction between strategy practitioners and their practices and praxis is performative rather than causal. That is, as the research model in Figure 1.1 reflects, strategy practitioners (X), other than causing strategising activities (Y), perform them. The model further articulates that this relationship is to some degree mediated by practitioners' knowledge resources and sets of skills (M). In proper context, the relationship is built on what Muniesa (2018) characterises as the being (X), knowing (M), and doing (Y) of a nuanced and dynamic interaction in the *performation* of strategy. The model presents strategy practitioners as individuals (beings) who perform some strategy activities (Y). The performation of such activities constitute a set of rational activities which depend on a systematic body of knowledge (knowing) and involves the exercise of skill (doing) with a certain degree of art (Rein & White, 1981). Implicit in the model is the conceptualisation of knowledge resources as either *knowledge for practice* or *knowledge in practice* (Smith, 2018). *Knowledge for practice* constitutes the formal strategy knowledge developed and taught by business schools, whereas *knowledge in practice* represents tacit knowledge constructed by strategy practitioners through professional practice and experience (Smith, 2018).

Whether causal or performative, interactions embody both mediation mechanisms and moderation effects. Aguinis, Edwards and Bradley (2017) note that the concepts of mediation and moderation are foundational to strategy. Though related, the terms are conceptually distinct: mediation refers to an intervening mechanism between subject and object, whereas moderation refers to the nature of the effect exerted on their interaction in terms of strength or direction (Aguinis et al., 2017). For the current study, mediation is the mechanism by which the interaction between subject and object is enhanced. Specifically, the study postulates that the interaction between strategy practitioners and their practices and praxis is enhanced by strategy academic knowledge and skills, or 'knowledge for practice' in Smith's (2018) characterisation of knowledge types. The study further assumes that the strength of such an enhancement is affected by an individual practitioner's experiential circumstances and history. For example, from a conceptual standpoint, practitioners who left formal schooling some years back, may rely more on their tacit knowledge than they would rely on formal knowledge when strategising. On the contrary, recent graduates are more likely to rely on formal knowledge than on tacit knowledge.

Explicating the model further, mediation implies indirect influence by practitioners (X) on their strategising activities (Y) through strategy knowledge and skills (M). By way of notation, direct influence $\rightarrow a \neq 0$; indirect influence, $\rightarrow bc \neq 0$; complete influence, $\rightarrow a + bc = 1$, the notation implies partial mediation, otherwise $bc \neq 0$ whereas $a = 0$; $a + bc = 1$. Turning to the moderation effects, along path *z*(a), the interaction between practitioners (X) and their strategising activities (Y) are moderated by practitioners' practical experiences; path z(b) the link between practitioners (X) and the mediators (M) is moderated (i.e. strengthened/weakened) by practitioners' period after graduation and level of formal qualification; path z(c) the link between the mediators (M) and strategising activities (Y) is moderated (i.e. strengthened/weakened) by practitioners' period after graduation. And finally, the operation of the mediator (M) is surmised to be affected by the individual practitioner's age and sex. Table 1.1 summarises the nature, effect and description of *z* as depicted in the research model.

Table 1.1: The Moderating Effects of Strategy Practitioners' Biographies

	Type 1	Type 2	Type 3	Type 4
Nature of Z	Affects link from **x** to **m**	Affects the operation of the mediator	Affects link from **m** to **y**	Affects link from **x** to **y**
Effect of Z	Moderates ***x***'s influence on both **m** and **y**	Moderates **x**'s influence on both **m** and **y**	Moderates **x**'s influence on ***y*** but not **m**	Moderates **x**'s direct influence on **y**
Description of Z	Practitioner's level of qualification	Practitioner's age and sex	Practitioner's period after graduation	Practitioner's practical experience

Source: Own Compilation

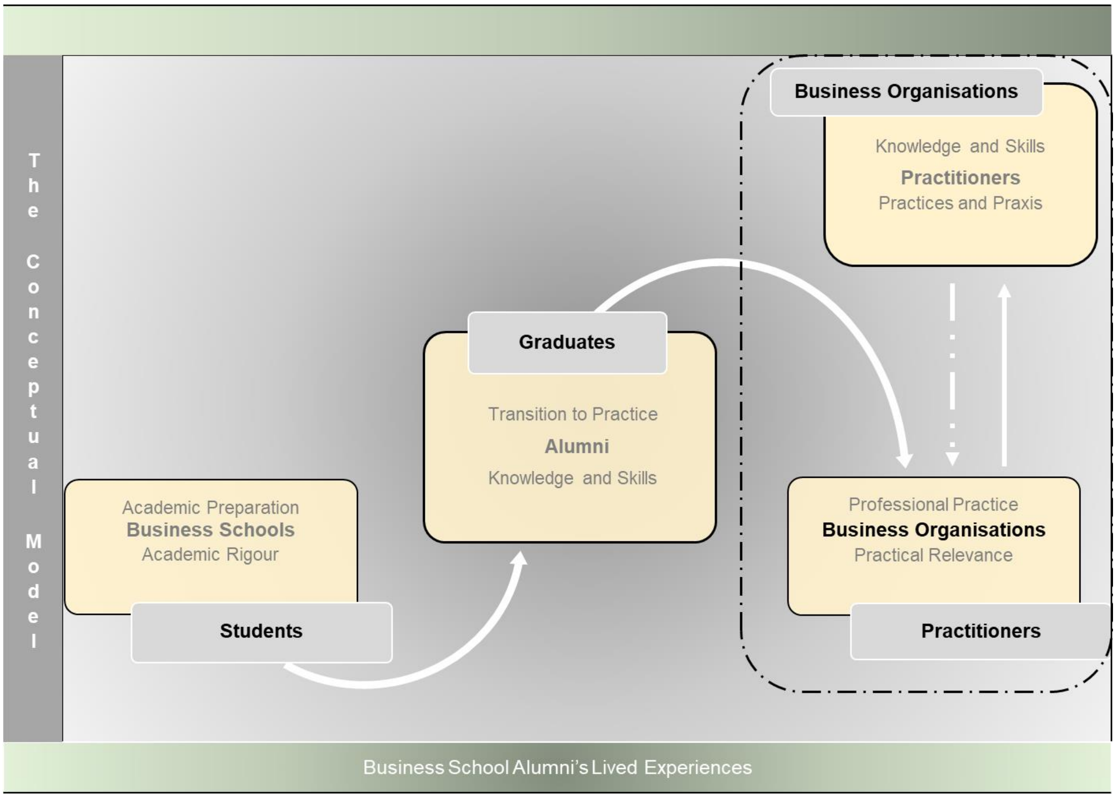
As Vancouver and Carlson (2015) note, the nature of the moderator z will determine its effect on the interaction between X, Y, and possibly M. They identify 3 possible effects the moderate z would have on the subjects, mediators, and objects, and call them Type I, Type II, and Type III, Table 1.1. The Fourth effect, Type IV, was identified for the current study. As depicted in Table 1.1, practitioners' levels of qualifications are articulated to affect the link between practitioners (X) and their knowledge and skills (M) and thus moderate X's influence on both M and Y, a Type I effect. Practitioners' age and sex are articulated to affect the operation of their knowledge and skills (M) and thus moderate X's influence on both M and Y, a Type II effect. Practitioners' periods after graduation are articulated to affect the link between their knowledge and skills (M) and their strategy practices and praxis (Y) and thus moderate X's influence on Y, a Type III effect. Finally, practitioners' practical experiences are articulated to affect the link between X and Y, thus moderating X's influence on Y, a Type IV effect.

The research model contextualises and situates the study within the strategy-as-practice research stream. The model also brings into focus the notion of performativity in strategy practice which, according to Kornberger and Clegg (2011) directs scholars' attention to the reality that strategising is an activity that does something. Key to the research model is the articulation that the strategy body of knowledge and skills mediate the interaction between practitioners and their strategising activities. That is, the strategy body of knowledge and skills enhance the interaction between strategy practitioners and their practices and praxis in the *performation* of strategy. Closely related to the concept of mediation is the notion of moderation – the strengthening or weakening of the enhancement mechanism. Moderation effects may affect the link between the subject, the mediator, the object or the operation of the mediator. The research model served as an organising framework of the study.

1.9 The Conceptual Framework

Generally, the debates and discourses on management education revolve around rigorous academic scholarship and the practical relevance of business management education. Figure 1.2 presents the conceptual framework adopted for the current study which examined the lived experiences of selected business school alumni's intellectual journeys, beginning at business school, through graduation, and then transitioning to professional practice. As Grant and Osanloo (2014) explain, a conceptual framework maps the relationship between different variables of the study and guides the researcher on how the research problem can best be explored. In a similar vein, Maxwell, (2012) defines a conceptual framework as primarily a conception of what is out there to be studied – a tentative theory of phenomena to be investigated. As depicted in Figure 1.2, during academic preparation, the student is surmised to go through the rigorous experience of a learning process in order to obtain a formal qualification. And hence, at the background of the academic preparation process is the academic rigour of teaching, pedagogical, and assessment methods deployed by each business school. Figure 1.2 further depicts that , after graduation, armed with new knowledge and skills obtained through a formal business management qualification, the graduate then transitions to professional practice. In professional practice, practitioners engage in strategy practices and praxis, while they are surmised to draw on their academic knowledge and skills to efficiently and effectively perform their strategising activities.

Figure 1.2: The Conceptual Model of the Study



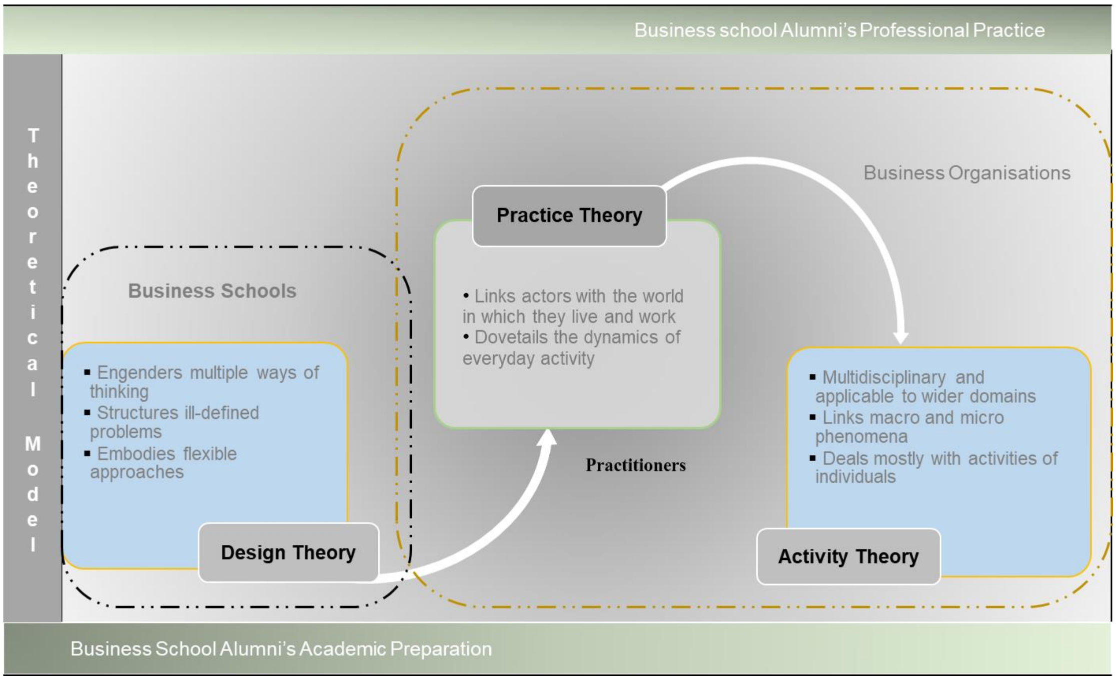
Source: Own Compilation

Primarily, the study examined the practical relevance of strategy academic knowledge and the skills of professionals and managers in their strategy practices and praxis. These professionals and managers had, as part of their official functions, the responsibility to formulate and implement strategy, and hence, they were poised to provide meaningful insights into the practical relevance of strategy education in professional practice. Admittedly, business school students are, or have been employed before enrolling for a business qualification, as such, they likely draw on both formal, academic knowledge and tacit, experiential knowledge in their strategising activities. The major distinction between the two forms of knowledge is that the former is codified, stored, and observed (Ranucci & Souder, 2015), whereas the latter primarily resides in practitioners' heads. Both forms of knowledge are crucially important as they blend the abstract and the concrete, and the general and the particular. However, the current study was primarily concerned with formal academic knowledge and skills obtained from business schools.

1.10 The Theoretical Framework

As theory gives structure to the subject under study, the current study was grounded on existing theoretical resources, namely: design theory, practice theory, and activity theory. Study findings were not tested against these theories, rather the theories were used to situate, inform, and guide the study. A theoretical framework is the "blueprint" that serves as a guide on which the study is built and supported as it offers a theoretical basis for understanding, analysing, and designing ways for investigating a problem, (Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Figure 1.3 graphically depicts the theoretical framework adopted for the study.

Figure 1.3: The Theoretical Model



Source: Own Compilation

As reflected in Figure 1.3, these theories are distinct yet connected. Design theory, though not limited to, is largely embodied in business school environments, where they inform and guide curricula development and assessment methods. Practice theory and activity theory on the other hand, are largely embodied in business organisations where strategy practice plays out. Practice theory links strategy practitioners with their lifeworlds were as activity theory links up macro and micro phenomena.

1.10.1 Design Theory

In the practice of strategy, design thinking offers a better approach for dealing with complex, ill-defined problems of today's business world (Glen, Suciu & Baughn, 2014). Design has become pervasive both as an act and an outcome as it is a multi-dimensional concept which engenders multiple ways of thinking and behaving, serves multiple functions, and is conducive to the development of a flexible approach to the teaching, research and practice of strategy (Ruttonsha & Quilley, 2014). In research and teaching, design theory speaks to learning and course design, whereas in strategy practice and praxis, it speaks to, among other things, organisational and work design.

1.10.2 Practice Theory

What strategy practitioners actually do in their day-to-day practice of strategy has increasingly become the focus of strategy in recent years (Chia & Holt, 2008). According to Chia and Mackay (2007) practices orient and educate our attention, and shape our dispositions as they make us understand what it actually means to be human and how to act, not by having mental representations, but through being socialised into certain social practices. For Feldman and Orlikowski (2011) the relationship between specific aspects of situated action and the social world in which such action takes place is critical to practice theory. That is, practices are posited to be social phenomena enacted in the broader social scheme of things. In a strategy-as-practice perspective, practices are central to strategising activities of strategy practitioners.

1.10.3 Activity Theory

The practice of strategy is steeped in human activity. "In activities, humans develop their skills, personalities, and consciousness" (Sannino, Daniels, & Gutiérrez, 2009: 1). For Bødker (1991) activity theory is a useful framework for understanding the totality of human practices and praxis. As activity cannot be understood, and thus analysed, outside the context in which it occurs, when analysing human activity, one must examine not only the kinds of activities performed, but even practitioners themselves, their goals and intentions and all the elements of the activity system (Jonassen & Rorer-Muroy, 1999). Activity theory is a practice-based theory (Sannino, et al., 2009) which facilitates interpretation of the "practices through which actors and collective structures interact in practical activity” (Jarzabkowski, 2003: 26). For the current study, business schools and business organisations provided important activity systems with the collective structures in which academics, graduates, and practitioners perform practical activities for practical outcomes.

1.11 Design and Methods of the Study

The study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed methods design rooted on a survey and phenomenology. The two components of the study were almost of equal weight; however, the survey was conducted first. An internet mediated questionnaire was used to gather quantitative data while one-on-one semi-structured interviews were employed to produce qualitative data. The population of interest for the survey were business school graduates who held a postgraduate diploma or a postgraduate degree from a business school in South Africa. For phenomenology, the population consisted of MBA degree holders who obtained their qualifications within a ten-year period between 2006 and 2015. The size of the population was unknown; however, around 178 e-mails with the survey link were distributed of which 57 (32%) usable responses were received. Roughly 30 requests for interviews were made 16 (53%) of which resulted in interviews being conducted. Study participants were purposively sampled.

Data analyses and interpretation of findings rested on abductive reasoning, (Creswell, 2014; Reilly, 2016; Tracy, 2020). Statistical analyses, means, modes, correlations, and regressions were performed quantitative research data whereas thematic analysis was performed on qualitative data. Qualitative data were coded, and then the codes were categorised and further developed into themes, (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A total of 5 themes were developed from interview response data. Survey findings reveal a positive and significant relationship between academic rigour and practical relevance of strategy theory while phenomenological findings reveal that practical relevance of strategy theory is largely constructed by practitioners according to their contextual conditions. All the activities of the study were conducted under the guiding principles of ethical standards germane to the study. As Leedy and Ormrod, (2015) note, human participants have the potential to experience physical or psychological distress, as such, ethical implications for the study were closely observed.

1.12 Originality and Significance of the Study

A number of studies have been conducted globally (e.g. Jarratt & Stiles, 2010) and in South Africa (e.g. Grebe, Davis, & Odendaal, 2016) on strategy tools used by managers. However, very little, if any studies have been done that examine the lived experiences of practitioners, with the practical relevance of their strategy academic knowledge and skills in South Africa. The current study gains its originality in that it blends strategy academic knowledge, skills, and strategy tool use within a strategy-as-practice perspective in multiple industries and sectors of the economy. The study is also significant in that its findings generate new knowledge which provides possible explanations on how academic knowledge and skills inform, guide and shape strategy practices and praxis of selected business school graduates.

1.13 Delineation of the Study

Business schools are institutions of higher learning whose offerings transcend teaching and student evaluation and administration to include research and publishing. Although some of the research output ends up codified in textbooks and then gets delivered to students through teaching and pedagogical means, the current study did not investigate the rigour and practical relevance of strategic management research. That is, the study only examined the practical relevance of strategy knowledge and skills as taught in business school lecture halls. Theoretically, the concept of performativity that runs through some sections of the study was not adopted as a theoretical lens of the study, but is used in the study to cement the idea that strategy is patently an applied and practical discipline. Also, the study did not attempt to cover all the variables that may affect the interplay between strategy scholarship and strategy scholarship as doing so would make the study unwieldy and difficult to execute.

1.14 Underlying Assumptions

Assumptions are realistic expectations that are considered true even though they have not been scientifically tested, (Patidar, 2013). The researcher expects readers to believe that such assumptions are true without providing them with evidence (Hofstee, 2006). As the research data gathering and production processes of the study involved active engagement with participants, the following important assumptions were made. *One*, like Gioia, Corley and Hamilton (2012), the researcher assumed that participants were knowledgeable practitioners who could explain their thoughts, intentions, and actions, such that the accounts of their experiences would be credible. This assumption was critically important for the study, in that giving prominence to participants' voices during data production, analysis, and reporting, created opportunities to unearth new and important insights into the practical relevance of management education. *Two*, participants' primary motivations for acquiring a business school education were to build their careers as management practitioners. The implication of this assumption for the study was that participants would want to actively draw on their management knowledge and skills, in professional practice. *Three*, as study participants were neither induced nor incentivised to participate, they had a sincere and genuine interest to take part in the study. The implication of this assumption is that participants were honest and faithful in their responses and thus the conclusions drawn from the study findings are valid. *Four*, as anonimity and confidentiality were observed, the study was conducted in a scientific manner. *Five*, the sampled participants were represenattive of the population of South African business school alumni. Table 1.2 summarises the assumptions of the study.

Table 1.2: Summary of Assumptions Underlying of the Study

Type of Assumption	Brief Detail of Assumption
Methodological	• Knowledgeable and thoughtful participants who could offer credible accounts of their experiences • Participants' motivation to draw from their academic knowledge and skills in performing their strategising activities
Contextual	• Sincere and genuine interest in participation in the study
Theoretical	• Study being conducted in a scientific manner • Representativeness of the sample

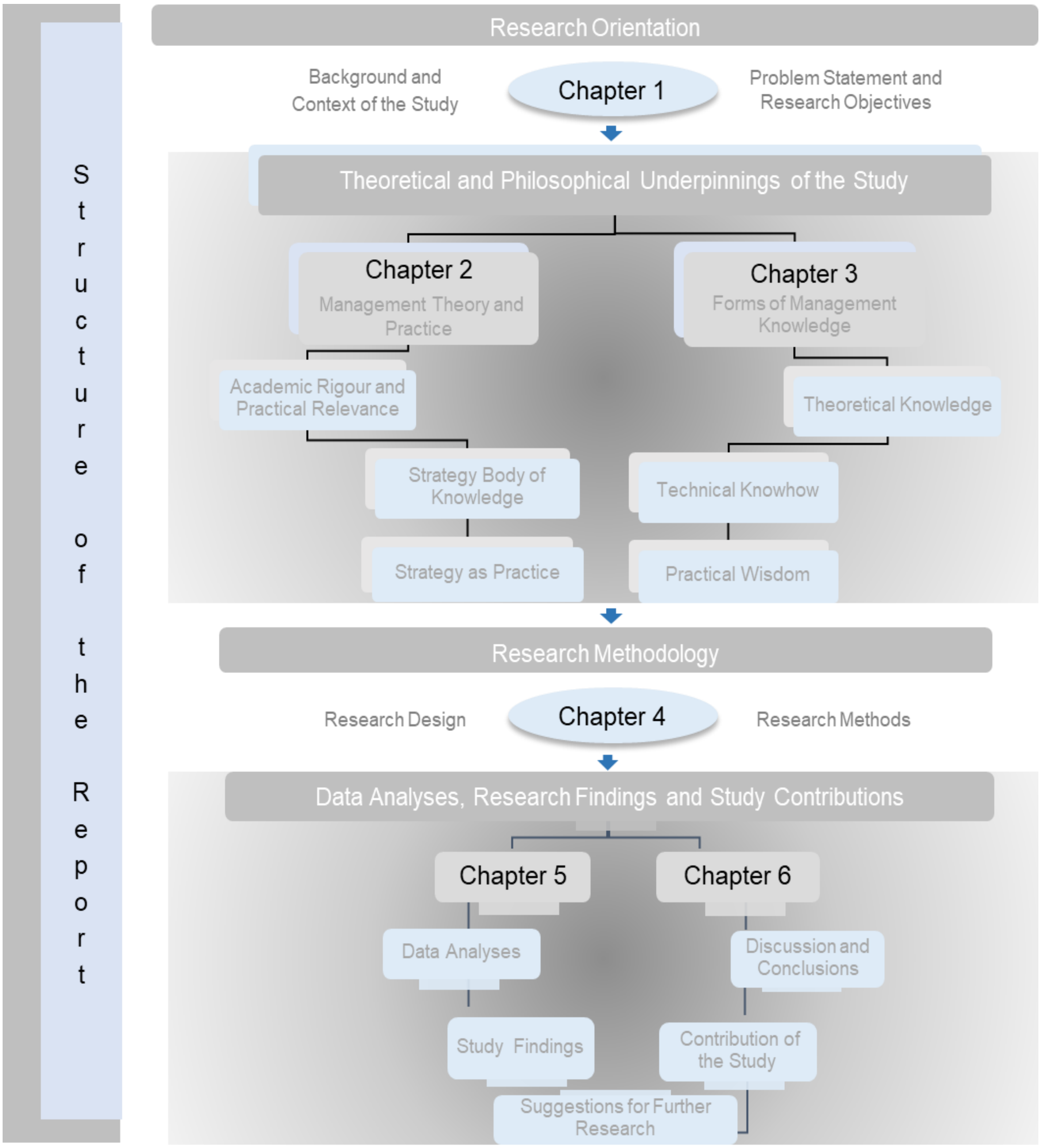
Source: Own Compilation

As Table 1.2 depicts, the assumptions are classified according to type. These underlying assumptions formed the bedrock upon which the current study was built.

1.15 Structure of the Dissertation

This dissertation is divided into 6 chapters that are grouped into four themes as graphically depicted in Figure 1.4. Chapter 1 provides the context of the study and presents the research problem, research questions, research purpose and the objective of the study under the research orientation theme. Chapter 2 presents the theoretical underpinnings of the study as it delineates the theory and practice nexus, and the strategy-as-practice phenomenon.

Figure 1.4: Structure of the Dissertation



Source: Own Compilation

Chapter 3 presents the forms of management knowledge and their attendant dispositions within the strategy-as-practice perspective. Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 make up the literature review theme. Chapter 4 delineates the research design and research methods adopted for the study under the research methodology theme. As reflected in Figure 1.4, Chapter 5 details the analyses of the research data and presents the findings of the study. Chapter 6 presents a detailed discussion of the study findings, draws conclusions from the study findings, and then provides some suggestions for further research.

1.16 Chapter Summary

This chapter lays the foundation on which all the activities and processes of the study rest. The chapter opens with a rich background of business school education in the United States, circa the 1950s, and then delves into the South African context of management education, beginning around 1949 with the founding of the first business school in the country, the Graduate School of Business at the University of Pretoria. Since then, business management education in the country has evolved to be what it is today, an epitome of management studies that is supported by a system of well-established university affiliates, as well as independent business schools, some of which have international acclaim and influence. The chapter then proceeds to present the problem under study, pose research questions, establish the purpose and objectives of the study and advance its thesis.

To properly frame and contextualise the study, the chapter also presents the research model, the conceptual model, and the theoretical model. The research model situates the study within the strategy-as-practice perspective and thus conceptualising strategy as a performative enterprise that is capable for creating the conditions and outcomes it describes. The conceptual model encapsulates the concepts that constitute the heart of the study, whereas the theoretical model brings to the fore theoretical resources that situate, frame, and inform the entire study. The design and methods of the study are also briefly outlined. To round up, the chapter stakes out the contribution and significance of the study while delineating its parameters, detailing the assumptions that define its texture and lays out the structure of the study.

CHAPTER 2: MANAGEMENT THEORY AND PRACTICE

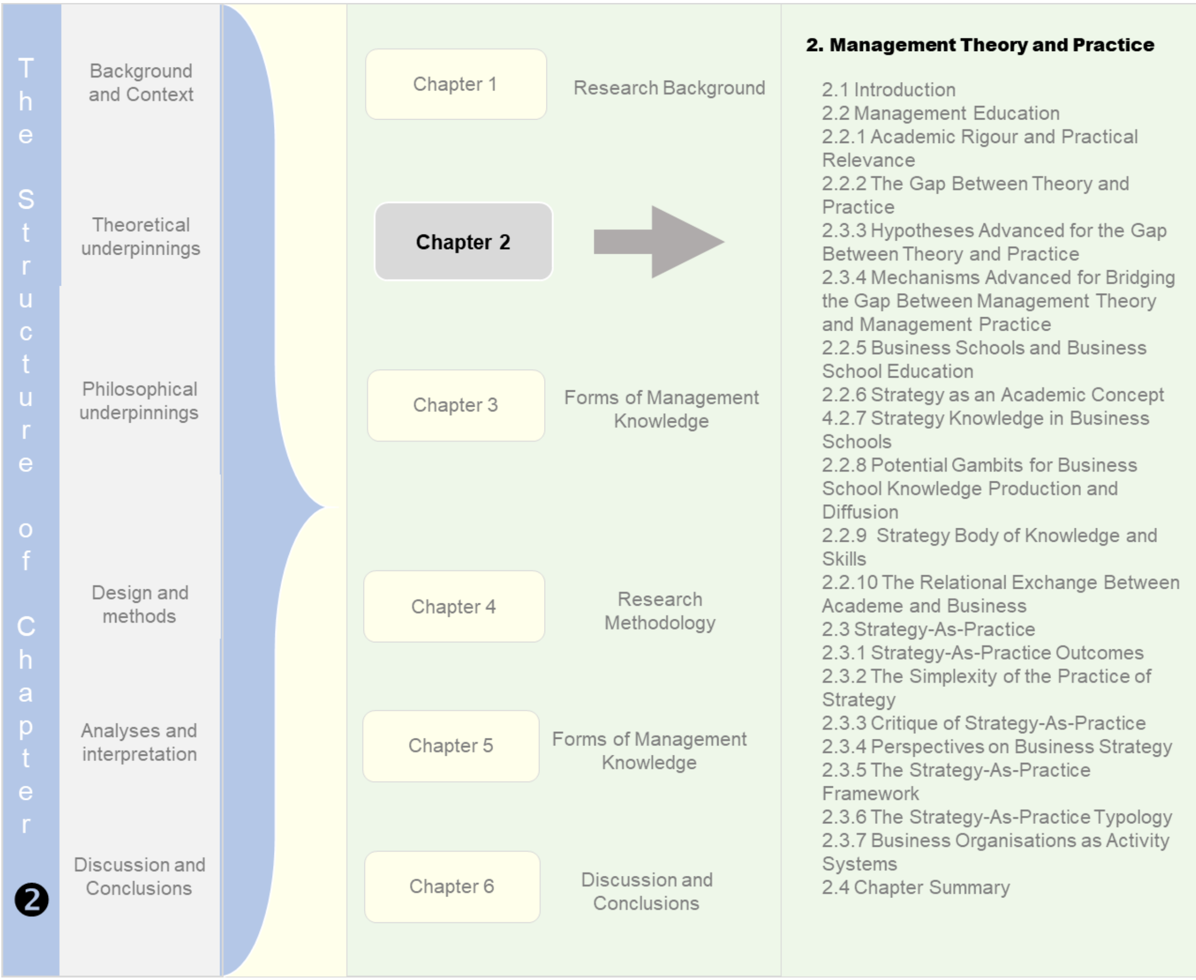
> “*Practice pervades the deepest foundations of the scientific operation and reforms it from beginning to end. Practice sets the tasks and serves as the supreme judge of theory as its truth criterion. It dictates how to construct the concepts and how to formulate the laws*” – Lev S Vygotsky.

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the background, context, research model, conceptual framework, and the theoretical framework of the study. This chapter presents a review of theories undergirding the dynamic interplay between theory and practice as underpinned by academic rigour and practical relevance. Given that very little is known about the practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge and skills produced by South African business schools, this review interconnects management theory as embodied in business management education, and practice as embodied in strategy practice. The review is conducted against the backdrop of the much-debated phenomenon of the gap between academic rigour and practical relevance. Notwithstanding the fact that in much of management literature, theory and practice are depicted as dichotomous and therefore mutually exclusive, the view taken in this review is that the two concepts are inclusive and complementary.

For breadth and depth of analysis, the review covers the broad themes of management education and strategy-as-practice as graphically depicted in Figure 2.1. By and large, management education is the domain of business schools where strategic management is offered as a capstone course, designed to integrate disciplinary knowledge and functional knowledge necessary for graduates’ dynamic and global view of the practice of strategy. In practical settings, the practice of strategy embodies detailed processes and practices that constitute the day-to-day activities of organisational life for strategy outcomes (Johnson, Melin & Whittington, 2003). As a socially accomplished activity, the practice of strategy melds theory and practice through the nexus between practitioners, practices, and praxis. Such an interpenetration of the theoretical and the practical domains (Barnett, 2010) raises the question of rigour and relevance. Academic rigour and practical relevance, properly balanced, are the hallmarks of a quality management education. As Schultz (2010) puts it, working in tandem, rigour and relevance create unique accomplishments that are interesting and insightful.

Figure 2.1: Chapter Two Structure



Source: Own compilation

Figure 2.1 depicts the position of Chapter 2 within the broad structure of the disssertation. Specifically, Chapter 2 addresses the theoretical underpinnings of the study and locates the current study within the broader literature on management theory and practice.

2.2 Management Education

Management practice permeates contemporary organisational life, calling for the ability of practitioners to understand and apply modern management theory, principles, practices, and techniques (Elmuti, 2004). At the heart of management practice is management education, which should equip practitioners with relevant management knowledge and skills. However, the linear, rational-analytic approach to management education dominant in business schools, particularly in the Global North, has become inadequate for the 21st century business management environment. Such inadequacies are calling therefore, for alternative approaches to business management knowledge production and dissemination.The interplay between theory and practice is complex, dynamic, and eclectic. As Anderson, Ellwood and Coleman (2017) note, management theory should inform practice. In turn, practices developed in the field should provide context and feedback on the usefulness of such theories. Consequently, management theory and management practice co-exist in a symbiotic relationship. However, theory building is said to be following rigorous academic procedures and processes, which render the knowledge produced to be mostly irrelevant to practice, and thus open a gap between academic rigour and practical relevance. Bridging such a gap has been a subject of debates in management literature for decades.

2.2.1 Academic Rigour and Practical Relevance

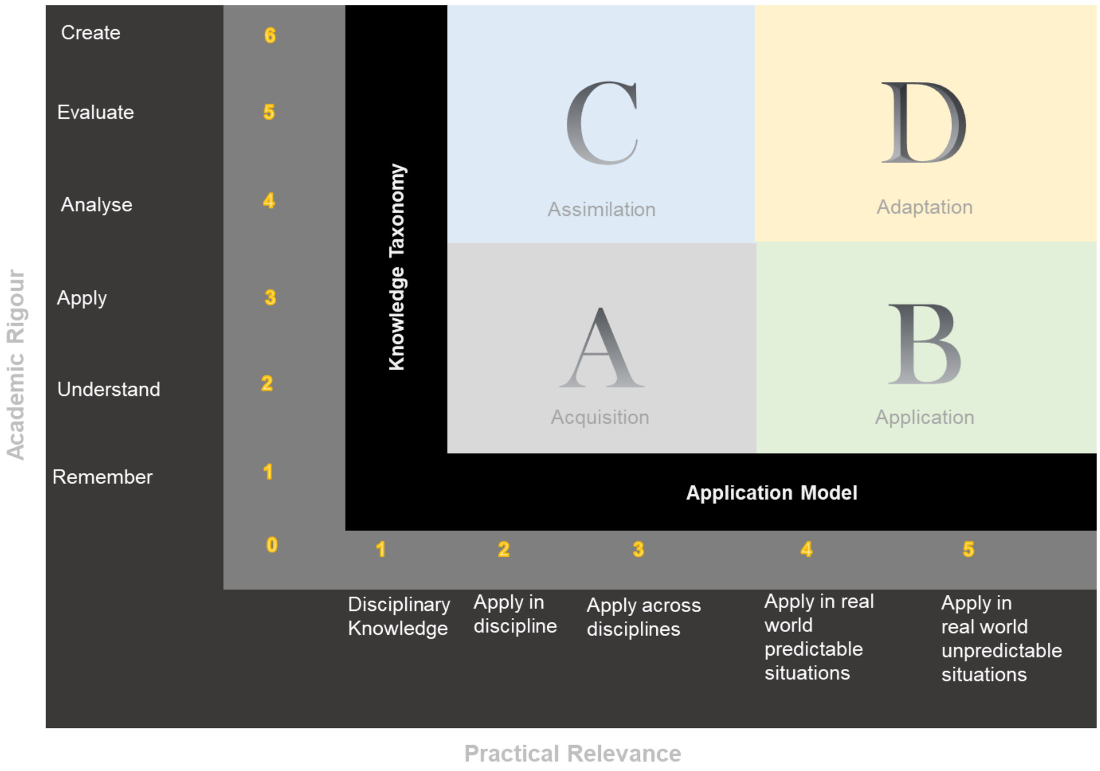
Embodied in management education are the twin pillars of academic rigour and practical relevance. Management literature, however, frames the twin pillars as dichotomous and therefore mutually exclusive. Such a framing is problematic in that a management education that lacks appropriate levels of rigour will subsequently lack the quality germane to practice. As such, rigour and relevance should constitute a hallmark of a high quality education. Gulati (2007) bemoans such framing as completely antithetical to a synergistic research enterprise which is so crucial to producing work that is rigorous as well as relevant to practice. To capture the essence of blending academic rigour and practical relevance, Bennis and O'Toole (2005) claim that most business schools have a dual mission of educating practitioners and creating knowledge through cutting edge academic research. The twin pillars meld theory and practice through bringing together the general and the particular, and the abstract and the concrete in a high-quality management education offering.

Admittedly, rigour and relevance are difficult concepts to define. As such, the concepts may mean different things to different people in different situations. Wolf and Rosenberg (2012) provide the characteristics of rigour from a purely research perspective. They note that empirically, rigour borders on sample selection, operationalisation of theoretical constructs, objectivity of measurement, interpretation of the results, and the potential for replication. Steinberg and Waspe (2016) however, define academic rigour as 'high quality teaching and learning' which involves explanatory lectures on key concepts and debates, appropriate readings, challenging and relevant tasks, useful feedback, and explicit guidance for students to self-regulate their own work, to allow students to acquire crucial knowledge and the accompanying professional skills. In other words, thoroughness and precision are the touchstones of academic rigour (Donaldson, Qiu, & Luo, 2013). As organisational life is about new ideas, Donaldson et al. (2013) argue that rigour is essentially the pursuit of such ideas, which replace old thinking with more valid insights.

The concept of practical relevance may be contextual and idiosyncratic. As Fox and Groesser (2016) observe, much of management literature on practical relevance has failed to capture the complexity of the concept. They argue that the perceived relevance of knowledge from any source is dependent upon complex paths that are affected by hard to predict interrelated factors. Other scholars appear to hold similar views. Augier and March (2007) note that the definition of relevance is ambiguous, its measurement imprecise, and its meaning complex. In their meta-analysis, Nicolai and Seidl (2010) distinguish between three forms of practical relevance: conceptual relevance that frames the problem; instrumental relevance that helps design the solution, and legitimative relevance which helps with the appropriate course of action. Conceptual relevance is further divided into linguistic constructs, uncovering contingencies, and uncovering causal relationships. In like manner, instrumental relevance is divided into schemes, technological rules, and forecasts. Legitimative relevance further branches into credentialising and rhetoric devices.

As stated earlier, the view taken in this review is that rigour and relevance are the two sides of the same coin. That is, the production and diffusion of knowledge is entwined with the application of such knowledge in practical settings.Together, they constitute an *indelible mark* of a quality management education. Figure 2.2 graphically depicts a framework that blends academic rigour and practical relevance by pulling together the elements of the Knowledge Taxonomy (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956) and those of the Application Model (Daggett & Gendron, 2015). As can be deduced from Figure 2.2, rigorous and relevant teaching and learning takes place in all the quadrants. However, quadrant D, is where students learn to think critically, analytically, reflectively, and creatively (Daggett & Gendron, 2015) thus consolidating their learning from the other quadrants at a higher level. Furthermore, quadrant D teaching and learning produces graduates whose thinking is complex and their higher order skills are well developed.

Figure 2.2: The Rigour and Relevance Framework



Source: Adapted from Daggett and Gendron (2015)

In quadrant D, students' skills are well developed to enable them to flexibly and creatively apply knowledge, models and tools to a range of unpredictable real-world situations. However, learning in other quadrants is equally important as it lays the foundation for high order learning in quadrant D. Students at each quadrant are also expected to produce different performance outcomes in practical settings.Table 2.1 brings together the knowledge taxonomy and the application model at different levels of competence for practical performance outcomes at each level within a strategy-as-practice perspective. At graduate level, the researcher contends that business school graduates should function at quadrant D where they can synthesise knowledge and skills to address dynamic and complex real-word unpredictable business situations. Teaching and learning in quadrant D prepares business school graduates for practice in swampy strategy practice landscapes, Schön (1995) as it should follow a blended approach that integrates theoretical knowledge and applied skills through practical synthesis (Kachra & Schnietz, 2008; Albert & Grzeda, 2015).

Table 2.1: Blending Rigour and Relevance

Level of Competence		Knowledge Taxonomy	Application Model	Performance Example
A	Acquisition	Remember Understand	Disciplinary Knowledge acquisition and basic skills development	A graduate can identify strategy tools and techniques appropriate for strategic planning
B	Assimilation	Understand Apply	Skilful application of knowledge within domain of acquisition	Using appropriate tools and techniques, a graduate can carry out a market analysis and present an acceptable report.
C	Application	Understand Analyse Apply	Applying knowledge and skills in real-world mostly predictable but complex and dynamic situations	A graduate can analyse and evaluate the effects of cutting the advertising budget for a brand which is struggling to gain market acceptance
D	Adaptation	Analyse Evaluate Synthesise	After critical and careful analysis, graduates are called upon to synthesise their knowledge and skills to address complex and dynamic real-word unpredictable situations	A graduate can develop strategies for his/her company's introduction of an innovative product or service which is likely to disrupt the market

Source: Own Compilation

With theoretical synthesis, when dealing with complex business problems, graduates should be able to blend technical skills from accounting with skills from other areas like organisational behaviour or marketing (Kachra & Schnietz, 2008). With applied synthesis, students should understand the interconnection between the component parts of a business and how each component impacts the whole. Finally, practical synthesis is about demonstrating wisdom, collaboration, and worldliness in one's decision making (Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002) as one deals with dynamic and complex business problems.

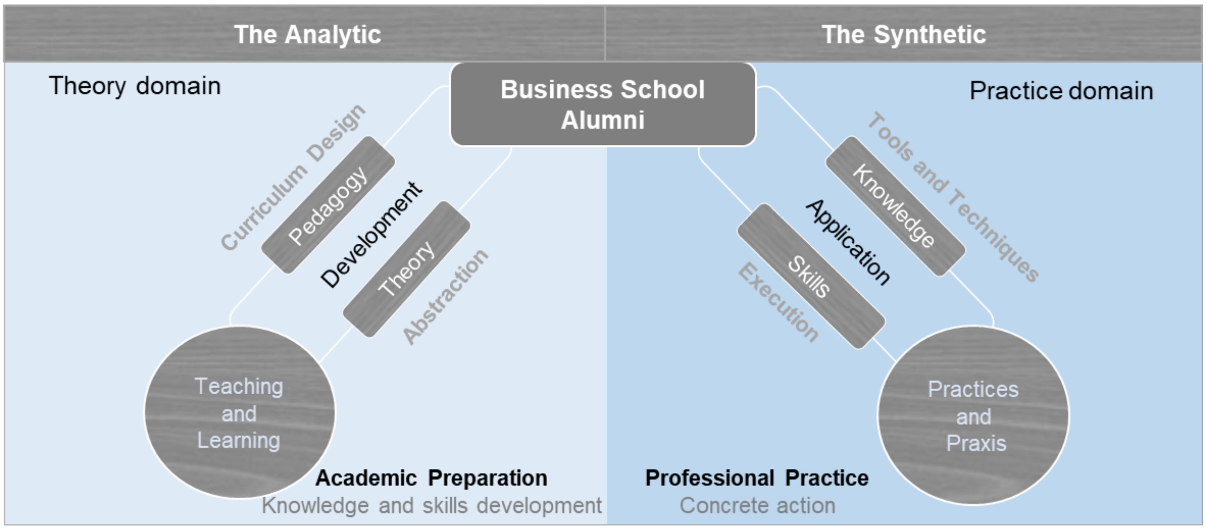
2.2.2 The Gap Between Theory and Practice

Curiosity on the esoteric relationship between theory and practice piqued circa the late 18th century, when in 1793, the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, noted that there will always be a gap between theory and practice, as certain things work well in theory but not so well in practice. Responding to some criticism of his ethical theory, Kant (cited in Rachels, 2001: 1706) pointed out that theory provides general rules and principles but cannot tell the practitioner how to apply those rules and principles – for application, practical judgement is required. “The general rule” wrote Kant, “must be supplemented by an act of judgement whereby the practitioner distinguishes instances where the rule applies from those where it does not.” Kant alludes to the fact that though theory and practice may rest on different logics, they are designed to work well together. Lewin (1943: 118) appears to concur with Kant when he calls for synthesis between theory and practice. He sums up his argument with his famous epigram, “there is nothing so practical as good theory”. The challenge of the gap between theory and practice has existed well into the 21st century. According to Freeman (2004), management scholars seem to be tirelessly debating the empirical and normative distinctions, and decrying the gap between theory and practice when they should simply accept that the gap is an entrenched one and move on. However, other than simply accepting that the gap between theory and practice is an entrenched one, the researcher contends that the dynamic and nuanced interplay between theory and practice should be appreciated and managed mutually by academics and practitioners.

Seamlessly melding theory and practice will likely provide creative solutions to pressing problems that demand greater understanding, insight, foresight, and sagacity (Owen, 2006). Management literature advances design thinking as an approach that may provide solutions to intricate problems in both strategy education and strategy practice. According to Çeviker-Çınar, Mura and Demirbağ-Kaplan (2017), design thinking can be a novel and critical approach in education, as well as a tool applied to foster innovation in business. In education, Glen et al. (2014), suggest that business schools should design curricula and develop pedagogies that combine analytic reasoning with a more exploratory skills set. In strategy practice, Çeviker-Çınar, et al. (2017), contend that the nonlinearity and creativity embedded in design thinking make it ideal for application in a variety of managerial contexts. Ruttonsha and Quilley (2014) surmise that design thinking provides an interpretive lens through which adaptive transformation can be comprehended. It also provides a repertoire of solutions to complex issues of everyday management practice. Matthews and Wrigley (2017) note that design thinking has recently moved from product and process design, to becoming a key element in company strategy. The complex, eclectic, and dynamic strategy practice environment, which is in constant flux, calls on the academe, and business schools in particular, to take a holistic view of management education.

Interconnecting strategy theory and strategy practice is a critical step in developing practitioners equipped with the skills and experiences necessary to deal with complex management problems in messy and ambiguous situations (Fukami, 2007). However, practitioners often claim that academics are detached from reality as they prioritise theorising processes over the contingent, context-specific outcomes emanating from an uncertain and chaotic world (Franklin, 2004). In turn, academics claim that practitioners have no basic understanding of what they are doing (Klabnik, 2012). Such a disconnect is couched in views that practice is a mundane and unreflective habitual action while theory is dry, erudite, perhaps reflective, yet reductive and limited in scope (Brownlie, Hewer, Wagner, & Svensson, 2008). Correctly understood and conceptualised, there is reciprocity between strategy education and strategy practice, as theories are shared with business, and feedback is subsequently given in the form of success or failure of those theories (von Feigenblatt, 2013). Other than being antithetical, theory and practice complement each other. Theory is abstracted practice, while practice is applied theory (Klabnik, 2012). Figure 2.3 presents a graphical depiction of the interconnection between theory and practice as embedded in academe and business. As Figure 2.3 reflects, framed within the academy, through *teaching* and *research*, the primary objective of academic preparation is to develop knowledge and skills in graduates. In contrast, through *practices* and *praxis*, the primary objective of professional practice in business is concrete action for practical outcomes. The teaching and research functions of the academy develop in graduates mostly theoretical knowledge that is embodied in *abstract* concepts and inculcates in them a repertoire of business management skills. Such knowledge and skills are embodied in *curriculum design* and delivered to students through a variety of *pedagogical* means. After transitioning to professional practice, graduates apply their *knowledge* in the form of *tools, techniques* and *skills* in practical settings for *execution* of tasks. Business school alumni interconnect the analytic domain of the academy and the synthetic domain of business as they transpose knowledge and skills developed at business school to the business world for application in practical settings.

Figure 2.3: Analytic Theory and Synthetic Practice



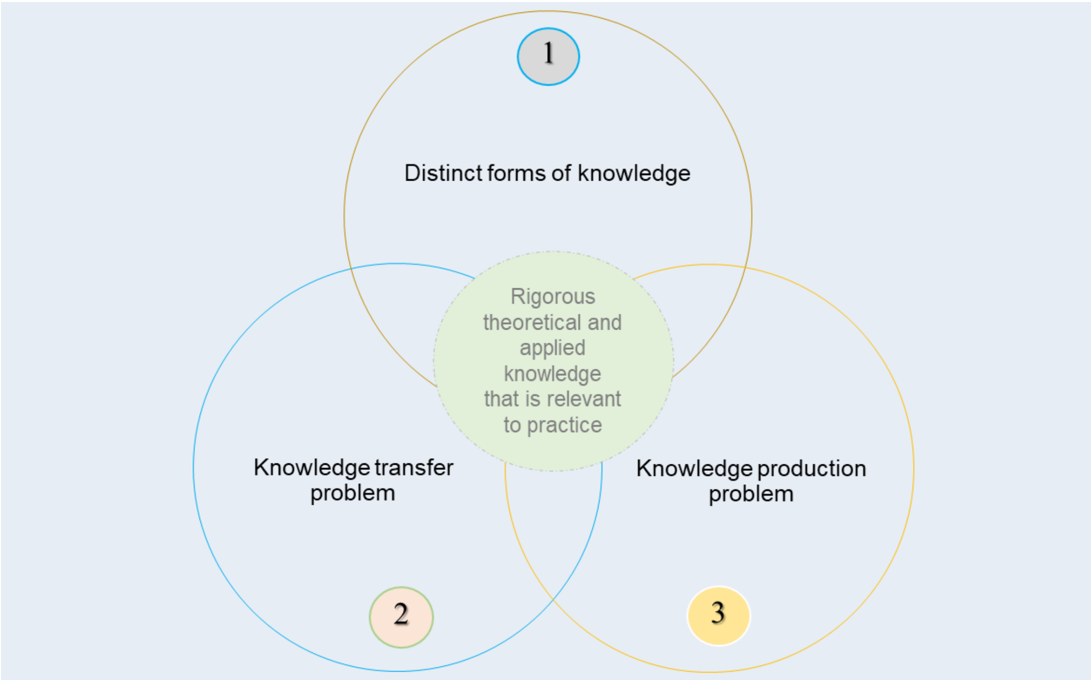
Source: Adapted from Owen (2006)

Figure 2.3 further reflects that business schools go beyond simply providing useful business techniques to transforming graduates into practitioners favourably disposed to run successful organisations. Rather, they provide an education which rests on the interconnection between theory and practice (von Feigenblatt, 2013).

2.2.3 Hypotheses Advanced for the Gap Between Theory and Practice

By and large, in management literature, the gap between theory and practice is framed between three distinct but complementary hypotheses (Ven de Van & Johnson, 2006; Empson, 2013; Kieser, et al., 2015). Hypothesis one posits that the gap exists because of a distinction between academic knowledge and experiential knowledge (Ven de Van & Johnson, 2006; Augier & March, 2007; Empson, 2013). Hypothesis two posits that the gap exists because of the knowledge production problem (Ven de Van & Johnson, 2006; Wolf & Rosenberg, 2012; Empson, 2013). Whereas hypothesis three posits that the gap exists because of the knowledge transfer problem (Ven de Van & Johnson, 2006; Empson, 2013). Figure 2.4 graphically depicts the potential hypotheses for the gap between theory and practice. Figure 2.4 reflects a point of convergence between the hypotheses, giving them much power to exacerbate the problem, and implying therefore, that to bridge the gap, the hypotheses need to be addressed simultaneously to a certain degree. Addressing either of them and not all will not help bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Figure 2.4: Potential Hypotheses for the Gap Between Theory and Practice



Source: Own compilation

Hypothesis 1, the problem of a distinction between academic knowledge and experiential knowledge, postulates that theory and practice are grounded on different ontological and epistemological underpinnings and each is meant to address a different set of questions (Ven de Van & Johnson, 2006). Framed within academe, academic knowledge's hallmarks are long term orientation, aesthetic ideas, and abstraction from practice that is aimed at general application (Augier & March, 2007; Olejniczak, 2015). In contrast, framed within business, and derived from practical experience, experiential knowledge tends to emphasise immediacy and applicability in specific contexts (Augier & March, 2007). Experiential knowledge aims for direct and immediate relevance.

Hypothesis 2, the knowledge production problem, postulates that management scholars produce knowledge that does not sufficiently address practitioners' problems (Wolf & Rosenberg, 2012), prompting practitioners to develop their own solutions to the problems they face (Banks, Pollack, Bochantin, et al., 2016). Hypothesis 3, the knowledge transfer problem, postulates that, based on the assumption that practitioners in part draw from academic knowledge (Ven de Van & Johnson, 2006), they however fail to transpose such knowledge to practical domains. According to Banks et al. (2016), though research findings may be published in different media outlets and be taught in class, practitioners may not read those materials, and graduates may not retain the knowledge they gained in class. The three hypotheses are all important in the nexus between theory and practice, addressing them simultaneously will facilitate the production of rigorous theoretical and applied forms of knowledge relevant to practice.

2.2.4 Mechanisms Advanced for Bridging the Gap Between Management Theory and Management Practice

Management literature proffers several mechanisms which are posited to bridge the gap between management theory and practice. Broadly, the suggested solutions fall into prescriptive literature, with the point of departure being the perceived lack of practical relevance of management theory and the descriptive literature which examines the dynamic interplay between theory and practice (Kieser et al., 2015). Among other bridging mechanisms, the prescriptive literature propounds the involvement of multiple stakeholders in knowledge production (Ven de Van & Johnson, 2006), addressing of real-life problems (Aram & Salipante, 2003), and increasing multi-disciplinary research (Augier & March, 2007).

The descriptive literature includes the following as bridging mechanisms between theory and practice: different forms of practical relevance (Nicolai & Seidl, 2010); management theories as self-fulfilling or self-defeating prophesies (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Nicolai & Seidl, 2010); bricolage (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006); distance from practitioners (Chia, 2014a). Descriptive bridging mechanisms describe how theories may change the practices they describe (Kieser, et al., 2015). They recognise the performativity of practice by emphasising how theory adopted by practitioners is adapted to particular contexts (Beyer & Trice, 1982).

2.2.5 Business Schools and Business School Education

Management education was first incorporated and institutionalised in 19th century continental Europe (Thomas, et al., 2013; Kaplan, 2014). The development of business and management education may have been largely influenced by France, Germany, the UK and the USA (Thomas et al., 2013). The world's first business schools were a combination of publicly funded and privately funded institutions. The world's first Business School, ESCP Europe was co-founded in 1819 by a trader, Vital Roux and the economist Jean-Baptiste Say. The school's first curriculum was based on a combined theoretical and practical approach to business education, centred on pedagogical simulation games (Kaplan, 2014). Influenced by Vital Roux's insistence that a business school should be international in scope, the school adopted a global perspective with one-third of its students coming from outside France and courses being offered in ten different languages (Kaplan, 2014). The first business school in the USA, The Wharton School of Finance and Economics was founded in 1881. More than a century after the first business school in Europe, South Africa's first Business School, the Graduate School of Management was established in 1949 by the University of Pretoria with the first class of students graduating in 1951. The Graduate School of Management was replaced in 2000 by the Gordon Business Institute of Science. Table 2.2 provides a list of some of the world's oldest business schools and their curriculum designs at the time of their establishment.

Table 2.2: Pioneering Business Schools and their Curriculum Designs

Business School	Country	Year	Funding	Curriculum Design
ESCP Europe	France	1819	Private	Combined theoretical and practical approach to business education
Wharton School of Finance and Economics	USA	1881	Private	Influenced by Taylorism, the school adopted a less interdisciplinary curriculum made up mainly of business and finance courses
Harvard Business School	USA	1908	Public	As a pioneer of both the case study method and the MBA programme, the curriculum design was more practically oriented than theory driven
The Graduate School of Business	South Africa	1949	Public	Details of the curriculum design at the school's inception are not available. However, it is likely that the school adopted the Harvard model which was more practical than theory driven

Source: Own Compilation

Considered to be one of the greatest educational success stories of the 19th century (Hay, 2008) business schools have expanded to and proliferated in China, Russia and other countries that only recently adopted market economic systems (Koris, Örtenblad & Ojala, 2017). Despite their notable success, their purpose and legitimacy have been hotly debated (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2004; Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Koris et al., 2017). Simon (1967: 1) proffers that: "The purpose of a business school is to train managers for the practice of management as a profession and to develop new knowledge that may be relevant to improving the operation of business". Judging by current debates, however, such a lofty ideal may be waning, perhaps because of the emergence of profit driven business schools which care less about academic quality. In Rousseau's (2012) words, synthesis entails converging the two thought worlds and knowledge domains of science and practice within the business school from the classroom to the research office, and the organisational setting. To this end, Hay (2008) sums up the primary purpose of a business school to be the creation of academic, personal, and social value. In this sense, the role of business schools goes further than normally understood and appreciated.

Granted, business school education is quite different from any other type of education. As such, it should be held in high regard by students, faculty, and society at large not least for what it is but for true excellence that it stands for. According to Clement and Grant (2010), business school education should embody and cultivate intellectual curiosity, rigorous argument, judicious use of evidence, a depth of understanding gained through serious engagement with others' work, erudition, and *learnedness* of students (emphasis in original). To graduates, instead of being a mark that signifies expertise, business school education should be an epitome of *attentiveness*, *alertness*, *awareness*, and *appreciation* of the complexities of everyday practice steeped in situations that call for practical wisdom (Antonacopoulou, 2016). As Boyer (1990) notes, business school education should not only enable students to skillfully explore the frontiers of knowledge, but also inspire them to integrate ideas and connect thought to action within a dynamic and complex management practice landscape. That is, the value of business school education goes beyond knowledge and skills accumulation, to influencing thoughtful action.

2.2.6 Strategy as an Academic Concept

As an academic discipline, strategic management is fairly new, with its genesis as the limited content of a general management course in the business school curriculum (Hoskisson, Hitt, Wan, & Yiu, 1999). However, the discipline is now an entrenched field in business and organisational studies. Hoskisson et al. (1999) further assert that within a fairly short period of time the discipline has witnessed a tremendous growth in the diversity and breadth of topics it covers and the variety of methods it employs.

Strategy as an academic concept has seen some tremendous developments from its fragmented state, circa the 1960s, to a respectable field of study it is today. During its developmental phases, the discipline has attracted some important contributions from many scholars from diverse backgrounds. In this study, the evolutionary developments of strategy as a disciplinary area of academic inquiry are divided into four distinct yet related phases. Table 2.3 provides a summary of the developmental phases of the concept of strategy as an academic concept.

Table 2.3: The Development of Strategy as an Academic Concept

Developmental Phase	Major Contributors	Theoretical Underpinnings	Methodological Themes
Foundational	Barnard (1938) Simon (1945) Selznick (1957) Penrose (1959)		• In-depth Case Studies • Comparative studies
Early Development	Chandler (1962) Cyert & March, (1963) Ansoff (1965) Learned et al. (1965) Ackoff & Emery (1972)		• In-depth Case Studies • Comparative studies
Economic Theory	Williamson (1975;1985) Jensen & Meckling (1976) Mintzberg (1978) Porter (1980; 1985) Grant (1996)	• Structure-conduct-performance • Strategic groups • Competitive dynamics • Transaction costs economics • Agency theory	
Practice Theory	Bourdieu, (1977; 1990) Schatzki (1996) Wittington (1996) Jarzabkowski (2000)	• Action based perspective • Strategy-as-practice • Micro foundation	• Critical Analysis
Open Strategy	Chesbrough and Appleyard (2007) Whittington et al. (2011) Whittington (2015) Seidl et al. (2019)	• Action based perspective • Strategy-as-practice • Strategy-as-process • Micro foundation	• Critical Analysis

Source: Own Compilation

First, constituting the foundational phase are the loci classici works of Chester Barnard (1938); Herbert Simons (1945); Philip Selznick (1957), and Edith Penrose (1959) stretching the period 1938 to 1959. *Second*, constituting the early development phase are the seminal works of Alfred Chandler (1962); Cyert and March (1963); Igor Ansoff (1965); Learned, Christensen, Andrews and Guth (1965) and Ackoff and Emery (1972) stretching the period 1960 to the eraly 1970s. *Third*, constituting the economic theory phase are the transitionary works of Williamson (1975, 1985); Jensen and Meckling (1976); Mintzberg (1978); Porter (1980) and Grant (1996) stretching the period 1970 to circa the mid 1990s, (Hoskisson et al., 1999). *Fourth*, constituting the practice theory phase are the works of Bourdieu (1977); Schatzki (1996); Wittington (1996), and Jarzabkwoski (2000) among others. *Fifth*, constituting the open strategy phenomenon and the works of Chesbrough and Appleyard, (2007); Whittington, Cailluet and Yakis-Douglas (2011); Whittington, (2015), Seidl, Von Grogh and Whittington (2019) and others who have addressed different facets of strategic openness.

The discipline's steady progress towards a mature academic field of enquiry and teaching can be attributed to a confluence of factors (Guerras-Martín, Madhok & Montoro-Sánchez, 2014). *First*, there has been a marked increase in the range of topics being addressed (Hoskisson et al., 1999). The field covers such diverse topics as internationalisation, corporate cooperation, competition for products and factors in markets, strategic leadership, corporate responsibility and corporate performance among others (Guerras-Martín et al., 2014). *Second*, there has been a tremendous growth in the range of research methods employed, which have become progressively more sophisticated (Hoskisson et al., 1999; Ketchen, Boyd & Bergh, 2008). Though still used in some instances, in-depth case studies have largely been replaced by more complex statistical tools employing quantitative and econometric techniques, multilevel analysis, and hybrid methodologies (Molina-Azorin, 2012).

Third, there has been an increase, albeit slow but inexorable consensus around the concept of strategy, thus further cementing the maturity of the discipline. That said, the plurality of the definitions of strategy is still noticeably common. However, generally accepted concepts have come to form part of the core of the definition of strategy over time (Guerras-Martín et al., 2014). The convergence of these concepts into the definition of strategy speaks directly to the firm establishment and maturity of the discipline. *Fourth*, there has been a steady growth in interest in studying the field of strategy among the academic community, not only in terms of the number of scholars dedicated to the field, but also their international profile and their linkages (Guerras-Martín et al., 2014). Over the years, strategy has been studied from such diverse disciplinary perspectives as psychology (Gavetti, 2012), economics (Porter, 1980) and sociology (Carroll & Sørensen, 2016) among other disciplines. As such, researchers in strategy often have diverse backgrounds and different approaches or foci of interest (Guerras-Martín et al., 2014).

2.2.7 Strategy Knowledge in Business Schools

For decades, scholars in organisation and management studies across disciplines have sought to define and understand the nature of strategy. During the period of such a journey of intellectual enquiry, the strategy magnum corpus has produced a large body of knowledge. Such a journey however, has neither been easy nor straightforward, with some of the knowledge produced being fruitful and illuminating, while some may have been counterproductive and self-defeating. Questions of what really constitutes the nature of strategy reality and what constitutes acceptable knowledge in the realm of strategy have been asked repeatedly, but answers to these questions have been seemingly elusive. An apparent lack of agreement among scholars as to what really constitutes strategy, raises even more questions of why such differences exist and how are they to be explained. Philosophy, however, may provide the best possible answers to these questions. Philosophical foundations of strategy would suggest that such differences are both ontological and epistemological in nature, leading to the question of how individuals tend to view the nature of reality of the world around them.

2.2.7.1 The Nature of Strategy and Its Knowledge Claims

Drawing on Pepper's 1942 writings, Tsoukas (1994) explains that individuals tend to view the nature of reality of the world around them through ontological and epistemological stances called 'the world hypotheses'. According to Tsoukas (1994) strategy can be explained and understood from any or a combination of the world hypotheses of formism, mechanism, contextualism, and organicism as summarised in Table 2.4. The hypotheses are different and distinctive in nature and yet complementary in application. The hypotheses can be looked at and explained along different dimensions. The horizontal axis in Table 2.4 presents the theories as either analytic or synthetic, while the vertical axis presents theories as either dispersive or integrative. Formist and mechanist theories tend to be analytic and dispersive in nature. In contrast, contextual theories are synthetic but still dispersive. Organic theories are both synthetic and integrative. These theories can easily exhibit characteristics of other theories, as such, the classification is not a hard and fast one.

Table 2.4:The World Hypotheses

	Analytic	**Synthetic**
Dispersive	Formism	Contextualism
Integrative	Mechanism	Organicism

Source: Adapted from Tsoukas (1994)

When one takes a formist-mechanist hard stance, the world is viewed as it actually is, and the knowledge produced by learning about it embodies objective truth. With such an ontological stance, the objective is to construct a theory of the stable and universal relationship between elements of the phenomenon being studied (Aram & Salipante, 2003). In a contextualist-organicist stance, one embraces the synthetic and descriptive viewpoint which considers the forces of change and novelty. The contextualist-organicist stance also values quality, the intuited wholeness of an event, texture, and the details and relations making up the quality (Tsoukas, 1994). Though their implications differ, both these stances have a bearing on the learning and practice of strategy. The contextualist-organisist stance, with its orientation towards 'intuated wholeness' can be more suitable for the today's environment that is dynamic, nuanced, eclectic, unstable, and uncertain.

2.2.7.2 Different Conceptualisations of Strategy

This sub-section briefly discusses the ontology and epistemology underpinning the concept of strategy, as underscored by a 1991 interchange between the doyens of strategy, Igor Ansoff and Henry Mintzberg, published in the Strategic Management (Vol 12; Issue 6) Journal. The debate illustrates conflicting assumptions about what constitutes strategy reality and strategy knowledge. Drawing from a formist ontology and epistemology, Ansoff (1991) defines strategy and strategy knowledge in terms of universal principles or laws claimed to be valid across domains. His approach to strategy and its knowledge claims, assumes a stable and predictable world in which phenomena can be measured accurately. Ansoff's approach is a classic search for universal understanding which requires definitional precision, abstract representation and quantification and measurement of regularities between variables according to the dictates of modern empiricism (Aram & Salipante, 2003).

In contrast, in Mintzberg's (1991) contextualist ontology and epistemology, where strategy emerges out of a local context and is dependent on a practitioner's perspective and a number of dynamic situational conditions, knowledge is highly personal and local. That is, the world of strategy is contingent where neither stability nor continuity can be assumed. Mintzberg disavows interest either in objectifying behaviour or in generalised behavioural regularities. For him, knowledge is experiential, qualitative, a function of trial and error, and synthetic, rather than analytic (Aram & Salipante, 2003). In Mintzberg's epistemology, strategy is rich, context-dependent, idiosyncratic, deep, and more nuanced, closely reflecting the practical issues on the ground.

From a practice perspective, the two approaches invoke what Schön (1995) classifies as the high, hard ground and the swampy lowland practice landscapes. In the high, hard ground, strategy problems lend themselves to solutions through research-based, theory driven techniques, while in the swampy lowlands, strategy problems are messy and confusing, and as such, incapable of analytic and technical solution (Schön, 1995). According to Schön, when asked to describe their methods of practice, strategy practitioners who practice in the swampy lowland normally speak of experience, trial and error, intuition, or muddling through, a description which fits well with Mintzberg's contextual strategy ontology and epistemology. Truly, though formist and machinist thinking still dominate business school management teaching and learning, it is inadequate for the 21st century business management environment. Appropriate balance between the two positions is called for.

2.2.7.3 Strategy Knowledge: Representative or Exemplary

Flowing from the above is the issue of the nature of business school produced knowledge and the attendant modes of explanation. This issue has received detailed treatment from Chia and Holt (2008) in their classical Academy of Management Learning & Education article, in which they put forward the idea of Knowledge-by-representation and knowledge-by-exemplification as alternative modes of knowledge production and diffusion in business schools. According to Chia and Holt (2008) knowledge-by-representation encapsulates management theories, concepts, and ideas which are believed to comprehensively and accurately represent the actual goings-on of management realities. In contrast, knowledge-by-exemplification means a form of knowing associated with manner, orientation, style, and predisposition as the practice of managing involves skilled in-situ coping and making do - more a phenomenon of method associated with the applied practice of strategy.

Attendant to the nature of knowledge production and diffusion as described above, are modes of explanation of *building* and *dwelling*. The *building* mode pre-supposes an initial precognitive separation between the practitioner and the world, such that the practitioner has first to construct mental representations and models of the world before engaging with it (Ingold, 2000). In contrast, in the *dwelling* mode of explanation, practitioners are assumed to be inextricably immersed and entwined with their surroundings with all their complex interrelatedness (Chia & Holt, 2008). Further, in the *dwelling* mode, self and world emerge through the very concrete activities of strategy practice where managerial action and decisions emanate from being in-situ and occur *sua sponte.* The modes of explanation as described above appear more aligned with each of the modes of knowledge production – *building* aligns more with knowledge-by-representation while *dwelling* aligns more with knowledge-by-exemplification. However, in the realm of strategy scholarship and practice both modes of explanation are important.

Clearly, analytic, representational, context independent knowledge, though still critically important, is inadequate to deal with the vagaries of today's eclectic and messy business realities. In fact, such knowledge has attracted some criticism from both the worlds of academia and business. Therefore, alternative modes of knowledge production and explanation are long overdue. Business schools would do better to consider new ways of knowledge production and dissemination as suggested above. More contextualised, practice oriented intellectual inquiry offers a rich patina for research in the domain of strategy and strategy knowledge.

2.2.8 Potential Gambits for Business School Strategy Knowledge Production and Diffusion

In addressing the nexus between strategy theory and practice, Barnett (2010) poses the question whether strategy education should be construed as an authentic encounter with knowledge, as well as some kind of preparation for practice. In search of relevant answers to the question, he looks at three possible gambits for strategy knowledge production and diffusion in business schools. Gambits are deliberate acts which provide business schools with an advantage in producing and diffusing academically rigorous and practically relevant strategy knowledge and skills. Gambit one postulates that business schools should be epistemologically adventurous in their knowledge production. However, in our multimodal 21st century world, traditional, 'mode 1' academic knowledge which is mostly propositional has largely become inadequate. To counter the apparent inadequacies of mode 1 knowledge (Gibbons, Lomiges, Nowotny, et al., 2010), propounded the mode 2 knowledge thesis, which is knowledge that is produced in situ, mainly by project teams from diverse backgrounds. Such knowledge is interdisciplinary, local, and ephemeral. However, as Barnett (2010) asserts, in a contemporary world which throws up competing and incommensurable frames of understanding, and yet demands instantaneous action, such knowledge has proved to be hopelessly inadequate and thus cannot provide conclusive answers to the above question.

Higher education had developed a sense that part of its mission was founded on knowledge, and a university was a place of contemplation and solitude as it was severed from the world (Barnett, 2010; Clegg, et al., 2013; Chia, 2014a). Accordingly, to posit a relationship between higher education and the immediate world of practice would be to misconstrue the *raison de'tre* of higher education. This then leads one to gambit two, which postulates that we should deny that higher education and practice should be understood to be in relationship with each other (Barnett, 2010). For higher education to be able to critique the world of practice with objectivity, business schools should be detached from it. With the two gambits above, however, the problem posed by the above question remains unsolved, which then forces the consideration of yet a third gambit. This third gambit posits that there is a special relationship between strategy knowledge and practice. As Barnett (2010) notes, a systematic way of understanding the world is itself a practice. Education, then, becomes an initiation into a life of practice (Peters, 1966). And therefore, it is not to be understood as separate from practice (Dunne & Hogan, 2004).

At surface level, the three gambits appear to be at odds with each other. Whereas gambit one encourages us to embrace multimodal epistemologies, gambit two nudges higher education to shun practice. Gambit three recognises higher education to be an embodiment of complexes of practices, an argument which serves as one of the bases on which the idea of transferable skills gains its currency, for transferability makes sense only if there is some form of correspondence between higher education and the world of practice (Barnett, 2010). Gambit three however, occupies a more nuanced position in that it declares affinities between academic practices and those of the wider world (Barnett, 2010). As such, the three gambits are more complementary than they are at odds with each other. Higher education needs to be somehow steeped into the exigencies of the world of practice and yet be separate from it to contemplate it and to inject into it some new insights and breezes of fresh air. To do this end, business schools should be more *avant-garde* than ever before.

2.2.9 Strategy Body of Knowledge and Skills

Relevant knowledge and skills will enable business school graduates to accomplish work performance, which will lead those who encounter it in their work to find it to be safe, creditable, and professional (Shakespeare, 2010). Such relevant knowledge and skills are steeped in a curriculum which is grounded in strategies, content, teaching, assessment, and goals that direct students' learning towards preparation for practice roles after graduation (Higgs, Loftus & Trede, 2010). Such a curriculum should embody multiple practice understandings to account for different stakeholders' need to see graduates command different facets of practice in a dynamic and ever-changing business environment. In most business schools, strategy is a capstone Master of Business Administration course designed for integrating strategic decision-making skills in students (Kachra & Schnietz, 2008).

The strategy body of knowledge as taught by most business schools consists of a collection of concepts, theories, tools, techniques, methods, principles, procedures, and processes designed to develop graduates' ability to understand the relationships and interconnections between business functions and other disciplines. As a capstone course, strategy fits in quadrant D of the rigour and relevance framework in Figure 2.2. To develop students' synthetic abilities, synthesis should be given greater prominence as a key dimension in the teaching and learning of strategy (Albert & Grzeda, 2015). A form of reflection and art, synthesis refers to deriving meaning from information and reconstructing or visualising new pathways and opportunities (Albert & Grzeda, 2015) - a critical competence in dynamic and complex strategy practice settings.

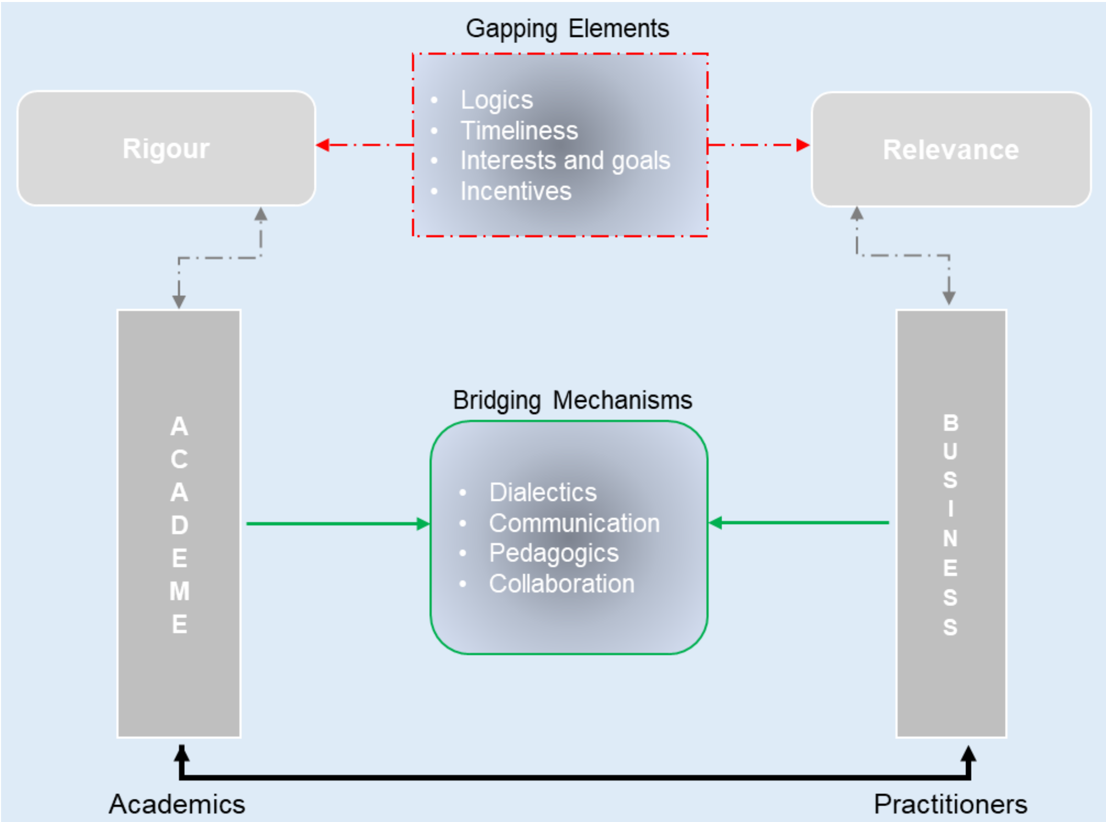
Strategy tools constitute an important component of the strategy body of knowledge. Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015) note that when teaching strategy, business schools introduce students to numerous strategy tools. According to Rigby (2015), for a period spanning decades, strategy tools have become a common part of strategy practitioners' professional lives. Strategy tools support strategising activities in turbulent environments as they make strategising activities much easier and more effective by bridging abstract concepts to specific practicalities (Stenfors & Tanner, 2007). Such tools aid business analyses, decision making and problem solving in a practitioner's everyday strategising activities.

Notwithstanding the above; however, the strategic management field has not settled for a single, universal definition of what strategy tools are. As such, various definitions of strategy tools are proffered in management literature, including the physical, processual, and conceptual stand points (Hodari, 2009). For Jarzabkowski and Kaplan (2015), strategy tools are generic frameworks, concepts, models or methods. Resonating with the broader objectives of the current study, is a much broader definition put forward by Clark (1997), who defines strategy tools as the numerous techniques, tools, models, frameworks, approaches, and methodologies available to support decision making within strategic management. The focal point of this study is on conceptual and analytical tools that are intended to simplify the messy realities of strategising.

2.2.10 The Relational Exchange Between Academe and Business

For many business management academics, their relationship with practicing managers is characterised by a struggle between the high-mindedness of theory and the allure of pragmatic day-to-day trials and tribulations of the real world of practice (Brownlie, Hewer, & Wagner, 2008). This relationship has been a subject of some debates spanning decades. At the heart of these debates is the idea that management education emphasises the esoteric of academic purity – *rigour*, at the expense of providing immediate solutions to management problems – *relevance* (Augier & March 2007), thus opening a gap between knowledge production and knowledge application. With such a gap in existence, the relationship is still critically important, as academe and business are interdependent and mutually constitutive. Figure 2.5 graphically depicts a relational exchange model between academe and business.

Figure 2.5: The Relational Exchange Model Between Academe and Business



Source: Own compilation

As Figure 2.5 reflects, the relationship between academe and business embodies some gapping elements as well as some bridging mechanisms. That is, the relationship is being pulled apart by issues pertaining to rigour and relevance as it is drawn together by institutional forces of mutual concern, raising some tensions among parties in the relationship. These tensions then attract some criticism of one party by another. Bartunek and Rynes, (2014) define the term *tension* to mean various dichotomies, dualities, conflicts, inconsistencies, and contradictory pulls, turns and demands experienced by those in a particular setting that purportedly represent different and contradictory poles, such that they require a choice of one or the other. As reflected in Figure 2.5, such tensions are mostly because of conflicts between gapping elements - *red block*, and the bridging mechanisms – *green block,* which create some distance between parties.

As the model in Figure 2.5 reflects, the gap between academe and business is manifested in differing logics between academics and practitioners, time considerations when addressing problems, their interests and goals, and the incentives they derive from their practices. Drawing on different sociological perspectives, conceptual works examining the modes of operation of academe and business argue that the two domains follow different logics (Kieser, et al, 2015). Astley and Zammuto (1992) describe academe and business as interdependent, yet semi-autonomous. On time dimensions, academics' time horizons are much longer than practitioners' (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014), as practitioners normally deal with immediate problems. As academics and practitioners have different interests and goals (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014) their incentives also differ.

Figure 2.5 also shows that academe and business are drawn together through such gap bridging mechanisms as dialectics, communication, pedagogics, and collaboration. Dialectics can be described as contradictory elements resolved through synthesis (Bartunek & Rynes, 2014). Synthesis is key in dealing with contradictory elements. Academe and business also need to communicate better and effectively with each other, and in a language and manner understandable to each other. As Empson (2013) notes, the merits of closer communication between academics and practitioners are more widely accepted. Following from the mechanisms of dialectics and communication is the element of pedagogics. To foster interdependence between it and business, academe needs to incorporate in pedagogics some feedback obtained via communication channels. Though not always feasible or desirable, a call for collaboration between academics and practitioners resonate far and wide. The resulting cross-fertilisation will provide richer and more detailed understandings of practitioners' needs and problems.

As academe and business's distinct objectives somehow converge, the definition of tension advanced above loses its power. In this case, Olejniczak (2015) points us to symbiosis as a much more apt and accurate term to describe the nature of the relationship between academe and business. According to Olejniczak (2015) 'symbiosis' is an "interaction between two different organisms living in close physical association, typically to the advantage of both" with all its complexities and contradictions. Symbiosis, therefore, is the basis on which the relational exchange between academe and business should be built and maintained as the gapping elements and bridging mechanisms are managed for the benefit of both. The differences in nature and purpose of both academe and business is what makes one matter to the other.

2.3 Strategy-As-Practice

Though in management literature the credibility of traditional strategy theory still holds, its limited economic view, which focuses on macro organisational phenomena, divorces it from the realities of strategising (Stander & Pretorius, 2016). Once the stable and long-term bastion of corporate strategists, with their positioning and analytical models, today the field of strategy is an intellectual domain characterised by intense contestation (Wilson & Jarzabkowski, 2004). This view is supported by Campbell-Hunt (2007) who asserts that the field of strategy research has become an eclectic enterprise. The view that strategy is the setting of long-term goals and objectives, which proved fruitful for positioning and economic modelling adherents, has been found deficient by scholars interested in delineating and describing strategy processes as emergent other than completely planned (Wilson & Jarzabkowski, 2004). To encapsulate the emergent nature of strategy, its sub-disciplines have had to move away from its basic foundations in the discipline of economics and predominantly positivistic epistemologies (Wilson & Jarzabkowski, 2004). In its evolutionary intellectual journey, strategy research has attracted the attention of scholars from richly diverse disciplines and backgrounds (Whittington, 1996) with each class of scholars bringing different strategy perspectives.

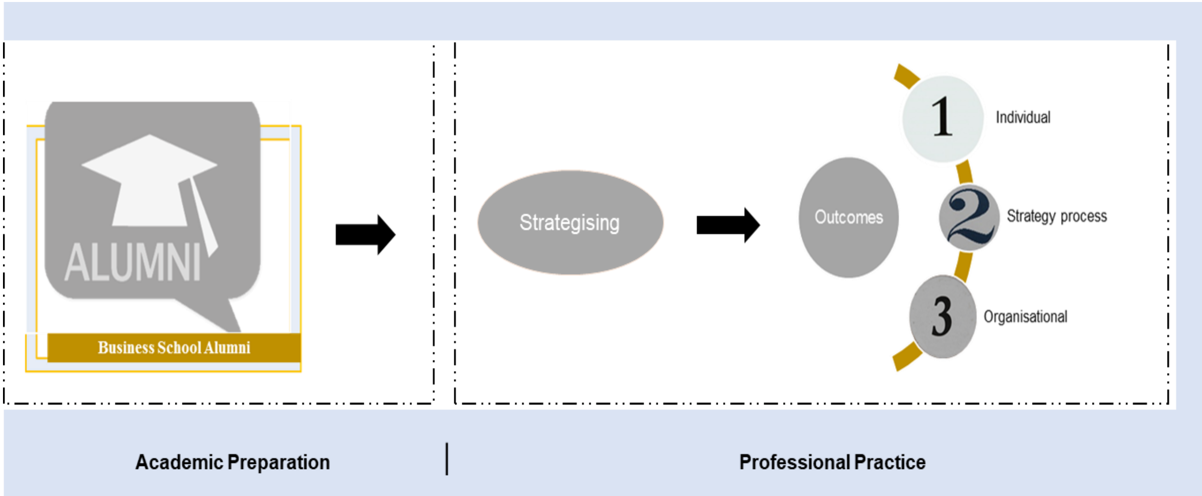
That strategy is perhaps the master concept of contemporary life is beyond dispute (Carter, 2013). However, as a business concept, strategy has been reconceptualised many times over, and in the process, generated rich accounts of the concept over time. From its initial conceptualisation as a set of rational, abstracted techniques, to be reconceptualised as an emergent and context process, and lately as an activity embedded in practices and praxis (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2010), strategy permeates modern day organisational life and beyond. The practice turn in strategy refocuses attention from the *what* of strategy towards *how it is actually accomplished* in practice in a strategy-as-practice perspective. As Schmachtel (2016) puts it, in strategy-as-practice, strategy is something that is locally co-created and enacted in situated actions, inter-actions and negotiations. The power of the strategy-as-practice perspective lies in its ability to explain how strategy-making is enabled and constrained by prevailing organisational and societal norms and practices (Vaara & Whittington, 2012), as strategy is a social practice.

2.3.1 Strategy-As-Practice Outcomes

As strategy-as-practice stakes out new ground in the realm of strategic management, to succeed where other perspectives have not done so well, it has to establish appropriate and formidable outcomes drawn from different forms of praxis (Jarzabkowski, Kaplan, Seidl & Whittington, 2016). As its strengths lie in its rich understanding of situated phenomena, it's criteria for outcomes are better suited to idiographic research (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). As Tsoukas (1989) explains, idiographic studies have both theoretical and empirical explanatory power. Theoretically, they have the power to explain underlying social structures, while empirically, they have the power to elucidate the specific patterns of action. Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) propose that such outcomes might be grounded in two types of explanations based on single-case generative mechanisms and comparative methods that seek to explain variances arising from those mechanisms.

In single-case generative mechanisms, a detailed analysis is conducted to explain how a particular outcome is constructed. Studies in this type of explanation examine the implications of what individual strategy practitioners do to construct particular streams of activity (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). In comparative methods of explanation, studies examine differences in what strategy practitioners do to explain variations in the way that streams of activity are constructed. As Langley (2007) explains, the second method seeks to build on the first method by examining whether a variation in the generative mechanism is associated with the variation in outcomes. Related to the types of explanation are issues of what outcomes are being examined. That is, how outcomes are understood may depend on the unit and level of analysis (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). The link between strategising and strategy outcomes are graphically depicted in Figure 2.6. Although Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) identify five types of strategy outcomes, only three are considered for the current study.

Figure 2.6: Strategy-As-Practice Outcomes



Source: Own Compilation

As reflected in Figure 2.6, strategy-as-practice outcomes germane to the study are: individual outcomes; strategy process outcomes, and organisational outcomes. These are discussed in detail below. Group outcomes and institutional outcomes as initially conceptualised by Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) are not discussed as they are not of particular relevance to this study.

2.3.1.1 Individual Outcomes

Though strategy practices and praxis are socially shaped and informed, they are normally accomplished by individual practitioners. As such, strategy practitioners are set to achieve certain individual outcomes. Whittington (2003), notes that part of the strategy-as-practice agenda is to examine what strategy practitioners actually do in order to help them become better in their practice of strategy. Beech and Johnson (2005) illustrate how a new CEO experienced an identity-based outcome as he used his increasing power to reinforce his authority. Samra-Fredericks (2005) reports how one strategist's talk within the strategising praxis was able to give him increased influence over other senior managers.

Mantere (2005; 2008) systematically compared practices and praxis of different individual practitioners and noted how such differences constrain and enable each individual practitioner's capacity to influence strategy processes. Mantere (2005) implied such individual outcomes as motivations and gains derived from assuming particular roles in which they are motivated to champion a strategy because it provides meaning and purpose for their work. Other individual outcomes of strategy practices and praxis may be job enrichment, feelings of power and purpose, and capacity for influence and personal advancement (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). They further posit that better understanding of individual outcomes, and particular variations in outcomes in terms of individual identity, purpose, power, and career potential will contribute to developing strategy practitioners' competences.

2.3.1.2 Strategy Process Outcomes

The practice of strategy involves processes and hence, strategy process outcomes are a critical element of the strategy-as-practice research agenda. In their meta-analysis, Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) report that strategy literature identifies and explains outcomes in the strategy process. They identified processes for creating and implementing strategy. They further note that strategy literature also explains how the strategy praxis observed was associated with strategy process failures.

2.3.1.3 Strategy Organisational Outcomes

Contrary to received wisdom, business exists for sustainable value creation, which is not solely measured in financial terms. And hence, strategy practitioners' practices and praxis, individually and collectively, should speak, directly or otherwise, to the organisational outcomes of the organisation for which they work. And indeed Ambrosini, Bowman and Burton-Taylor (2007) illustrate how the practices and praxis of individuals and groups can improve the delivery of superior customer service outcomes. Beyond the boundaries of an organisation, such outcomes would add value to their own customers.

Furthermore, Regnér (2003) provides a substantive indication of a link between the practices and praxis of individual strategy practitioners and groups and organisational outcomes. He compares the activities of peripheral and central groups of practitioners in four organisations over time and illustrates how successful innovations at the peripheral level were adopted at the centre, culminating in organisational change. Though strategy-as-practice does not adopt the same approach to firm performance as traditional, mainstream economics-based strategy research, it nonetheless explains organisational outcomes from a value accretive approach, and hence contributes to our understanding of why and how organisations act the way they do in the realm of sustainable value creation (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009).

2.3.2 The Simplexity of the Practice of Strategy

Strategising ‘at the edge of chaos’, which is characterised by complexity, ambiguity, equivocality, eclecticism, non-linearity, and uncertainty presents a major challenge for both academics and practitioners (Pina e Cunha & Rego, 2010; Milite, Barbato, Pastena, & Paloma, 2013). Manifested in this chaos, according to Pina e Cunha and Rego (2010) is the generative tension between complexity and simplicity in the theory and practice of management. Chaotic times, though suffused with complexity and novelty, demand quick and coordinated responses to rapidly unfolding events that threaten organisational and personal success (Colville, Brown & Pye, 2011). In such chaotic, complicated, and uncertain situations, wisdom may still be found in profound simplicity (Bowman, 2016). To this end, Bowman (2016) suggests that scenario planning may provide a structure for managing such complexities through a process of simplification that involves straightforward practices which address reality and perceived reality.

Pina e Cunha and Rego (2010) contend that it is not possible to understand organisational complexity without considering the role of simplicity. To that effect, they suggest that, though in management thinking the two concepts are generally considered to be independent and even contrary to each other, the concepts should be taken as interdependent and mutually constitutive, as expressed in the notion of *simplexity*. “Simplexity is a fusion of sufficient complexity of thought with necessary simplicity of action” (Colville et al., 2011: 6). They argue that complexity of thinking is required to notice and register the wild profusion of issues characteristic of an increasingly random, entropic world; whereas action clarifies situations and eliminates ‘might have beens’ by reducing equivocality and lessening ambiguity. Scholars and strategy practitioners alike, would understand and appreciate that at the heart of the practice of strategy are complexities and ambiguities which call on strategy practitioners to invoke the principles of *simplexity*.

2.3.3 Critique of Strategy-As-Practice

Though strategy-as-practice is an increasingly prominent approach to the study of strategising (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009), it is not without shortcomings. According to Brown and Thompson (2013) strategy-as-practice is yet to fully realise its promise to cast light on micro-processes of strategy-making, to link the micro to the macro, and to reveal what strategists actually do. For Mueller, Whittle, Gilchrist and Lenney (2013), though the practice turn in strategy scholarship has been helpful in moving beyond the question of strategy being what organisations have, towards viewing it as what organisational members actually do, it is yet to satisfactorily address the issue of power and politics.

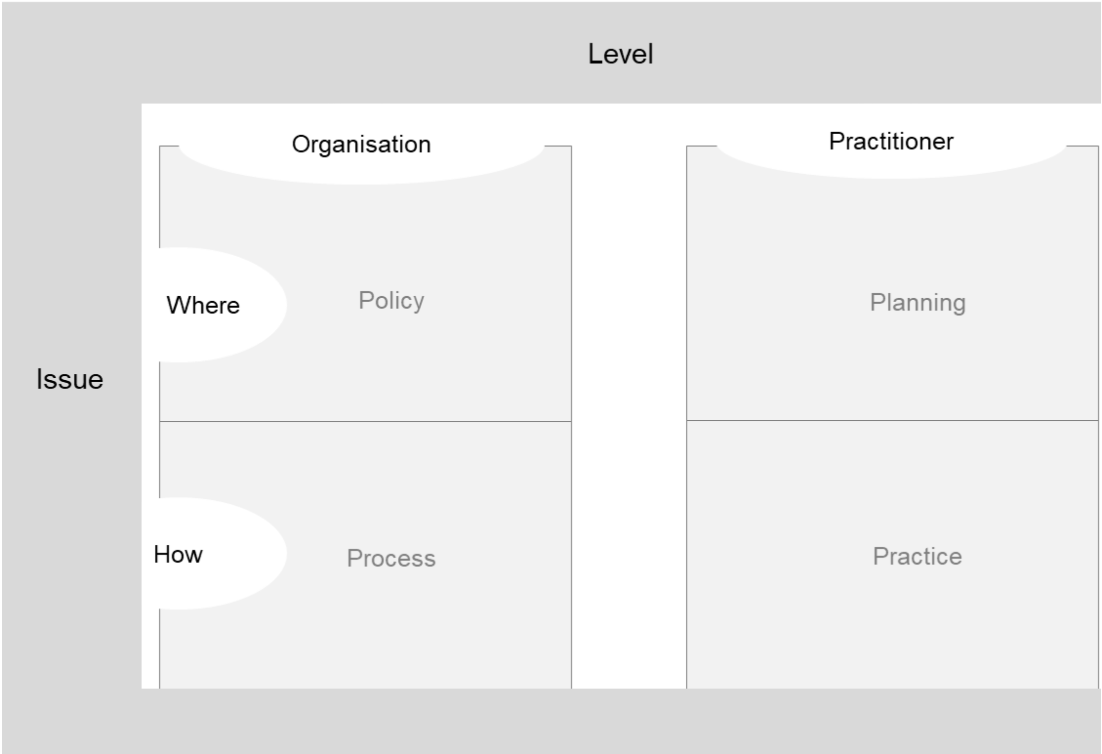
Carter, Clegg and Kornberger (2008) criticise the concepts of strategy and practice in the strategy-as-practice perspective. They argue that in the empirical analysis of strategy-as-practice, strategy becomes somehow reified and a somewhat naïve concept. In response, Jarzabkowski and Whittington (2008a) assert that the reconceptualisation of the concept of strategy as what organisational members do rather than what organisations have immediately opens aspects of strategy that academe has so far been reluctant to address. Carter et al. (2008) further contend that from a strategy-as-practice perspective, the concept of practice is not clearly defined, arguing that beside the rather confusing fact that the singular and the plural of the word practice mean different things, practice is modelled according to the agency and structure issue. Jarzabkowski and Whittington (2008) respond with a distinction between practices and praxis. Practices involve the various routines, discourses, concepts and technologies through which the strategy labour is made possible, whereas praxis refers to the nitty-gritties, sheer labour of strategy.

In a similar fashion, Gherardi (2009) raises concerns that the diffusion and acceptance of the practice concept lacks critical power over more orthodox accounts of strategy shaped by assumptions of rationalism and cognitivism in organisation studies. However, far from being a new orthodoxy or a conventional wisdom, strategy-as-practice can offer an open, illuminating, pluralistic, provocative, and elegant space for research (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008). The study of micro phenomena, which brings the researcher closer to reality, is the desideratum of the strategy-as-practice perspective. To this end, Geiger (2009) questions the philosophy or methodology underpinning the mission of getting closer to reality, arguing that from a philosophy of science perspective, it is hard to justify why observing micro-phenomena means being closer to reality. He argues that it seems to be crudely naïve to believe that being micro has anything to do with being close to reality. Considering the shortcomings of the practice perspective, Geiger (2009) provides what he believes could be fruitful directions for further research. In a nutshell, Geiger suggests that to potentially enrich its critical power, strategy-as-practice should explain how practices are sustained and continue to be practiced, and should explore how practitioners speak and reflect on practices in order to reach a new and deeper understanding of what constitutes good practice. Despite such criticisms, strategy-as-practice is a viable perspective which brings researchers closer to the messy realities of strategising.

2.3.4 Perspectives on Business Strategy

The evolutionary journey of strategy research, spanning more than half a century, has adopted different streams of enquiry in different foci. Wilson and Jarzabkowski (2004: 54) note that "organisational views of strategy traverse a wide intellectual terrain". As graphically depicted in Figure 2.7, Whittington (1996) provides a classification of these streams and foci according to the target level and their dominant concerns in the organisation. The horizontal axis calls attention to organisations as whole units and to strategy actors as individuals – the strategy practitioners who are involved in the work of strategising. The vertical axis contrasts the large body of strategic thought that is essentially directional, concerned with *where* strategies should go with the equally important stream focused on the *how* issues of actually getting there (Whittington, 1996). Importantly, emerging perspectives of strategy critically evaluate the micro activities of organisational life.

Figure 2.7: Perspectives on Strategy



Source: Whittington (1996)

As is evident from Figure 2.7, a perspective can be concerned with individual or organisation levels or the issue of where the strategy activity is directed and how the outcomes can be achieved.

2.3.4.1 The Planning Perspective

Emerging around the 1960s, the planning perspective focuses on tools and techniques to help managers make decisions about business direction (Whittington, 1996). Structural analyses based on economic and statistical modeling were key analytical tools employed in planning by managers. Emphasis was on managers who had to put together the plans mapping the direction and competitive positioning of a given organisation, and provide the means of how to get there. However, the view that strategy was the determination of basic long-term goals and objectives has been found deficient in analytical depth by those scholars who are interested in delineating and describing strategy processes (Wilson & Jarzabkowski, 2004).

2.3.4.2 The Policy Perspective

Emerging around the 1970s onwards, the policy perspective developed a new focus analysing the organisational pay-offs to pursuing different strategic directions (Whittington, 1996). Policy directions widely considered were diversification, mergers and acquisitions, innovation, joint ventures, strategic alliances, and internationalisation.

2.3.4.3 The process Perspective

It was not until organisation theory scholars began to question the idées fixes of strategy, circa the early 1980s that the process view of strategy began to emerge alongside the positioning view (Wilson & Jarzabkowski, 2004). The process view explored how organisations first came to recognise the need for strategic re-orientation and then to actually achieve such a re-orientation (Whittington, 1996). The process approach is primarily concerned with explanations of phenomena at the organisational level of analysis, thereby ignoring a more nuanced micro analysis of strategy activity. Balogun, et al. (2003) echo the same sentiment when they say that in strategy process studies, not enough is understood about the unique characteristics and micro activities of strategising. As a result, the strategy body of knowledge has been criticised to be out of synch with practical reality (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006).

2.3.4.4 The Practice Perspective

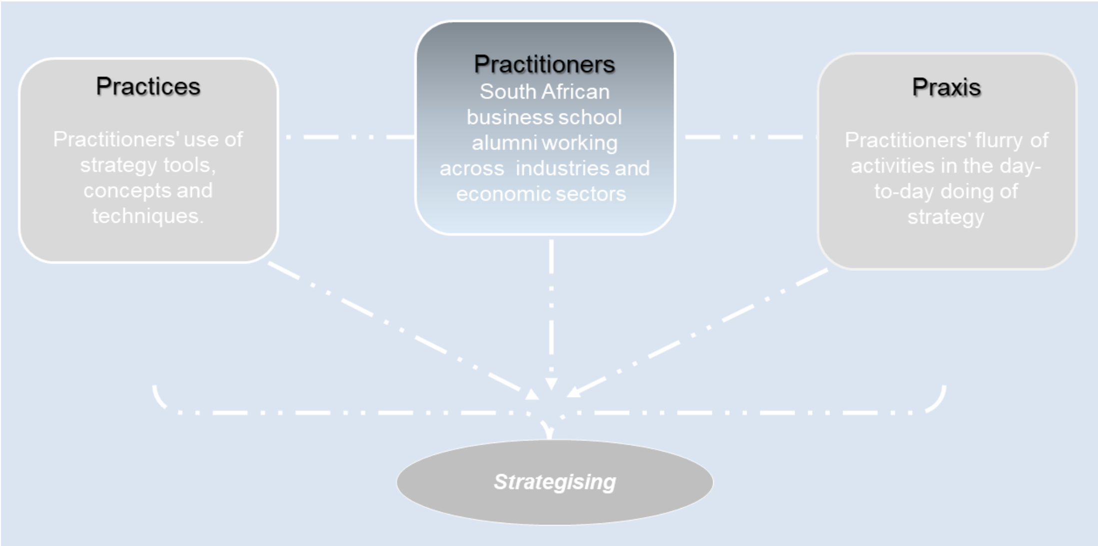
As strategy research has evolved over time, strategy literature has recently welcomed the practice approach, which recommends directing research focus on strategy actors who are engaged in the real work of strategising (Whittington, 1996). For Whittington, the nitty-gritties and local routines of strategy practice are neither easily understood nor influenced from a distance, as such, the thrust of the practice approach is to take seriously the work and talk of practitioners. He emphasises though, that to realise the full potential of the practice turn, researchers will need to do more than statistical manipulations and teachers do more than merely lecture.

“Treating strategy as a practice implies a new direction in strategy thinking” (Whittington, 1996: 732). Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2006) note that strategy-as-practice is the interplay between thinking and acting strategically. Dandira (2012) observes that the strategy-as-practice perspective is a micro-level approach that concentrates on practices and activities performed by a wide range of strategy practitioners individually or collectively. However, he acknowledges that the micro-level activities have some macro implications. That is, an assemblage of micro activities ultimately lead to macro outcomes.

2.3.5 The Strategy-As-Practice Framework

The strategy-as-practice scholarship has shifted the focus to people and their concrete actions and doings in the practice of strategy. Traditional organisation studies have treated strategy as some kind of plan an organisation owns. Extant literature, however, increasingly considers strategy as a practice, as something that people *do* (Whittington, 2006), rather than what organisations possess. Such a conceptual reorientation offers the possibility of the explanation of strategy activities at a deeper level, as they focus research attention on the situated social practices that are enacted and re-enacted in the doing of strategy (Rasche & Chia, 2009). Strategy-as-practice scholars (Johnson, et al. 2003; Jarzabkowski, et al. 2007; Jarzabkowski and Whittington, 2008; Jarzabkowski and Spee, 2009) provide the elements of practitioners, practices, and praxis as an organising framework for studying strategy-as-practice. Stander and Pretorius (2016) go further to characterise the elements as the DNA of strategising. The framework is graphically depicted in Figure 2.8.

Figure 2.8: Strategy-As-Practice Framework



Source: Adapted from Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009)

As Figure 2.8 reflects, the turn to the strategy-as-practice paradigm has provided important insights into the role and identity of strategy actors, the tools and methods of strategy making, and how the work of strategising is actually accomplished (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). The three elements are an embodiment of the strategy-as-practice scholarship.

2.3.5.1 Strategy Practitioners

Strategy-as-practice supposedly focuses on the concrete activities of strategy practitioners (Rouleau, 2013). In practice theory, practitioners are the critical connection between intra-organisational praxis and the organisational and extra-organisational practices (Whittington, 2006). And so, who are strategy practitioners? Strategy practitioners are the people who do the actual work of strategising (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009; Rouleau, 2013). Management literature provides two main ontological dimensions through which strategy practitioners can be identified (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). Practitioners can be identified as either individual or aggregate actors or as internal or external to the organisation. Internal actors are employees at any level of the organisation who are involved in strategising activities, while external actors like consultants, analysts, and regulators influence and shape the practice of strategy in organisations from an outsider standpoint. Rouleau (2013) further postulates that strategy practitioners mobilise the tools of practice and draw on specific skills in their work of strategising. That is, strategy tools and some stock of skills may become enablers or disenablers to these practitioners.

2.3.5.2 Strategy Practices

According to Vaara and Whittington (2012) strategy practitioners are never discrete individual actors detached from context, but rather, they are social beings whose possibilities are defined and shaped by the practices in which they are immersed. Stander and Pretorius (2016) define strategy practices as the social, symbolic and material tools that practitioners draw on in their 'doing' of strategy. For Vaara and Whittington (2012), practices are accepted ways of doing things which are embodied, materially mediated and shared between practitioners and which are routinised over time. In a similar vein, Whittington (2006) take practices to mean shared routines of behaviour, including traditions, norms and procedures for thinking, acting and using ‘things’. For Chia and Mackay (2007: 217) “everyday strategy practices are discernible patterns of action arising from habituated tendencies and internalised dispositions rather that from deliberate, purposeful goal setting initiatives”. They therefore maintain that practices orient and educate practitioner attention and shape their dispositions.

2.3.5.3 Strategy Praxis

From a strategy-as-practice perspective, strategy is conceptualised as a situated, socially accomplished phenomenon (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). They further assert that strategy is accomplished over time through strategy praxis, which they define as a stream of activities in the doing of strategy. Kemmis and Smith (2008) conceptualise praxis as follows:

> Praxis is a kind of action which is morally committed, and oriented and informed by traditions in a field. It is the kind of action people engage in when they think about what that action will mean in the world. Praxis is what people do when they consider all the circumstances and exigencies that confront them at a particular moment and then, taking the broadest view they can of what is best to do, they act.

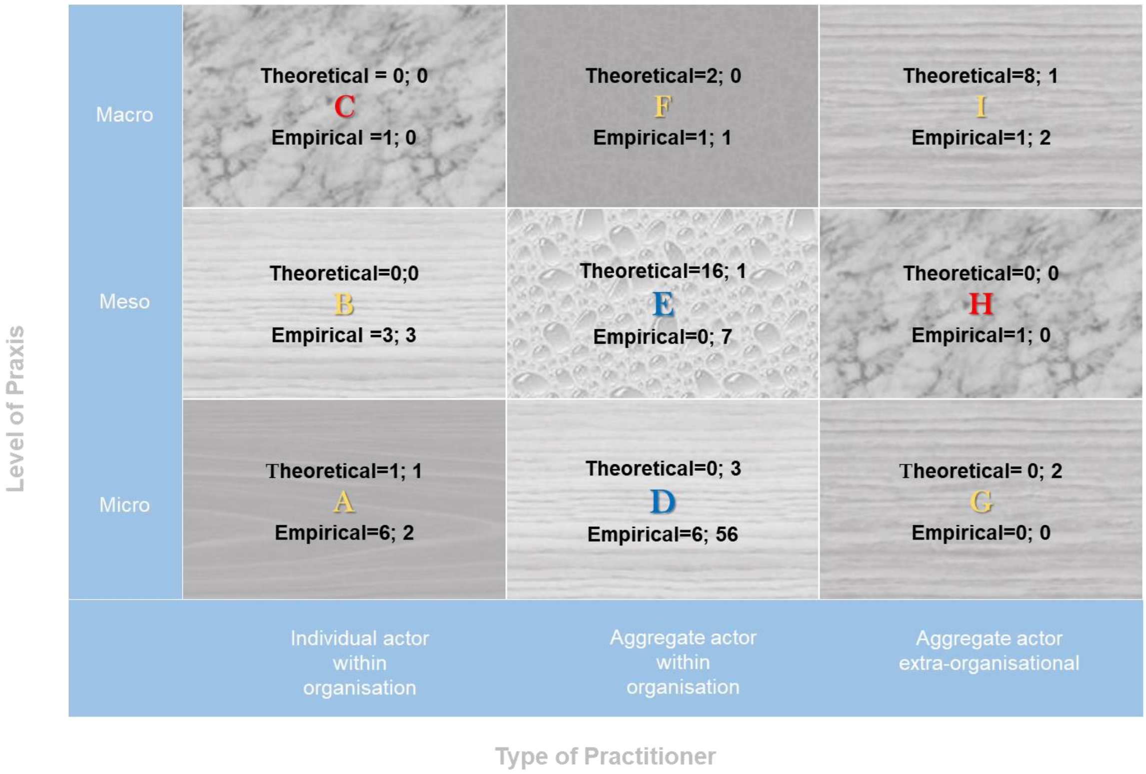
Impliedly, when performing strategy praxis, strategy practitioners not only draw from their stocks of skills and experiences, they also draw from the vast deposits of phronétic resources available to them.

For Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) praxis is a stream of activity which connects the micro actions of individual strategy practitioners and groups to the wider institutional domains of their practice. Supporting this view is Stander and Pretorius (2016) who define praxis as the interconnection between the practitioners’ actions, their consumption of resources, and the organisational context within which they work. For Sztompka (1991) praxis is the intersection of operation and action, a dialectic synthesis of the goings-on in society and what people are doing. Indeed, praxis permeates the practice of strategy. That is, without praxis, nothing concrete can be accomplished in the realm of strategy practice. As such, Wittington (2006) alludes to the fact that praxis is an artful and improvisatory performance.

2.3.6 The Strategy-As-Practice Typology

Based on the ontological dimensions of the type of strategy practitioner, and the level of strategy praxis they identified in a meta-analysis of literature on strategy practice, Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) developed a typology of nine strategy practice domains which can be conveniently grouped into three broad categories. In category 1 are studies which link up individual organisational practitioners and levels of praxis they perform. Category 2 covers studies which link up aggregate intra-organisational practitioners with levels of praxis they perform. And finally, category 3 covers studies which link up aggregate extra-organisational practitioners with levels of praxis they perform. The nine typologies are summarised in a typology matrix as graphically depicted in Figure 2.9. Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) found that some domain areas were better developed than others, offering a rich patina for further research. A similar conclusion was subsequently reached by Stander and Pretorius (2016) in a comparative study conducted between 2008 and 2015, which analysed research on strategy practice.

Figure 2.9: Strategy-As-Practice Typology Matrix



Source: Adapted from Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009)
Stander and Pretorius (2016)

As evident from Figure 2.9, there have been some interesting developments in strategy-as-practice research during the period 2008 and 2015. Although there has been an overall increase in studies conducted between 2008 and 2015, an interesting development has been the shift in research focus from a total of 16 studies in domain E in Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009) study to 59 studies in domain D in the Stander and Pretorius (2016) study. Besides the shift of research focus from domain E in 2008 to domain D in 2015, also noticeable is the number of articles focusing on domain D in the 2016 study, 53 more articles focusing on domain D were published in 2015 (59) compared to 2008 (6), an 883% increase. Furthermore, of the 59 total articles published focusing on domain D in the 2016 study, 56 (95%) were empirical and only 3 (5%) were theoretical. Stander and Pretorius (2016) posit that the increased research focus on domain D could be because of the ease of access to participants in a single organisation at a micro level. That there is a high number of empirical studies compared to theoretical studies could be because micro praxis primarily deals with practical matters which are much easier to study empirically.

Like Jarzabkowski and Spee (2009), Stander and Pretorius (2016) found that domain C and domain H were under-researched. They hypothesised that, given the sensitivity of information which can threaten the competitive advantage of organisations at these levels, it may be extremely difficult to find willing research participants in those domains. Stander and Pretorius (2016) also found that, except for domain D and domain G, there has been a decrease in research in other domains. As noted above, overall, there has been a slight decline in theoretical studies, while empirical studies grew exponentially. Theoretical articles declined by 3 articles (-27%) from a total of 11 articles in the 2009 study to 8 articles in the 2016 study. During the same period, empirical articles more than doubled from 35 articles in the 2009 study to 71 articles in the 2016 study. Although strategy-as-practice is dominated by empirical studies, domain I is denominated by theoretical studies. According to Stander and Pretorius (2016) the reason could be that, although it is feasible to theorise about macro organisational phenomena, testing developed theories empirically could be difficult. Both studies emphasise that the domain areas are not mutually exclusive; as such, different areas may be covered in a single study.

2.3.6.1 Individual Practitioner Within Organisation

Category 1 comprises practice domains A – C which link-up individual practitioners with the level of praxis they perform. In domain A, research studies cover individual actors who perform micro praxis that are largely proximal to their experiences. In domain *B*, research studies cover individual practitioners who perform meso praxis by looking at how practitioners' praxis shape how organisations or organisational units do strategy. Ma, Seidl and Guérard's (2015) study on new CEOs' post-succession processes is a good example which falls into domain B. In their study, Ma et al. (2015) report two types of practices new CEOs engage in post-succession - integration practices and realignment practices. Social integration practices are geared towards creating a match between the new CEO and their organisation while realignment practices seek to realign the organisation with its environment. In domain C, research studies cover individual strategy practitioners who perform macro praxis at institutional and industry levels.

2.3.6.2 Aggregate Practitioners Within Organisation

Category *2* comprises practice domains D – F which link-up internal aggregate practitioners with the level of praxis they perform. In domain D, research studies cover aggregate practitioners who perform micro praxis, either from a positional or functional perspective. Salih and Doll's (2013) study of middle managers' views on organisational factors influencing strategy implementation falls into domain D. In their findings, they report that organisational factors, middle managers' contributions, and some challenges influence the strategy implementation process. In domain E, research studies cover internal aggregate practitioners who perform meso praxis which affects firm level outcomes. In domain F, research studies cover internal aggregate practitioners who perform macro praxis with diffusion to institutions, sectors and industries.

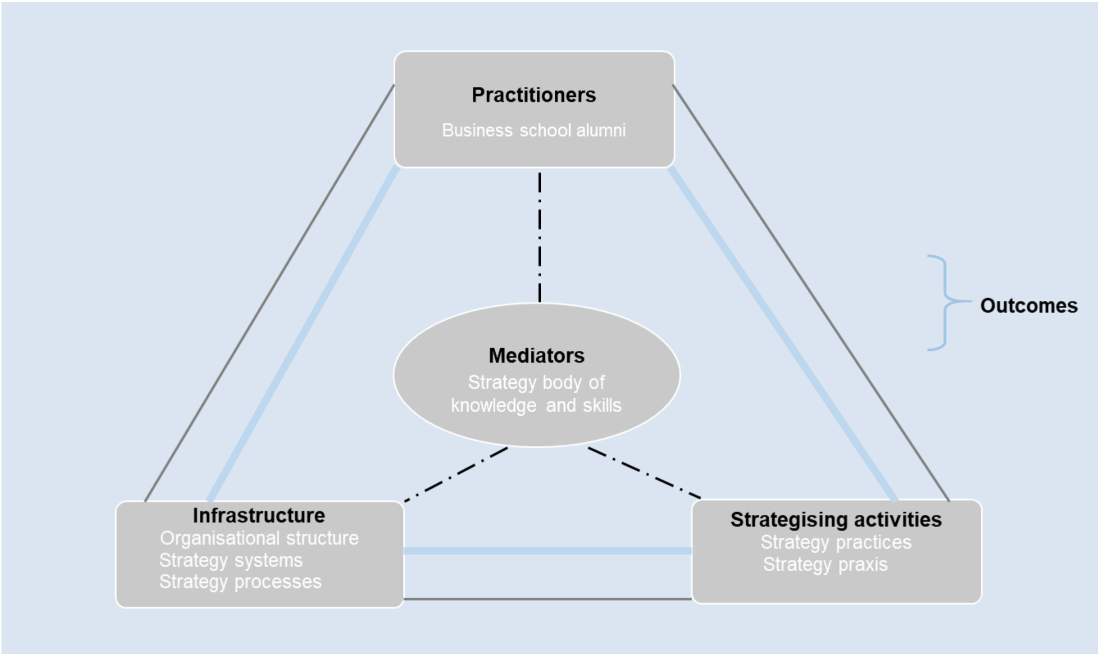
2.3.6.3 Aggregate Practitioners at Extra-Organisation

Category *3* comprises practice domains G – I which link-up external aggregate practitioners with the level of praxis they perform. Research studies cover extra-organisational aggregate practitioners and the level of praxis they perform. Researchers in this category may seek to unravel the association between multiple practitioners and the development of strategy as a field (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). In domain *G*, studies cover external aggregate practitioners who perform micro praxis in conjunction with internal practitioners. In domain H, research studies cover external aggregate practitioners who perform sub-organisation and organisational praxis, such as consultants and regulators. In domain I, research studies cover external aggregate practitioners who perform macro praxis. Schmachtel's (2016) study of the co-creation of the locally situated partnership narratives falls into domain I. She theorises that 'rationalised partnership myths' legitimise partnerships while concealing contradictions, antagonisms, and complexities in their structures. The updated typology matrix still offers an organising tool for research in the field.

2.3.7 Business Organisations as Activity Systems

The practice concept has recently penetrated strategy literature (Whittington, 1996). As Jarzabkowski (2003) puts it, practice scholars now examine how practitioners interact with their social and physical worlds as they engage in their everyday activities that constitute practice. Sannino, et al. (2009) posit that activities allow humans to organise their lives and develop their skills, personalities, and consciousness. Given the prominence of activities in the strategy-as-practice approach, activity theory appears apt for the analysis of the activities of strategy practitioners. Business organisations are the lifeworlds of strategy practitioners in which they perform their strategy practices and praxis. Figure 2.10 presents a model of business organisations as activity systems.

Figure 2.10: Business Organisations as Activity Systems



Source: Own Compilation

As is evident from Figure 2.10, the activity system comprises practitioners, infrastructure, strategising activities, and mediators in the form of the strategy body of knowledge and skills. Organisations for which business school alumni who participated in the study work, constitute the 'activity system' where interaction between the strategy practitioner and the collective structures of the organisation and strategising activities take place and produce practical outcomes. Jarratt and Stiles (2010) define collective organisational structures as the strategy history, formal and informal structures, organisational culture, strategy systems and processes, and normative strategising behaviour. Importantly, activity systems are driven by a deeply communal motive which is embedded in the object of the activity (Engeström, 2000). In the practice of strategy, praxis is the object which carries the motive embedded in business operations. In activity theory, the concept of object is crucially important (Leont'ev, 1978). There could not be an activity without an object, for the object embodies the meaning, the motive and the purpose of an activity system (Engeström & Kerosuo, 2007) To paraphrase Engeström and Kerosuo (2007), an object is not reducible to short-term goals, but is durable and reproduced in each stream of action vital to the activity.

2.4 Recent Developments and New Directions in the Field of Strategy

Driven by cutting edge research, the field of strategy is constantly evolving as new insights are gained and new directions are being opened. Spurred by a growing number of organisations that are embracing the ideals of openness in such areas as strategy making and innovation, (Dobusch, Dobush, & Müller-Seitz, 2019) a failry nascent stream of research in 'Open Strtegy' is rapidly taking hold. Open Strategy implies transparent, inclusive, and [participative] strategy processes and [practices], (Seidl et al., 2019) and thus challenges the orthodoxies of opacity and secrecy, (Whittington et al., 2011) that is charactiristic of the traditional forms of strategising.

In like manner, following the streams of research in strategy process and of late, strategy practice, schorars have begun to study strategy processes and practices (SAPP) together. In this regard, a notable reference is the 2018 *Strategy Management Journal* special issue on SAPP which encapsulated insights on both strategy processes and strategy practices from diverse strategy scholars. According to Burgelman, Floyd, Laamanen, et al. (2018) a moment has come for exploring the intersections between stratgy processes and practices. They further contend that it is both *feasible* and *desirable* to combine them into a joint research stream, (emphasis added). Such a development is welcome since strategy content and processes are entangled in strategy context, strategy practices being the mechanism of such entanglement. The distinct yet complementary contributions of the strategy process and strategy practice scholarship lead to better understanding of how microprocesses affect macro-outcomes, (Kouamé & Langley, 2018).

2.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter critically reviewed literature relating to management theory and practice, thus melding management education and the practice of strategy. From the reviewed literature, there appears to be a general agreement that a gap exists between academic rigour and practical relevance. The argument is that academics emphasise rigour in their academic offerings over practical relevance to management practice. However, such an argument appears to have overlooked the dynamic and nuanced interplay between management education and practice. Accordingly, gambits advanced for bridging the gap between rigour and relevance, diverse as they are, may be insufficient to capture the richness of the interplay between theory and practice.

Considering that from a practice perspective, the ultimate objective of strategy knowledge is to act as a guiding and organising framework to shape and inform practitioners' actions, there will always be a dissociation between theoretical knowledge and its direct application in practice (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006). The implication therefore is that, practical relevance can take different forms (Nicolai & Seidl, 2010), when applied in practical contexts, theoretical knowledge is typically re-interpreted (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 20006), and that practitioners may draw on theoretical knowledge selectively (Nicolai & Dautwiz, 2010). According to Kieser, et al. (2015), even though these insights illuminate crucial aspects of practical relevance, they have largely been ignored in the literature. This study therefore advances the thesis that the strategy body of knowledge taught at business schools to management students may be relevant in one form or another.

CHAPTER 3: FORMS OF MANAGEMENT KNOWLEDGE

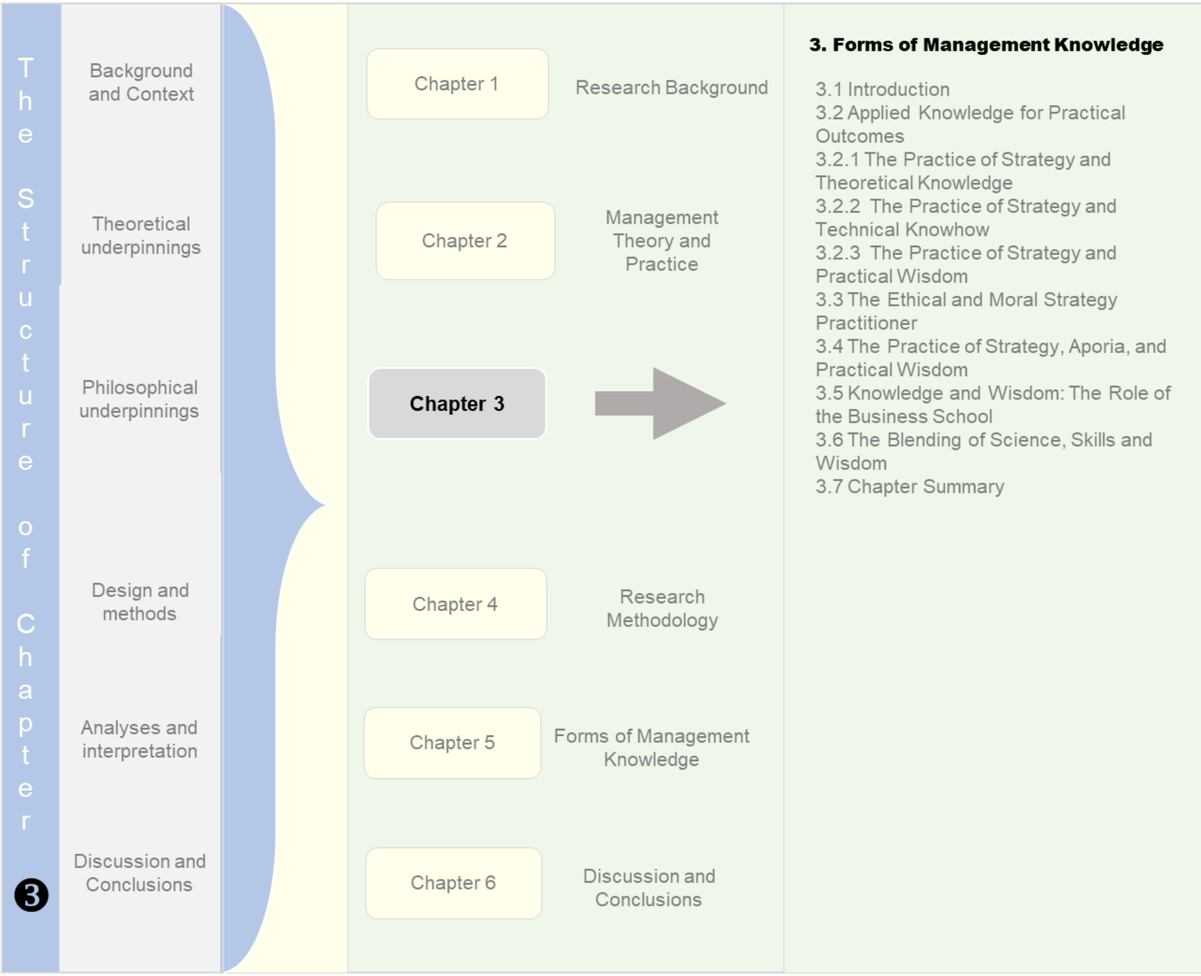
> “*At the heart of teaching practice therefore are not items of knowledge as discrete measurable techniques, but judgement which is itself a form of knowledge*” – Hugh Socket

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented a review of theories undergirding management theory and practice underpinned by academic rigour and practical relevance. Building on the previous chapter, this chapter presents a review of the philosophical dimensions of management knowledge which straddles theory and practice. Specifically, the purpose of this philosophical framework is to bring together instrumental rationality and practical rationality so often held apart. As per Higgs (2012), it is both right and necessary for professional education and practice to balance the two rationalities. In this regard, Fish and Coles (1998) illustrate the indivisibility of knowledge and practice through the metaphor of the *iceberg of professional practice* in which just a portion of practice is visible action beneath which invisibly lie beliefs, assumptions, emotions, and values of practice. To this end, Higgs (2012) raises the point of *practice knowledge*, the sum total of the knowledges used in practice, including academic knowledge and experiential knowledge.

Cementing the idea of practice knowledge, Ellett (2012) notes that in the Western philosophical tradition, customary practice has been to distinguish between theoretical reasoning, meant to determine what one should believe, and practical reasoning, meant to determine how one should act. However, according to Kinsella and Pitman (2012) for more than two centuries now, practical rationality has increasingly given way to instrumental rationality that now permeates professional schools and professional practice alike. But, the dynamic, complex, ambiguous, and highly volatile 21st century world demands that a fine balance be maintained between the forms of knowledge, as championing one form over the other, will likely produce unintended and dire consequences. The structure of Chapter 3 is graphically depicted in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1: Chapter Three structure



Source: Own Compilation

Figure 3.1 depicts the position of Chapter 3 within the broad structure of the dissertation. Specifically, Chapter 3 addresses the philosophical component of the study that relates to the forms of management knowledge germane to the practice of strategy.

3.2 Applied Knowledge for Practical Outcomes

Aristotle, the ancient Greek philosopher and scholar, offers a quite influential three-fold, broad classification of knowledge as theoretical, technical, or practical with their attendant dispositions of *epistéme*, *téchné*, and *phronésis* (Smith, 1999; Kemmis & Smith, 2008). These knowledge domains remain an excellent starting point for delineating knowledge as a public, social good (Smith, 1999). Along with other Greek scholars and thinkers of his time, Aristotle believed that the appropriateness of any knowledge form depends on the purpose it serves, or the telos it seeks to achieve (Smith, 1999). In line with this belief, Aristotle advances forms of knowledge, each guided by a distinctive disposition with its own *telos*, guided by a distinctive form of action as outlined above. Though the three forms of knowledge serve different purposes and thus are aimed at different ends, there are complementarities among them. To this end, to be a prosperous society, we need a sufficiently balanced dose of each. Doubtlessly, knowledge in general has increased to reach unprecedented heights; however, such tremendous growth has been disproportionate, with theoretical and technical knowledge being elevated over practical wisdom. Such a situation should be cause for concern for academe, business and society in general. Table 3.1 summarises the knowledge forms germane to the practice of strategy, together with their attendant dispositions, associated action, and the telos that each seeks to achieve.

Table 3.1: Forms of Management Knowledge

	Theoretical Knowledge	Technical Knowledge	Practical Knowledge
Disposition	**Epistémé** The disposition to seek truth for its own sake based on analytic rationality. Universal, invariable, and context independent	**Téchné** The disposition to act in a true and reasoned way according to the rules of a trade and instrumental rationality. Pragmatic, variable, context-dependent, and production oriented	**Phronésis** The moral perspective to act wisely, truly, and justly, with both goals and means always open to review. Based on practical value rationality. Pragmatic, variable and context-dependent
Action	**Théoria** Contemplation involving theoretical reasoning about the nature of things	**Poiésis** Making action involving means-ends or instrumental reasoning to achieve a known objective or outcome	**Praxis** Doing action involving practical reasoning about what is wise, right, and proper to do in a given situation
Telos	**Universal Truth** The attainment of knowledge and truth	**Tangible Product** The production of something tangible	**Common Good** Wise and prudent judgement; acting rightly in the world

Source: Adapted from Kemmis and Smith (2008)

As Table 3.1 reflects, scientific knowledge is guided by the disposition of epistéme, a disposition which seeks truth for its own sake. Associated with epistéme, is the distinctive action of theoria, a contemplation centred on theoretical reasoning about the nature of things (Kemmis & Smith, 2008). In strategy practice, under the disposition of epistéme, contemplative action of theoria may include the nature and purpose of strategy. In contrast, technical knowledge is guided by the disposition of téchné, which seeks to act in a true and reasoned way, according to some craft rules. Associated with téchné, is the distinctive action of poiésis, a means-ends type of action that is aimed at producing a tangible outcome, product, or artefact. In strategy practice, the making action of poiésis may include engaging with strategy tools in one's activities and preparing one's activities for maximum impact on strategy activities.

Practical knowledge - *practical wisdom* - is guided by the disposition of phronésis, a moral disposition to act wisely and prudently regardless of circumstance, with both means and ends being open to review (Kemmis & Smith, 2008). Associated with phronésis is the doing action of praxis, the domain of activity where the end is realised in the very doing of the activity itself, for good action itself is its end (Aristotle, 2007: 6.5 1140b7), in (Kavanagh, 2012). The phronimos - *wise person* - understands that their activities can hardly be reduced to the simple or prescribed responses to situations in which they operate (Sellman, 2009). Indeed, as Kemmis and Smith (2008) note, with phronésis, doing the right thing does not only follow a given rule, social norm or convention, it means doing what will later be judged to have been good in light of its historical consequences. In strategy practice, phronésis would enable strategists to think and act strategically, that is, they will work to create sustainable value through championing the achievement of both external and internal goods.

3.2.1 The Practice of Strategy and Theoretical knowledge

The strategy body of knowledge embodies theories, concepts, and principles which dispose practitioners towards analytic rationality involving theoretical reasoning about the nature of their organisations and the environment within which they operate. Fundamentally, the practice of strategy requires the ability to abstract from complexity, by analysing the situation to identify the core elements, which are then synthesised in order to understand how they relate to each other (Grant, 2008). In other words, strategy theories and concepts embodied in theoretical knowledge provide the broader context of the work of strategising. As Domke-Damonte, Keels and Black (2013) suggest, theoretical knowledge develops strategy practitioners' appreciation and understanding of the practical business conditions, and provides critical insights that engenders more substantive analytical outcomes.

To create value, an organisation pursues a universal ideal (Nonaka & Toyama, 2007). Grant (2008) contends that to achieve such an ideal, an organisation needs to develop a comprehension of, and insights into the business environment characterised by high levels of complexity. Such comprehension and insights are most likely to be developed through the theoretical lenses of strategy. Grant further asserts that theoretical knowledge is important in strategy practice as it allows practitioners to come to terms with reality more insightfully and incisively. On the same note, Domke-Damonte, et al. (2013) posit that theoretical knowledge provides strategy practitioners with the capability to leverage analytical tools and build causal maps to arrive at creative business solutions. However, according to Smeeton (2017), in their practice, strategy practitioners still fail to tap into the theories available in strategy literature. As a result, practitioners tend to perceive external situations from internal lenses and rules of thumb of which they may have little conscious awareness and fundamental understanding (Grant, 2008; Klabnik, 2012). Despite a lack of deep appreciation and widespread adoption by practitioners, relevant theory is still critical in the practice of strategy and the attainment of practical outcomes.

3.2.2 The Practice of Strategy and Technical Knowhow

Our world, from antiquity to present, is teeming with architectural, infrastructural, technical, mechanical, and technological artefacts and physical products and objects of tremendous artistic and aesthetic beauty of varying shapes and sizes. These artefacts, products, and objects, regardless of size, shape, and nature come with bewildering sophistication and functionality. Sophisticated and powerful though these artefacts, products, and objects are, they embody the excellency of the technicians, engineers, artisans, artists, craft workers and more who possess technical prowess associated with knowledge, known in Aristotelian terms as téchné. These artefacts and objects effectively serve specified purposes (Glen et al., 2014).

Téchné, a productive form of knowledge, is possessed by an expert in a specialised art who understands the principles underlying the production of an object or product and is associated with poiésis which involves making of things (Kavanagh, 2012). Dunne (1993) identifies two elements comprising téchné as a technical, productive form of knowledge. The first element, which answers the how questions of poiésis, is a form of technical knowledge underpinning the ability to analyse and describe how a product or artefact is actually made, and the second, which involves the actual making or creation of the artifact or product, is the form of technical knowledge underpinning the ability to actually make an artefact or produce a physical product. Kavanagh (2012) further categorises poiésis into artefactual poiésis and performative poiésis. The former describes the activity of making something tangible like manufacturing a car, while the latter involves activities like playing soccer.

Strategy practice, as primarily an intellectual and moral activity, would primarily be concerned with the technical knowledge of analysis and description of processes leading to a desired outcome, that is, the first of Dunne's technical elements. From Kavanagh's (2012) categorisation, however, strategy practice would be concerned with performative poiésis other than artefactual poiésis since, in and of itself, strategy practice hardly, if ever, produces tangible products or artefacts. As such, as a performative activity, strategy practice produces, a design, a process, a state of affairs, an act or an outcome.

3.2.3 The Practice of Strategy and Practical Wisdom

The work of a professional involves exercising practical judgements in real and unique settings. Business school graduates should therefore, be cultivated to value this aspect of their professional lives and be sensitised towards a disposition to think critically about their work, to act for the best, to develop into practitioners characterised by practical wisdom that will inform their actions (Pitman, 2012). Other than being a stock of tacit knowledge, practical wisdom is a state of being, an individual's inclination to act wisely regardless of circumstance. To this end, Kemmis (2012) emphasises that in those we educate into professional practice, we want something more than knowledge and technical skill, a desire which underpins our aspiration to inhere phronésis in professional education that will not only produce a good professional practitioner but a practitioner who also does good.

As Baden and Higgs (2015) observe, wisdom is an antique concept transcending Western philosophy and modern psychology which has long been discussed by both philosophers and theologians. However, in extant literature the concept of wisdom appears to be very rare in both academic and business discourses. A quick internet search on 27 September 2019 for the word *wisdom* using the Google search engine generated 421 million results within 0.53 seconds while for the word *knowledge* the search generated 3.53 billion results within 0.52 seconds, the word *knowledge* is more than 8 times popular than the word *wisdom*. This view is supported by Nonaka and Chia (2014) who state that the concept of wisdom seems to have been pre-eminent in ancient thought but with civilisation it has slipped away from the collective consciousness and has been replaced by technical rationality.

As a virtue that straddles cognition and emotion (Sellman, 2012) phronésis is acquired and deployed not in the making of any product separate from oneself but it is rather manifested in one's actions in social circles. It is not knowledge of ethical ideas or universal principles, but rather a state of being which describes a resourcefulness and perceptiveness of mind, and characterises a person who knows how to act with virtue. It is good, practical, and moral judgement (Kavanagh, 2012). Accordingly, if educators of professional practitioners fail to inspire their students towards a phronétic professional life, they will not only fail the profession but the whole society they profess to serve (Pitman, 2012).

3.3 The Ethical and Moral Strategy Practitioner

> The motive for success is not enough. It produces a short-sighted world which destroys its sources of prosperity... A great society is a society in which its men of business think greatly about its function. Low thoughts mean low behaviour, and after an orgy of brief exploitation, low behaviour means descending standard of life. (Alfred North Whitehead, Lecture delivered at the Harvard Business School, 1932, published in Adventures of Ideas, 1933: 119-120.

As Bazerman and Tenbrunsel, (2011) point out, managers are keen on running ethical companies and yet corporate corruption is widespread. They also caution that managers should look at what they encourage employees to do, as they (managers) routinely delegate unethical behaviours to others and at times unwittingly reward unethical decisions because they have good outcomes. Decisions that fall within the indeterminate and grey areas of practice are infused with ethical concerns (Kinsella, 2012). Spectacular failures of the last few decades in corporate South Africa and elsewhere are testimony of the moral turpitude which has given rise to corporate malfeasance at a grand scale in such companies as Regal Treasury Bank, Samboo Bank, WorldCom, Enron, VW, Toshiba, Samsung and others. The contradiction between the keenness of strategy practitioners to act ethically and do good and what normally happens in actual practice can be understood from the perspective of MacIntyre's (2007) treatise on how social practices are embodied in institutions and Giambattista Vico's (1668–1744) portraits of [strategy] practitioners.

Cooke and Carr (2014) acknowledge that MacIntyre has developed a social constructionist conception of practical wisdom and virtue as qualities required to sustain a social practice. In his *locus classicus* work, *After Virtue*, MacIntyre (2007) posits that social practices are embodied in institutions which are primarily driven by external goods: money (profits), status, prestige and the accompanying power relations. MacIntyre also maintains that social practices enshrine standards of excellence and the achievement of internal goods that are recognised as such by those who engage in those practices. In the 'rub' between institutionally driven *external goods* and practice driven *internal goods*, lies the grey area which may be a breeding ground for corporate malfeasance and immoral conduct as practitioners fail to balance *external* and *internal* goods. To maintain a proper balance between the two, strategy practitioners should be the embodiment of integrity, fairness, and justice couched in practical wisdom.

In the manner of widely reported possible effects of leadership and management styles on one's conduct in business, Giambattista Vico, cited in Miner (1998) provides a timeless portrait of four strategy practitioner types that can also shed light and offer insight into the ethical and moral conduct of strategy practitioners. These strategy practitioner portraits are the fool, the imprudent savant, the astute ignoramus, and the wise. To the extreme, the portrait of a fool (*stultus*) possesses knowledge neither of the general nor of the particular, theory and practice escapes him/her alike, a fool constantly pays the price for his/her rashness (Miner, 1998). The imprudent savant (*doctus imprudentis*), lacks nuance and suffers from indecision, arrogance, and dabbled speech. Where plausible arguments can be made *in utramque partem* (in both directions) he/she is often too slow to act, the practical consequences of which are baneful. As his/her synthetic capabilities are not well developed, he/she fails to discover minute but telling detail that can alter one's perception entirely (Miner, 1998). Sometimes successful, imprudent savants more often fail (Rooney & Mckenna, 2007).

The astute ignoramus (*illiterates astutus*) often succeeds in temporal affairs, but, evidenced by his/her preference for the *utile* (useful), over the *honestum* (honourable), his/her ignorance of the most important things are sure cause of failure (Miner, 1998). The wise (*sapiens*), possess both theoretical and practical wisdom, they have the capability to rise from lowly occasions and chance opportunities to greater heights. Notwithstanding the obliquities and uncertainties of human action, the wise aim for external truth. They follow roundabout ways because situations do not call for straight ones as they aim for the best as far as the nature of things allow. The wise are an embodiment of both esoteric and common wisdom (Miner, 1998). The wise embody such wisdom because, wisdom, far from being a set of skills or a body of knowledge, is a *state of being*, the '*who*' of the wise person.

Given, some would be familiar with one or more such portraits, having interacted with them at a personal or professional level. Needless to say, the first three portraits are an embodiment of the unwise, as such, as Rooney and Mckenna (2007) note, they are undesirable in managing a complex business in a dynamic environment. To paraphrase Sellman (2012) another undesirable phenomenon is that the rational-analytic institutions and organisations expect *phronétic* practitioners and yet they are unwilling to provide environments in which *phronésis* would thrive. Instead, they produce environments which are conducive for the imprudent savant and astute ignoramus type practitioners to thrive (Rooney & Mckenna, 2007).

3.4 The Practice of Strategy, Aporia, and Practical Wisdom

As an embodiment of technical, practical, relational, and communicative aspects, [strategy] practice is characterised by complexity, uncertainty, diversity, and dynamism (Higgs, 2012) a situation which gives rise to aporias (Chishtie, 2012; Kinsella & Pitman, 2012) that face strategy practitioners in their day-to-day strategising. In such practice situations, it is extremely likely that the issues practitioners should contend with on a day-to-day basis are new, novel, complex, and ambiguous, such that there is neither a precedent nor a rule of thumb to invoke in addressing them.

In such situations, though not necessarily a panacea, in Aristotelian terms, strategy practitioners may effectively deal with such aporias by invoking phronésis, which according to Caputo (1993: 101), is the “capacity to act on the spot, to think on one’s feet, to invent what is needed at the time, to innovate, improvise, experiment, a capacity to move with the mobility of events, to let one’s logos hang loose”. As Macklin and Whiteford (2012) put it, phronésis is the ability to evaluate largely non-reproducible circumstances so that one can work out what should be done in a particular situation. Phronésis recognises the aporias of practice (Kinsella & Pitman, 2012), particularly in the practice of strategy.

As alluded to above, the strategy practice terrain is characterised by conflicts between demands for maximising external goods while maintaining the internal goods of the practice. However, as Kinsella and Pitman (2012) observe, important though external goods may be in sustaining a social practice, they have the potential to corrupt, distort, or disrupt the achievement of internal goods. Practical wisdom therefore, has the power to resist the moral compromise and despair that a strong focus on external goods may invoke and that trending towards technicism, instrumentalism, and managerialism may fuel. Kinsella and Pitman (2012) further note that amidst the *aporias* of strategy practice in contexts where the maximisation of eternal goods takes precedent, *phronésis* represents a beacon of light and hope for strategy practitioners to negotiate the internal goods of strategy practice with wisdom, integrity, authenticity and on morally respectable ground. Given, practical wisdom should be the glue which binds the external and internal goods of strategy practice together for sustainable performance outcomes.

3.5 Knowledge and Wisdom: The Role of the Business School

According to Rooney and Mckenna (2007), the practical dangers of knowledge without wisdom have been known for some time. The strategy practice landscape is ever changing, highly unpredictable, and ill-structured, rendering analytic and linear forms of thinking that are so ubiquitous in our daily dealings, almost obsolete and thus calling for new and better ways of thinking. Deficiencies and gaps in such forms of thinking and doing have been exposed in recent times with the after effects of the financial crisis still being felt around the world. As the 21st century strategy practice terrain is characterised by insurmountable and bewildering challenges, a rational-analytic approach to strategy practice, centered solely on scientific knowledge and economic modeling is becoming increasingly insufficient.

Until recently, reverberating across media platforms around the world were questions as to what extent business schools, as propagators of both theoretical knowledge and applied skills, should be culpable for the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. Spectacular corporate failures of the pre-2008 era of global financial meltdown had already precipitated from academe itself, giving rise to strong reservations about the kind of knowledge and skills being produced by business schools. A strong mea culpa was advanced by such renowned academics as Pfeffer and Fong (2002); Gosling and Mintzberg (2004); Bennis and O'Toole (2005); Ghoshal (2005) and most recently Queen (2015) as a direct response to corporate malfeasance, mostly by business school graduates.

As noted above, calls for business school reforms have resonated far and wide. Business schools are said to have become too scientific and analytic, and produce graduates with a limited and distorted view of their roles (Goshal, 2005). Though the whole system and design of business school education may have some inherent flaws, sharp criticisms are directed at the Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree, a premier business qualification which confers a badge of honour, not only to the holder, but also to the conferrer, and until recently the hirer of an MBA dgree holder. The MBA degree is thought to be too analytic, rather than reflective, and that it produces hard, analytic skills at the expense of reflective, soft skills that are important in practice.

Steeped in praxis, the practice of strategy, to quote Smeeton (2017) is, ‘by its very nature, action’. By implication therefore, strategy practice draws heavily on what De Souza (2017) terms ‘performative judgments’ which in turn are embedded in practical wisdom. As the ongoing ability to act wisely in solving complex problems, performative judgements straddle theory and practice (De Souza, 2017). Cantrell and Sharpe (2016) contend that practical wisdom is not an innate character trait, but can be intentionally and skillfully learned and acquired. The question therefore is: How is the professional demeanor of a strategy practitioner to be developed from business school and beyond? Sellman (2009) argues that if business school education aims towards enabling graduates to become practically wise, such an education should provide students with the means to develop the insight, foresight, sagacity, and perspicacity called for in today’s strategy practice landscape. Practical wisdom will enable strategy practitioners to exercise performative judgements in the face of imperfect knowledge (Marker, 2013).

3.6 Blending Science, Skills, and Wisdom

The 21st century has seen more knowledge, technology, and technologists and experts than at any given time in human history (Rooney & Mckenna, 2007). According to Sellman (2012), science has provided humanity with innumerable opportunities to escape the worst excesses of superstition, and received dogma which are both notorious for silencing dissent, and for breeding oppressive environments that are largely antithetical to human flourishing. That said, science cannot provide solutions to all of the world’s problems.

Strategy is neither science nor art, but distinctly practice (Smeeton, 2017). To this end, Billsberry and Birnik (2010) contend that since strategy is a contextual practice, it should therefore blend theoretical knowledge (epistéme), technical skill (téchné), and practical wisdom (phronésis). As Sellman (2012) asserts, phronésis plays a pivotal role in guiding action, as it straddles both the intellectual and the practical. An effective practitioner therefore requires some elements of practical wisdom.

Although the rational-analytic world of science is important, it is not distinctively positioned to deal with all the messy realities of everyday strategy practice, giving rise to a need for complimentary forms of knowledge to aid effectiveness. As Sellman (2009) points out, in a rational-analytic environment, clear solutions to practice-related challenges will not always be available. To that effect, Frank (2012) alerts us to notable failures of life decisions which are made by plugging them into an algorithm. Specifically, Frank (2012) points out that in circumstances that demand consideration of what works versus what rules dictate should be done, practitioners would normally elect to follow the rules to avoid possible repercussions. In other words, there are situations, and plenty of them at that, in practical situations that demand action which may be contrary to what protocols or rules demand.

According to Frank (2012), reverting to protocols in such situations smacks of accountability. He illustrates such situations with reference to a medical situation where one should take care of difficult patients and concludes that such patients can best be cared for based on *phronésis* because they do not fit the accepted models of medical practice. Without doubt, such situations abound in strategy practice. As Miner (1998) puts it, that wisdom facilitates both comprehension and celerity, distinct imperatives which are crucial in practical matters that require swift responses given ex tempore, without the benefit of protracted analysis. The blending of knowledge, skills, and wisdom should be promoted within the echelons of both academe and business.

3.7 Chapter Summary

Following from the theoretical framework undergirding the study which was advanced in the previous chapter, this chapter discussed the philosophical framework which, for purposes of this study, organises both management education and the practice of strategy. The philosophical framework embodies theoretical knowledge with the disposition of epistéme, technical knowledge with the disposition of téchné, and practical wisdom with the disposition of phronésis. Furthermore, each knowledge form is associated with a different form of action and telos related to the practice of strategy in modern day organisations and institutions.

What could be gleaned from literature however, is that positivistic, linear, unidirectional, and algorithmic representations of theoretical knowledge based on the application of formal logic dominates both educational settings and practice contexts. According to Chishtie (2012) the privileging of theoretical knowledge has a long history stretching back from ancient Greek philosophy. However, the rational-analytic world of theoretical knowledge is severely deficient for the vagaries of today's practice environments, academic, business or otherwise. It would be plausible therefore, to invoke the antique concept of wisdom, which brings together the affect and the cognitive both in educational and practice settings. Business schools in particular, should manifest a phronétic demeanor and provide management students with an education suited to today's practice environments. In so doing they will reclaim their legitimacy and influence in business, as well as in wider society.

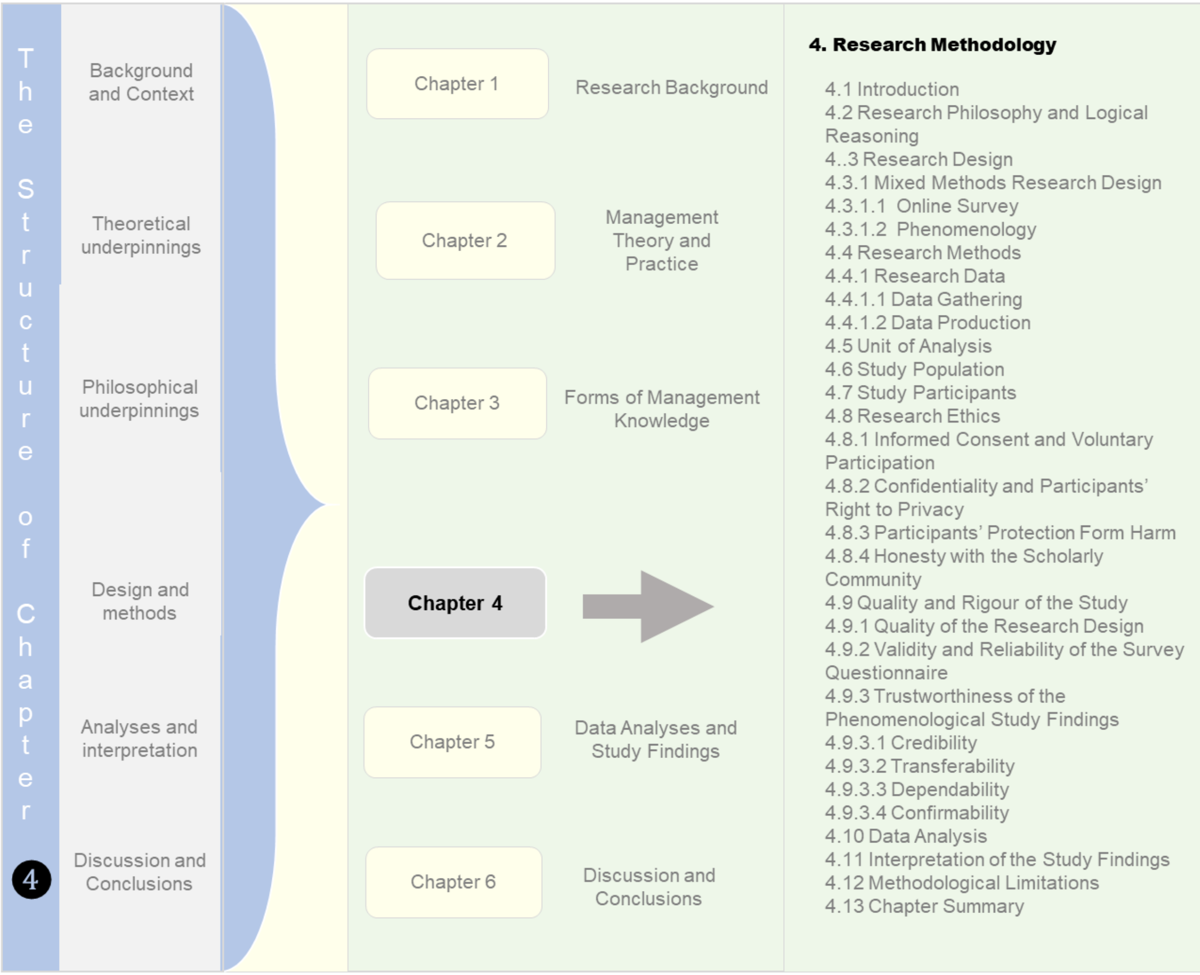
CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

> “*If the map shows a different structure from the territory represented ... then the map is worse than useless, as it misinforms and leads astray*” – Alfred Korzybski

4.1 Introduction

As stated in Chapter 1, the purpose of the current study was to examine and conceptualise the relationship between academic rigour and practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge and skills. Building on the conceptual framework presented in Chapter 1, the theoretical framework advanced in Chapter 2, and the philosophical underpinnings of the study presented in Chapter 3, this chapter presents a methodological framework of the study. The problem statement advanced in Chapter 1 informed the basis of this methodological framework. As a territorial map of the study, the research methodology supports its whole process and enables and facilitates its successful completion (Quinlan, Babin, Carr, Griffin, & Zikmund, 2015). The structure and content of Chapter 4 are graphically depicted in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: The Structure of Chapter 4



Source: Own Compilation

Figure 4.1 depicts the position of Chapter 4 within the broad structure of the dissertation. Specifically, Chapter 4 presents the methodological framework of the study, which pulls together the elements of the research design and methods required to sustain research processes and procedures necessary for a credible and successful study. The research methodology serves as the glue which seamlessly binds together other elements of the study for a sound and successful research project.

4.2 Research Philosophy and Logical Reasoning

Researchers have an individual worldview of the phenomena they choose to study and the methods they choose to employ in studying those phenomena. These views are underpinned by basic philosophical assumptions, which in turn, have both ontological and epistemological bearings on one's research. Though largely implicit, philosophical underpinnings impact the practice of research (Creswell, 2014). This study is underpinned by a pragmatist philosophy which is focused on real-world practice that is pluralistic. As Creswell (2014) notes, pragmatism affords researchers the freedom of choice, in that they are free to choose the methods, techniques, and procedures most appropriate for the study. Pragmatists believe that there is no single method, technique, or procedure which leads exclusively to a better understanding of complex phenomena. Researchers may traverse different terrain but they all converge on the same destination of enhancing human knowledge (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015).

With pragmatism, the emphasis is not so much on issues of methodology as it is on how best to address the research problem (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). As Leedy and Ormrod (2015) note, a good researcher should be eclectic, that is, willing to employ productive methods best suited for resolving the research problem. As such, in their quest for new knowledge, pragmatists refuse to be constrained by methodical restraints. Pragmatism, therefore, pulls together some elements of positivism, constructivism, and interpretivism as it joins objectivism and subjectivism by tapping into the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Pragmatism also seeks to balance the breadth and depth of inquiry as positivism mostly emphasises breadth more than depth, while the opposite is true for constructivist and interpretive studies. In Mcwilliams' (2016) words, pragmatism's intuitive appeal is in its dynamism and vitality. More so in social sciences, where much emphasis is in social actors' shared *meanings* and *actions* as concretely lived in their day-to-day messy realities of practice in varied contexts. As Venkatesh, Brown, and Bala (2013) assert, pragmatism considers practical consequences and real effects to be vital components of meaning and thus presents a practical and applied research philosophy.

Connected to philosophical underpinnings are the forms of logical reasoning - deductive reasoning, inductive reasoning, and abductive reasoning. All three forms of reasoning are integral to problem-solving (Reilly, 2016). Whereas deduction and induction draw conclusions from what is known, abduction explains what is known or most likely (Reilly, 2016). According to Saunders et al. (2009), it is not only possible to combine deduction and induction in one study, but actually advantageous to do so.

As the current study is undergirded by a pragmatist worldview, data analyses and interpretations are rooted in abductive reasoning that weaves together some elements of deduction and induction. The iterative abductive approach blends positivism and interpretivism, thereby rebutting the *quanti-qualy* incompatibility thesis.

To draw conclusions and provide explanations, the researcher first organised data into more abstract units of information (Creswell, 2014) and then inductively identified thematic patterns from the data. The inductive process involved moving back and forth between the themes and the data until the researcher had established a comprehensive set of themes. To determine whether there was enough evidence to support the identified themes, the researcher deductively looked back at the data. Finally, the researcher sought explanations by abducing pre-conditions from consequences. Table 4.1 presents connections between forms of reasoning and their underlying philosophies, the epistemologies they generate, the nature of inference that can be derived from each of them, and possible explanations each of them provides.

Table 4.1: Forms of Logical Reasoning

Philosophical Underpinning	Logical Reasoning	Epistemology	Nature of Inference	Logical Explanation
Positivism	Deduction	Objective	Generalisable	Deriving ***b*** from ***a*** only where ***b*** is a formal logical consequence of ***a.*** Impliedly, deduction derives the consequence of the assumed
Interpretivism	Induction	Subjective	Contextual	Inferring ***b*** from ***a***, where ***b*** does not follow necessarily from ***a***. ***a*** might give a very good reason to accept ***b***, but it does not ensure ***b***
Pragmatism	Abduction	Intersubjective	Transferable	Inferring ***a*** as an explanation of ***b***. Abduction allows the precondition ***a*** to be abduced from the consequence ***b***

Source: Adapted from Reilly (2016)

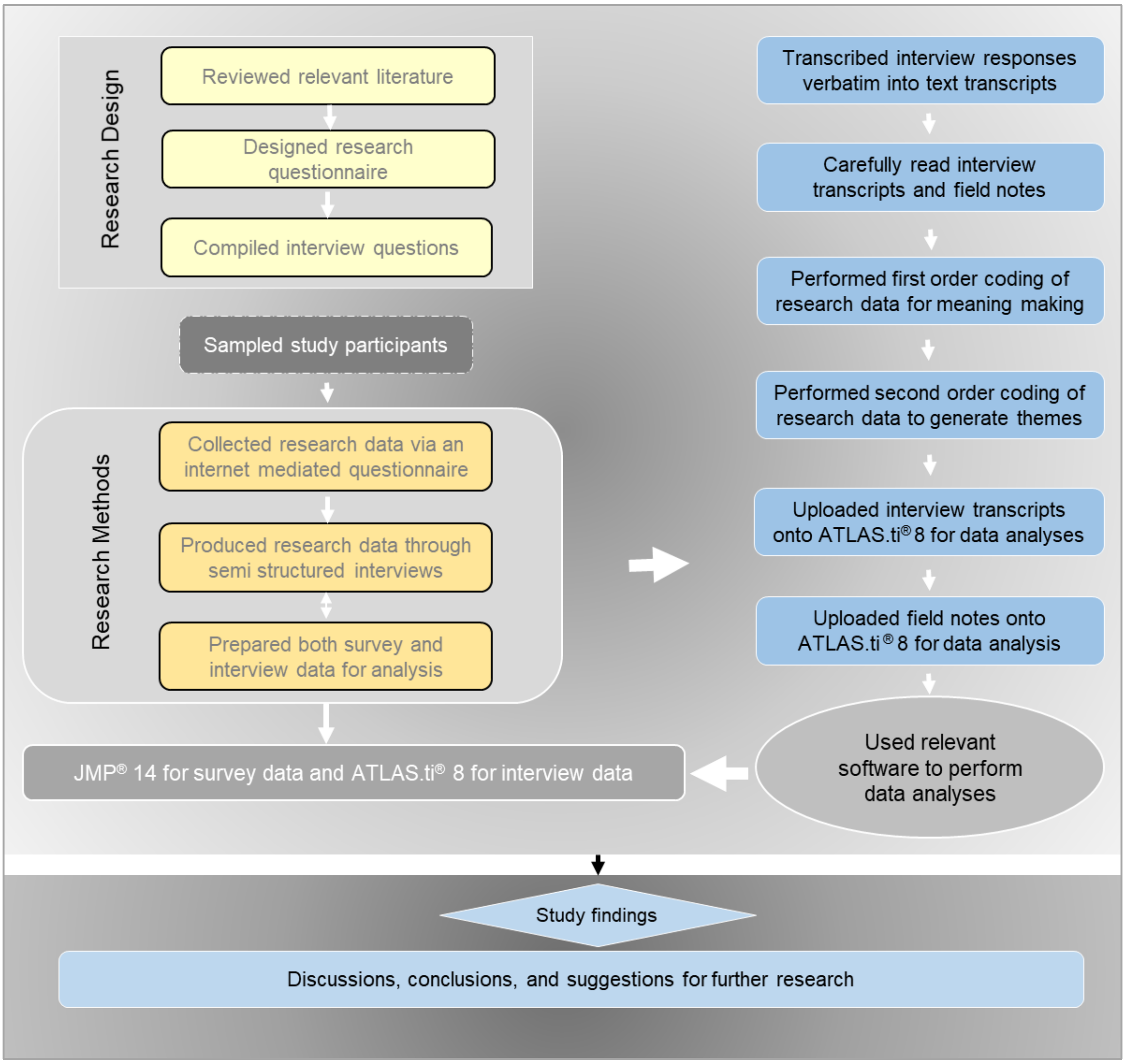
As presented in Table 4.1, epistemologies that are generated deductively are objective and the inferences drawn generalisable. In contrast, epistemologies generated inductively are subjective and inferences drawn contextual. Finally, epistemologies generated abductively are intersubjective in nature and inferences drawn are transferrable. Different forms of reasoning provide different kinds of explanations – deductive explanations derive consequences from the pre-conditions; inductive explanations derive meaning from consequences, and abductive explanations abduce preconditions from consequences.

4.3 Research Design

As an element of the methodological framework which operationalises the study process, the research design stakes out a logical blueprint for the collection, analyses, and interpretation of research data, and the reporting of the study findings in a credible manner. An appropriate design enhances the trustworthiness of the study (Yin, 2011). The research design should be creative and stimulating enough to help the researcher understand the question in more nuanced but also more practical terms (Ritchie, 2003). That is, the design should guide the researcher to critically and thoroughly engage with the research problem. Importantly, a good and effective design is a recursive one (Yin, 2011).

By default, research designs also define the structure of the study, a major component of which is the unit of analysis on which empirical examination rests (Yin, 2011). The study's process flow which sequentially, as well as iteratively links the sampling method, data gathering and production, data analyses, interpretation and reporting of study findings is graphically depicted in Figure 4.2. The process flow also allows for the integration of quantitative as well as qualitative study findings to present a synthetic and holistic view of the research problem. Critically, Figure 4.2 holistically presents a gestalt of different research elements, where each element contributes synergistically to the overall research design (Noy, 2008). The research process flow was critically important for the study as it guided each stage of the study in a connected and coherent manner.

Figure 4.2: The Research Process Flow



Source: Own Compilation

As reflected in Figure 4.2, the research process began with the overall research design in terms of the literature review and research strategy, and then linked the design with methods for data gathering and production within an ethical framework. The process flow proceeded with the presentation of methodical procedures and processes for data analyses and interpretation of study findings. Finally, the process flow made room for robust discussions required to draw credible conclusions from the study findings and provided for suggestions for futher research.

4.3.1 Mixed Methods Research Design

Increasingly, researchers are tapping into the benefits of expanding research designs beyond monomethods into ones that interface with other traditions (Mayoh & Onwuegbuzie, 2016). Among other factors, the rationale for mixing methods is rooted on the premise that lived experiences are multi-dimensional, as such, researchers may have impoverished and inadequate understandings of phenomena of interest if they only view them along a single dimension (Mason, 2002). To tap into the harnessing power of complementary methods, the current study adopted a mixed methods research design built on a survey and phenomenology - the study of phenomena as experienced from a subjective, first-person experience. A survey questionnaire was administered to gather data that would indicate the nature and extent of the relationship between strategy theory and strategy whereas phenomenological interviews would provide data that would indicate how this relationship is constituted. The rationale for adopting such a design is rooted on the premise that lived experiences are multi-dimensional in nature, and as such, require grounding from different perspectives, which may provide deep insights into phenomena under study. As Molina-Azorin, Bergh, Corley & Ketchen (2017) note, mixed methods provide a better understanding of research problems and complex phenomena and thus enhances the trustworthiness of the inferences drawn from the study findings. The survey and phenomenology were almost of equal weight, however, the survey was conducted first.

4.3.1.1 Online Survey

An online survey was administered to capture respondents' perceptions on the rigour of their academic preparation and the relevance to practice of the strategy education they obtained from their business schools. The survey instrument was a three-part electronic questionnaire which was developed by the researcher for purposes of the current study. The main questions in the questionnaire were derived from relevant literature. Specifically, Part 1 (academic preparation) was licensed from the Faculty Survey of Student Engagement (FSSE) of the University of Indiana, the item usage agreement of which is provided as Appendix 1. Online surveys are increasingly used in academic research (Roberts & Allen, 2015). They involve gathering information about individuals' or groups' characteristics, attitudes, opinions, and past experiences

(Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The electronic questionnaire afforded the researcher time-saving data collection opportunities and it was cost-effective.

As Elbeck (2014) notes, the advent of the internet has provided researchers and students with a remarkable range of tools that facilitate the design and administration of survey instruments. Content with an array of such features as text, images, audio and video can be embedded in web-based survey instruments. Web-based surveys also offer advantages over paper-based survey methods in that they are cheaper, flexible, accessible to large, diverse, and geographically disparate and otherwise difficult to access participants (Roberts & Allen, 2015). Notwithstanding such advantages, web-based surveys suffer from low response rates and some ethical problems (Roberts & Allen, 2015). For the current survey, the response rate was around thirty percent.

The questionnaire was hosted on both LimeSurvey and SurveyMonkey platforms. LimeSurvey is a user-friendly open source software application designed to develop and administer online surveys. SurveyMonkey is also a user-friendly web-based survey platform that is widely used in business and academia. The choice for LimeSurvey was influenced by its features relevant for the study, while SurveyMonkey was the primary application used by the consulting firm that assisted in distributing the questionnaire. Both applications provide an array of question types, basic statistical and graphical analysis of the results, and an option for respondents to buffer responses to the survey for continuation at a later stage. They also have a skip logic capability and the researcher can embed logos on each page of the survey. Although the applications that were used to host the questionnaire have data analysis capabilities, the results were exported onto SPSS and MS Excel for further analysis.

4.3.1.2 Phenomenology

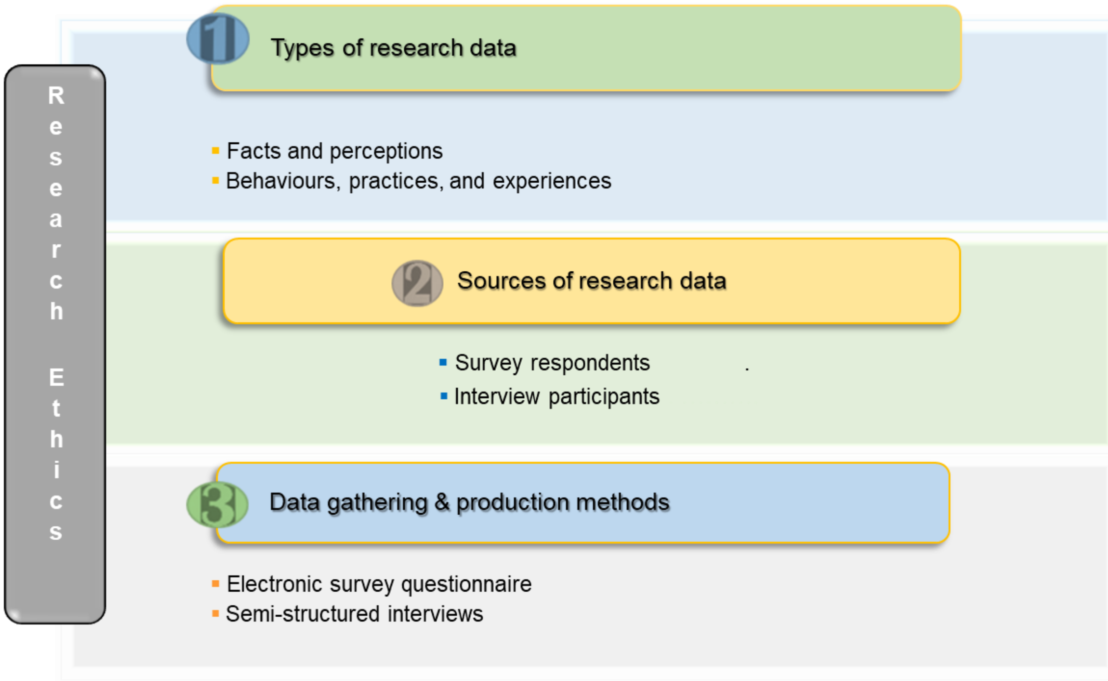
The study sought to closely examine the lived experiences of business school alumni with their strategy practices and praxis as mediated by their strategy academic knowledge and skills. Participants' experiences began in their days at business school to their career stages in positions of strategic import. There was a great need, therefore, for the researcher to be as close as possible to the phenomenon under study in order to concentrate on context and detail (Balogun, Huff & Johnson, 2003). The study was concerned with practices and praxis of business school alumni as strategy practitioners in their social milieu, calling the researcher to be as close to the action as possible. To engage with strategy strategy practitioners' lived experiences with the breadth and depth of inquiry, the qualitative part of the study adopted a phenomenological approach.

Phenomenology is both a philosophical approach and a family of qualitative research methodologies (Gill, 2014; Wilson, 2015). According to Holt and Jörgen (2015), it is a peculiarly influential philosophical approach employed by researchers in order to understand the rich and varied experiences of life. Phenomenological researchers' central concern is to return to embodied, experiential meanings that aim for fresh, complex, and rich descriptions of a phenomenon as it is concretely lived (Finlay, 2009; Holt & Jörgen, 2015). For van Manen (2007), phenomenological studies are sober reflections on the lived experiences of human actors driven by a fascination with meaning. Characterised by human action, strategy practice and the meaning thereof have to be taken whole and messy (Holt & Jörgen, 2015), hence the adoption of phenomenology for the qualitative part of the study.

4.4 Research Methods

Research is an intellectual journey that employs methodical processes and procedures that are necessary to adequately and effectively address the problem under study. Research methods provide the tools, techniques, and procedures for systematic data gathering, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of the research findings. By and large, a research project rests on relevant data. As a result, research methods employed should take into account the nature and type of data to be gathered or produced to resolve the problem (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Research methods, therefore, encapsulate types of data which can be specified in advance or allowed to emerge from participants as the research project unfolds. As Quinlan et al. (2015) note, the researcher is called upon to know the type and source of data required to address the problem, before deciding on data gathering or production techniques. Critical elements of the research methods adopted for the current study are graphically depicted in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3: Critical Elements of the Research Methods of the Study



Source: Own Compilation

As presented in Figure 4.3, data required to address the research problem for the current study communicate facts, perceptions, behaviours, practices, and experiences of strategy practitioners as study participants. The nature, type, and source of research data dictated the data gathering and data production techniques – an internet-mediated questionnaire for the survey and semi-structured interviews for phenomenology. Decisions on these elements were guided and informed by research ethics germane to the study.

4.4.1 Research Data

The research enterprise is driven by research data that provides meaning and insights required by the researcher to address the research problem and achieve the research objectives. As Leedy and Ormrod (2015) poignantly put it, research is a viable approach for addressing a problem only when there are data to support it. Data gathering and data production for the study followed a two-phase sequential pattern. The first phase involved the administration of an internet-mediated questionnaire to gather quantitative data on respondents' experiences with the rigours of their academic preparation and the practical relevance of their strategy education. Part of the survey was conducted by an external data gathering specialist based in Pretoria. Their services were enlisted after the initial attempt by the researcher to gather data from respondents within a single organisation failed to generate enough responses for the study to be statistically viable. The second phase involved data production through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews by the researcher, the findings of which were used to triangulate those of the survey and thereby enhance the validity of the conclusions drawn from the study (Molina-Azorin et al., 2017).

4.4.1.1 Data Gathering

As the study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed methods design (Creswell, 2014), quantitative data were gathered from respondents using an internet-mediated survey questionnaire developed by the researcher. A copy of the questionnaire is provided as Appendix 2. The three-section survey instrument was designed to gather data for measuring academic quality and practical relevance as embodied in the broad themes of academic preparation and professional practice. The questionnaire was modeled on the FSSE instrument developed by the University of Indiana in the USA. The FSSE questionnaire has been administered to students in the USA and Canada since 2000. The four constructs on academic preparation, together with the 18 question items were extracted from the FSSE instrument, and a few questions were slightly modified to better suit the requirements of the current study. As proprietary material, the researcher sought and was granted permission to use the items by the University of Indiana. Excluding demographic questions, the 4-point Likert-type scale consisted of a total of 32 close-ended question items measuring business school alumni’s behaviours, practices, and experiences.

Under the academic preparation theme, three quality indicator constructs of higher order learning; reflective and integrative learning, and quantitative reasoning were measured using 14 question items. Under the professional practice theme, four practical relevance indicator constructs of application of strategy theoretical knowledge, application of strategy practice skills, adoption of strategy tools, and the utility of strategy tools, were measured using 18 question items. Before the questionnaire was administered to the primary sample of repondents, it was pilot tested with a small sample of 17 business school alumni employed in different sectors of the economy to gather relevant data required to test the reliability thereof.

The higher order learning construct measured *the extent* to which students' coursework emphasised the application of knowledge and skills in addressing real-world problems on a scale ranging between 1 (never) and 4 (very often). The reflective and integrative learning construct measured *the extent* to which learning material was connected to real-world problems on a scale ranging between 1 (never) and 4 (very often). The quantitative reasoning construct measured *the extent* to which students used quantitative information to address problems on a scale ranging between 1 (never) and 4 (very often). The application of strategy theoretical knowledge construct measured the *level of importance* business school alumni attached to the capabilities provided by the theoretical frameworks underlying such knowledge on a scale ranging between 1 (not important) and 4 (very important). The application of strategy practice skills construct measured the *level of importance* business school alumni attached to the competencies provided by such skills on a scale ranging between 1 (not important) and 4 (very important). The adoption of strategy tools construct measured the *level of importance* business school alumni attached to the strategy tools they used in their practice of strategy on a scale ranging between 1 (not important) and 4 (very important). Finally, the utility of strategy tools construct measured the *level of importance* business school alumni attached to the capabilities provided by the strategy tools they used in performing their strategising activities on a scale ranging between 1 (not important) and 4 (very important).

4.4.1.2 Data Production

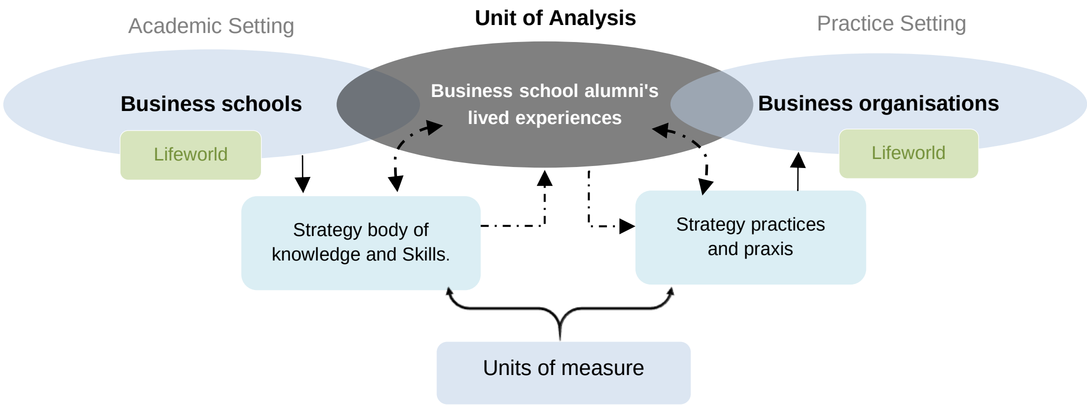
In Langeveld's (1983) words, situated, idiosyncratic phenomena demand that practically engaged social actors must enter the human space of the encounter 'in concreto'. In a research design which demands personal interaction with participants, the orientation is in data production, rather than data gathering, as the researcher is the primary instrument of research. In essence, the data were co-produced by the researcher and the study participants. For the researcher to obtain detailed accounts of participants' lived experiences, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were the primary method of qualitative data production for the study. A copy of the interview guide is provided as Appendix 3. For consistency, each interviewee was asked pre-planned questions with follow-up, probing questions being asked for clarification or further elaboration of certain points as the engagement progressed. Each interview lasted on average 40 minutes and was audio recorded. Save for one participant with whom the researcher had previously worked, the researcher had no previous contacts with the other participants prior to the engagements for purposes of the current study. Consequently, the researcher was entirely dependent on the personal and professional accounts of participants' lived experiences regarding their academic preparation and the practical relevance of their strategy knowledge and skills.

4.5 Unit of Analysis

The practice of strategy is accomplished by social actors in contextual settings – the everyday lifeworlds they inhabit and render meaningful (Noy, 2008). It is in these lifeworlds that practitioners acquire their experiences (Butnaru, 2015). As Holt and Jörgen (2015) note, practitioners and their lifeworlds are always entwined. They further note that strategy practitioners' lifeworlds provide a setting for them to carry out a range of activities utilising some stocks of knowledge, a set of skills, and an array of tools with a particular purpose in strategising at the same time as it enables them to understand themselves as strategists.

As an activity that draws on diverse resources, the practice of strategy pulls together different entities. As presented in Figure 4.4, the unit of analysis for the study was business school alumni's lived experiences with their strategy practices and praxis as mediated by their strategy academic knowledge and skills. As institutions which provided graduates with the requisite academic knowledge and skills, business schools provide an important background for the study of alumni's lived experiences with their academic preparation.

Figure 4.4: Unit of Analysis



Source: Own Compilation

Moreover, business organisations formed an important element of the study as they provided practical settings for business school alumni to apply their academic knowledge and skills in their practice of strategy. As Butnaru (2015) puts it, business organisations are the lifeworlds which provide the setting for strategy practitioners' practical engagements. As Figure 4.4 further depicts, the units of measure for the study were business school alumni's academic body of knowledge and skills and their strategy practices and praxis.

4.6 Study Population

A successful research study, among other factors, depends on the quality of relevant data obtained from appropriate sources. To this end, Ritchie, Lewis and Elam (2003) counsel that, whatever the type of study, it is always necessary to define the target population, which is an entire group of individuals, objects, or cases the researcher is interested in studying and drawing conclusions on. From this population, a representative sample is then drawn for further, critical analysis. To clearly identify appropriate samples from which relevant data can be gathered or produced, the target population of the study should be carefully defined (Quinlan et al., 2015). Depending on the type and nature of the study, a clear definition and a proper description of the population can pose some problems. The target population, the entire group of individuals relevant for the current study, were business school alumni who graduated from South African business schools between 2006 and 2015 and were working across industries and sectors of the South African economy. The size of this population is unknown as efforts to gather such information would be counterproductive.

4.7 Study Sample

Participants constitute a key element of any study. As such, participants' recruitment and selection is critically important. At the heart of participant selection is the question of sampling. Sampling designs may be more or less appropriate for a particular study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Sampling can either be probabilistic or non-probabilistic. Probabilistic sampling is characterised by random selection in which each member of the population has an equal, non-zero chance of being selected for inclusion in the study (Creswell, 2014; Leedy & Ormrod, 2015; Quinlan et al., 2015). In probability random sampling, the researcher assumes that the characteristic of the sample approximates that of the population (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015) and the results of the study are thus generalisable to the entire population.

In contrast, non-probability sampling emphasises the capacity of a fairly small number of participants to clearly and comprehensively illustrate the phenomenon under study (Quinlan et al., 2015). That is, the researcher relies heavily on personal judgement and selects participants in a deliberate but thoughtful manner in order to yield the most relevant and rich data (Yin, 2011). Sampling in qualitative and mixed methods studies is less structured, less quantitative, and less strictly applied than in quantitative studies because the quality of detailed, in-depth information is more important than the number of participants (de Vos, Strydom, Fouché, & Delport, 2011). As the present study sought to produce rich and deep data, non-probabilistic, purposive sampling was the most appropriate sampling design for identifying participants who would provide information-rich accounts of their experiences.

Selecting a sample from a large population and studying it in depth is an established tradition in research. As the size of the target population of business school alumni who met the study's inclusion criteria was unknown, to mitigate the risk of non-response, the survey questionnaire was sent out to over 180 potential respondents from whom a response rate of around 30% was achieved. For face-to-face interviews, a purposive sampling was adopted, as the researcher believed that sampled

participants would provide detailed and rich accounts of their experiences. As practicing professionals with experience, knowledge, and skills, participants had some unique and important perspectives and insights on the academic rigour and practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge and skills produced by South African business schools. The criteria for inclusion in the study is presented in
Table **4.2**, which also sets out grounds for exclusion from participation.

Table 4.2: Participant Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

	Inclusion Criteria		Exclusion Criteria
a)	Graduated from a South African based business school	a)	Graduated from a business school outside South Africa
b)	Graduated between 2006 and 2015.	b)	Graduated before 2006 and after 2015
c)	Engage in strategising activities as part of official functions	c)	Not engaged in strategising activities
d)	Have no less than one year of professional or management experience	d)	Have less than 1 year professional or management experience

Source: Own Compilation

Potential participants who did not meet all the inclusion criteria were excluded from participation in the study. For example, during recruitment of potential survey respondents, an individual who had expressed interest in participating in the survey had obtained his qualification from a business school in the Netherlands and was excused from participating the survey.

4.8 Research Ethics

Ethical considerations in research go beyond issues of good or bad, to include the capacity to distinguish between right and wrong. Ethical conduct is, therefore, the desideratum of the academic research enterprise in the social sciences and other cognate areas. That is, every process and procedure performed in the research was above board. As the study involved human beings, their feelings, thoughts, and rights were thoroughly considered in each step of the research process. An Ethics Certificate was granted for this study by the Department of Business Management Ethics Review Committee, a copy of which is provided as Appendix 4. Below are the principles of ethical conduct that the researcher observed throughout the study.

4.8.1 Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation

Researchers are ethically bound to inform potential participants of the nature of the research and the nature and extent of their individual participation in the study (Quinlan et al., 2015). In this spirit, study participants were not coerced or induced in any manner whatsoever to have them participate in the study. To assist participants to make an informed decision whether or not to participate in the study, a letter of informed consent detailing the nature and purpose of the study was presented to each of them. Copies of informed consent letters for survey respondents and interview participants are provided as Appendix 5 and Appendix 6 respectively. Further, a detailed explanation of the nature and extent of their individual participation was also provided to each of them. Their right to withdraw at any stage from further participation in the study if they so wished, was explained to them.

4.8.2 Confidentiality and Participants' Right to Privacy

Unless expressly permitted by the participant, under no circumstances would the dissertation be presented in such a way, implicitly or explicitly, that others will become aware of how an individual participant responded to a particular question (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The identities of all participants in the study were kept private and confidential throughout the research process. Participants' names and other identifying characteristics were not recorded anywhere in research records. Where applicable, codes and pseudonyms were used to maintain participants' anonymity.

4.8.3 Participants' Protection from Harm

According to Quinlan et al. (2015), the first maxim of the Hippocratic Oath is to 'do no harm'. Though the maxim has its roots in medicine, its tenets apply equally in social sciences research. In a study involving human beings, the standard is that the risk inherent in participation should not be appreciably higher than the normal risk of daily living (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The current study was conducted in situations quite familiar to participants (corporate offices, campuses, and eateries for interviews), employing widely used equipment (laptops / computers / smartphones) for questionnaires. As such, the risk for any type of harm was not appreciably higher than that which could be experienced in participants' daily lives.

4.8.4 Honesty with the Scholarly Community

This study was conducted against the background of considerable works by other scholars. To locate the researcher's own contribution within the body of knowledge, other scholars' work and ideas are acknowledged both in in-text citations and in references according to the Harvard referencing style. Furthermore, the findings of the research are reported in a complete and honest manner.

4.9 Quality and Rigour of the Study

Pragmatic researchers, as Venkatesh et al. (2013) note, are expected to conduct high quality mixed methods research, which apply appropriate validation principles. These rigorous principles relate to the accuracy, meaningfulness, plausibility, and credibility of the whole research project (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015), adding to the quality of the study. Blending quantitative and qualitative elements in a mixed methods study comes with some design challenges. However, mechanisms for dealing with such challenges have been developed in the literature.

4.9.1 Quality of the Research Design

The mixed methods research design adopted for the study was meant to cover the depth and breadth of the phenomena under study. Such a design encompassed processes and procedures which yielded data that allowed the researcher to draw accurate and meaningful conclusions from the analysis and interpretation of the study findings (Creswell, 2014; Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Furthermore, the study was conducted in real-life settings with participants drawn from a purposive sample, and thus it produced results with broader applicability to similar real-world settings (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). The profound submersion of the researcher with the data gathering and production from research participants and the context within which data were gathered or produced gives a mixed methods research design an advantage over monomethods (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017).

4.9.2 Validity and Reliability of the Survey Questionnaire

The survey questionnaire was the primary instrument used to collect quantitative data. To ensure meaningful interpretations of the data collected using the questionnaire (Creswell, 2014) the questionnaire's reliability was statistically tested using the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient and its validity was tested using expert opinion. Construct validity, according to Leedy and Ormrod (2015), is the extent to which an instrument measures a characteristic that cannot be directly observed but is assumed to exist based on people's behaviours. Reliability is the consistency of the results obtained from the use of the instrument. The Cronbach's alpha measures how closely a set of question items are as a group. Generally, a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.70 and above is considered to indicate good reliability (Quinlan, et al., 2015). However, there is no clear consesus on the most appropriate threshold of acceptable alpha values (Taber, 2018: 1278). In their cross-national study looking at student interests in science, van Griethuijsen, van Eijck, Haste, et al. (2015: 588) calculate several Cronbach's alpha values that are below the acceptable values of 0.7. For example, based on a subset of five items, the Cronbach's alpha for the "interest in school science" factor is 0.50, and for the "interest in domestic activities" factor based on a subset of three items the alpha is 0.45. According to Dall'Oglio, Rossiello, Coletti, et al. (2010: 421), when there are fewer than 20 items, an alpha value of 0.50 is satisfactory. Table 4.3 presents the reliability of the questionnaire, the alpha coefficient of which ranges between 0.54 and 0.82, levels that are considered satisfactory.

Table 4.3: The Structure and Reliability of the Questionnaire

Theme	Construct of Interest	№ of Items	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient (α)
Academic Preparation	Higher Order Learning	4	0.54
	Reflective and Integrative Learning	7	0.56
	Quantitative Reasoning	3	0.57
Entire Sub-set		**14**	**0.65**
Professional Practice	Application of Strategy Theoretical Knowledge	4	0.71
	Application of Strategy Practice Skills	5	0.74
	Adoption of Strategy Tools	4	0.82
	Utility of Strategy Tools	5	0.70
Entire Sub-set		**18**	**0.79**

Source: Own compilation

Table 4.3 also presents the alpha values for each sub-set – 0.65 for academic preparation and 0.79 for professional practice. Considering the above guidelines, the reliability of the ‘Academic Rigour and Practical Relevance Questionnaire’ is satisfactory.

4.9.3 Trustworthiness of the Phenomenological Study Findings

Despite its richness and potential for discovery and deep insights, phenomenological studies have often been critiqued for a lack of scholarly rigour (Shenton, 2004; Gioia et al., 2012). However, frameworks for ensuring rigour in this form of scholarly work have existed for some time (Shenton, 2004). Broadly, management literature offers four criteria discussed below for measuring the trustworthiness of qualitative research (Shenton, 2004). Critical to note though, is that it can be more difficult to measure the trustworthiness of mixed methods study findings than it is for a purely qualitative study.

4.9.3.1 Credibility

A pragmatic researcher is like a perceptive seer delving deeply into the mysteries with a solid belief of a rich and credible discovery (Stewart & Gapp, 2017). Credibility in research is achieved when the researcher has confidence in the truth of the findings as represented by the multiple realities revealed by participants (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017). To ensure the credibility of the study findings, the researcher adopted well-established data collection and analysis methods (Shenton, 2004), a survey questionnaire to gather quantitative data and semi-structured interviews to produce qualitative data. Quantitative data were analysed with the assistance of a statistician using JMP statistical software application. Thematic analysis was employed for analysing qualitative data using Atlas ti., a qualitative data analysis software application. The researcher stayed close to the data but at a reflexive distance (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017). Interview response data were also manually analysed by a professional co-coder from another discipline, who had no prior knowledge of the current study and her findings where then collated with those obtained by the researcher for purposes of critical interpretation. Although there were some differences in some of the generated themes, such differences were reconciled through open discussions.

4.9.3.2 Transferability

Though the primary objective of mixed methods research studies is not to generalise findings to wider domains, pragmatic researchers should, however, provide detailed accounts of processes and procedures they followed in the study. As Molina-Azorin et al. (2017) put it, to maximise the potential for replication by subsequent research, mixed methods study researchers need to be as transparent as possible in reporting their methodological decisions and the rationale behind those decisions. Such detailed descriptions of methodological decisions should also assist readers to decide whether to generalise the findings to similar contexts. For the current study, the researcher provides enough detail relating to the methodology of the study.

4.9.3.3 Dependability

Dependability ensures consistency in data collection to allow for repeatability of the research process which involves tracing data sources, documenting the data, methods, and decisions made during fieldwork (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017). For the current study, overlapping methods such as semi-structured interviews and a survey were used and are reported in detail. Such in-depth coverage of the methods should allow readers to assess the extent to which proper research practices were followed (Shenton, 2004). Consistency in the research process is paramount.

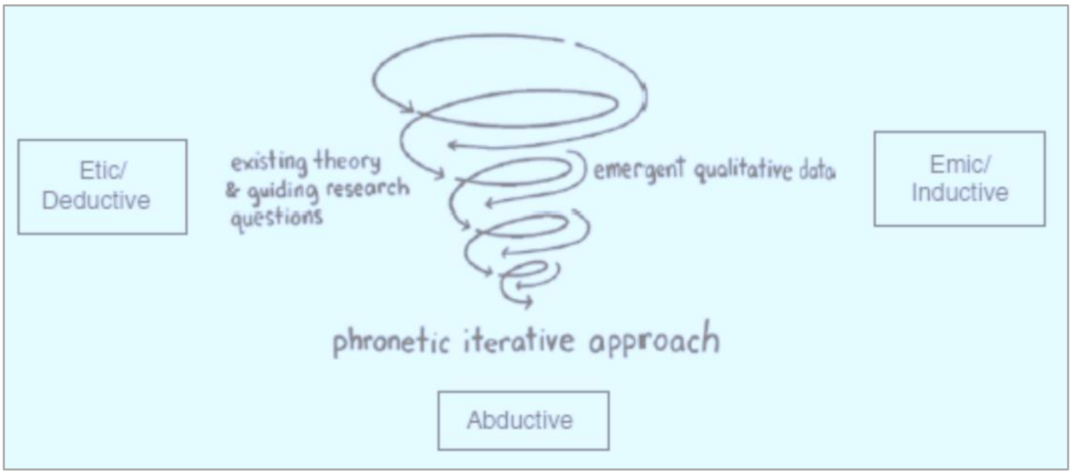
4.9.3.4 Confirmability

Qualitative study findings are in and of themselves subjective, but they can, however, be confirmable. Confirmability is about ensuring that the research process and findings are not biased (Johnson & Rasulova, 2017). The need, therefore, is for the researcher to be diverse in skills, adept at carrying out diverse tasks while remaining sensitive and intuitive (Stewart & Gapp, 2017). For the current study, a detailed description of the methods employed should enable the reader to determine how far the conclusions drawn from the findings can be accepted.

4.10 Data Analysis

Research data was analysed using both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques. For the quantitative part of the study, using JMP, the researcher computed simple descriptive statistics to present participants' demographic information and correlation coefficients and regression analysis to map the relationship between academic rigour and practical relevance. For qualitative data, the researcher used thematic analysis, a method of identifying, analysing and reporting themes within data, which minimally organises and describes data sets in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The Atlas.ti.8 software application was used to perform the analyses. Thematic analysis was the most appropriate qualitative data analysis technique because, in the words of Gioia et al. (2012) it imbues an inductive study with 'qualitative rigour', while retaining the creative, revelatory potential for generating new concepts and ideas from study participants. As Figure 4.5 indicates, data analysis adopted both quatnitative and qualitative approaches, thus tapping into both deductive and inductive forms of reasoning that were pulled together through phronetic iteration (abduction), (Tracy, 2020) for a holistic engagement with the data.

Figure 4.5: Data Analyses Process



Source: Tracy (2020)

As Figure 4.5 reflects, the richness of the phronetic iterative approach (abduction) (Tracy, 2020) is that it blends deduction and induction and thus increases both breadth and depth of analysis. Deduction evokes etic understanding from existing theory that determines and frames meaning whereas induction evokes emic understanding that describes behaviour and experience from an actor's veiwpoint, (Tracy, 2020). Such an approach to data analysis is holistic and enriches the research findings. For robust quantitative data analysis and intepretation of the results, the researcher worked with the statistician from the development of the quastionnaire up to the write-up of the results. For qualitative data, co-coders produce rich analyses that may otherwise not be achieved by a single researcher, (Church, Dunn, & Prokopy, 2019). For reasons of increased trustworthness of the findings, interview data were co-coded with an experienced coder from another discipline.

4.11 Interpretation of the Study Findings

As Leedy and Ormrod (2015) aptly put it, despite the importance of data analysis, interpretation of the results is the essence of the research. Leedy and Ormrod ask the question: "do dynamics within the data have relevance to events that go beyond them?" Answers to such a question go deeper into the interpretation of the study findings. Interpretation extracts the intrinsic meaning from data relative to the research problem. It goes into the intellectual depth of meaning of the results of the study as revealed by the data. Themes derived from participants' descriptive accounts of their lived experiences with the phenomena under study provided invaluable insights into the interpretation of the findings of the study.

4.12 Methodological Limitations

The adopted research design have some inherent limitations. *First*, mixed method designs are time-consuming and bring to bear high practical demands on the researcher. *Second*, as mixed methods are mostly context depend, research findings are generally not generalisable to similar contexts. *Third*, studying social phenomena always risks researcher bias. *Forth*, trustworthiness and quality of qualitative results may be difficult to measure.

However, as mixed methods and qualitative designs have gained wider acceptance over the years, strategies to address the above challenges and limitations have been advanced in the literature. To address the above limitations, the researcher employed the following strategies (Tracy, 2010):

- To address the first limitation, the researcher adopted a disciplined and methodical approach to the whole research project in order to streamline the use of available resources.

- To address the second limitation, the researcher provided enough detail of all the processes followed in the study in order to enable readers to make their own decisions as to the transferability of the study findings in similar contexts.
- To address the third limitation, the researcher, as far as possible, suspended his own convictions and perceptions about the phenomenon under study to allow participant accounts to ditacte terms.
- To address the fourth limitation, the researcher triangulated data collection methods and applied robust data analysis techniques.

4.13 Chapter Summary

This chapter sets out in detail, the methodological framework deemed by the researcher to be most appropriate for examining the lived experiences of selected South African business school alumni with their strategy practices and praxis as mediated by their strategy knowledge and skills. A mixed methods research design was adopted as a blueprint for answering the research question: What are business school alumni's experiences with the quality of their academic preparation and practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge and skills in their professional practice?

The chapter identifies data gathering and data production methods and describes them in greater detail. Furthermore, the chapter identifies and elaborates on data analysis techniques that were employed for the study. Ethical considerations, the desiderata of the study, are presented as well as the measures for ensuring the quality and rigour of the research design and the study findings. Methodological limitations and the steps to address those limitations are identified and elucidated upon. Chapter 5 presents data analyses and reports the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSES AND PRESENTATION OF STUDY FINDINGS

> "*Data, I think is one of the most powerful mechanisms for telling stories. I take a huge pile of data and I try to get it to tell stories*" – Steven Levitt

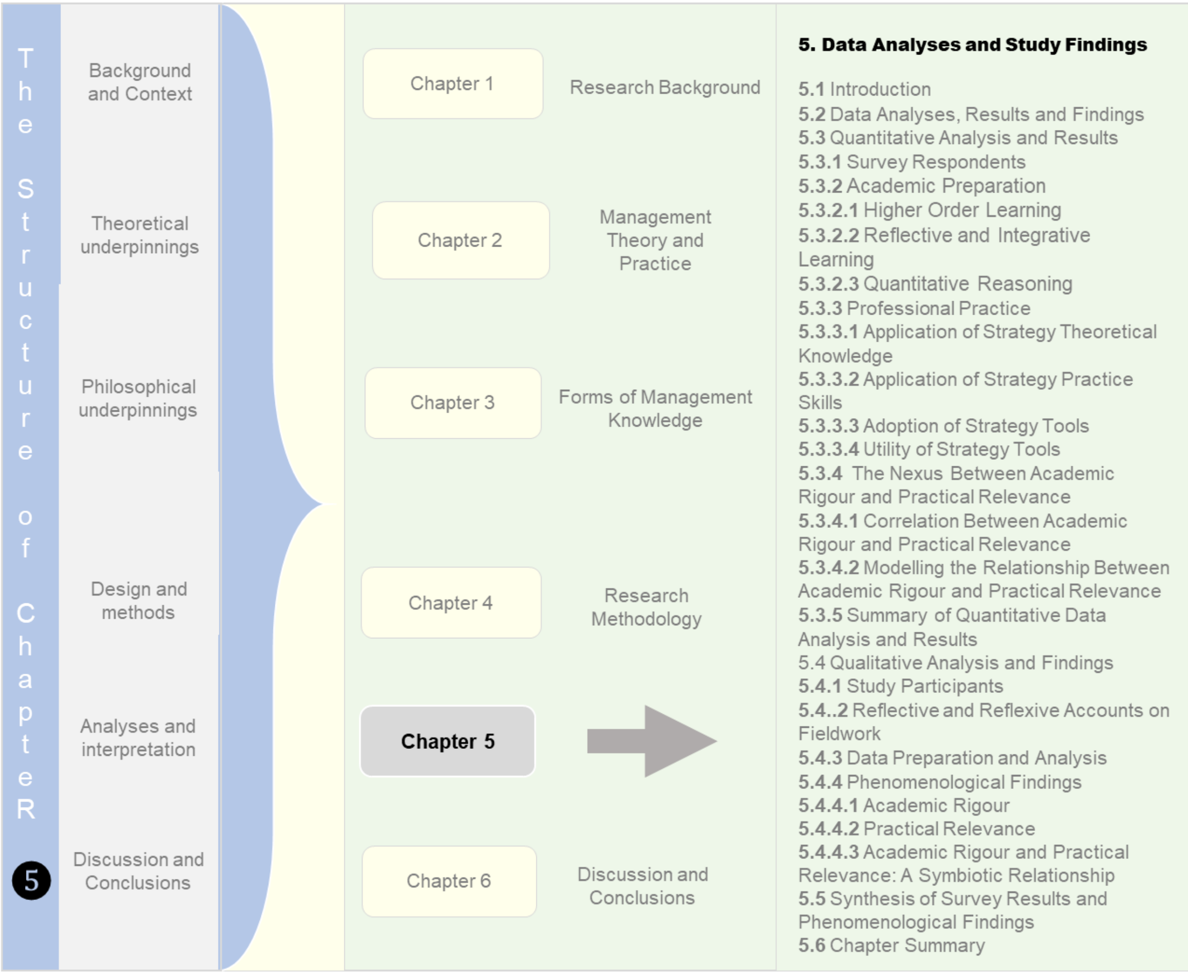
5.1 Introduction

Following on the research methodology presented in Chapter 4, which described and explained the design and methods adopted for the study, the purpose of this chapter is to report on the analyses of both the quantitative and qualitative research data and to present the findings of the study. In this chapter, research data are analysed, interpreted, and presented in a systematic manner as the next step of the research process with a view to *conceptualising* the interconnection between academic rigour and practical relevance. Study findings presented in this chapter provide answers to the following primary and secondary research questions:

1. What is the *relationship* between strategy theory and strategy practice in South Africa?
   1.1. What is the *nature* of the relationship between academic rigour and practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge and skills produced by South African business schools?
   1.2. What is the *extent* of the relationship between academic rigour and practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge and skills produced by South African business schools?
2. How is the *relationship* between strategy theory and strategy practice constituted in South Africa?

Research data were obtained from responses to an internet-mediated, self-administered survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews with participants in an integrated, mixed methods research study. The pragmatist philosophy which seeks deep engagement with empirical phenomena (Behfar & Okhuysen, 2018) underpinned the methodological framework of the study as presented in Chapter 4. In this chapter, analyses of research data are premised on abductive reasoning. Abductive analysis provides pragmatic researchers with an alternative epistemological foundation to explore, discover, and develop plausible explanations of complex phenomena through close and thorough engagement with the data (Behfar & Okhuysen, 2018). Furthermore, abductive analysis synthesises complex information to generate insight into phenomena under study (Reilly, 2016). As presented in Chapter 1, the primary purpose of this study was to investigate and conceptualise the relationship between academic rigour and practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge and skills produced by South African business schools. Study participants were graduates of different South African business schools both public and private. The number of graduates from private business schools was fairly small (n = 4) for the survey and (n = 1) for phenomenological interviews while the majority of the participants were graduates from business schools affiliated with public universities. Participants worked across sectors of the South African economy and they held different positions across departments and functions within their organisations. The unit of analysis for the current study was the business school alumni's lived experiences with their strategy practices and praxis as mediated by their strategy academic body of knowledge and skills gained through their studies. Figure 5.1 presents a graphic organiser of the chapter.

Figure 5.1: The Structure of Chapter 5



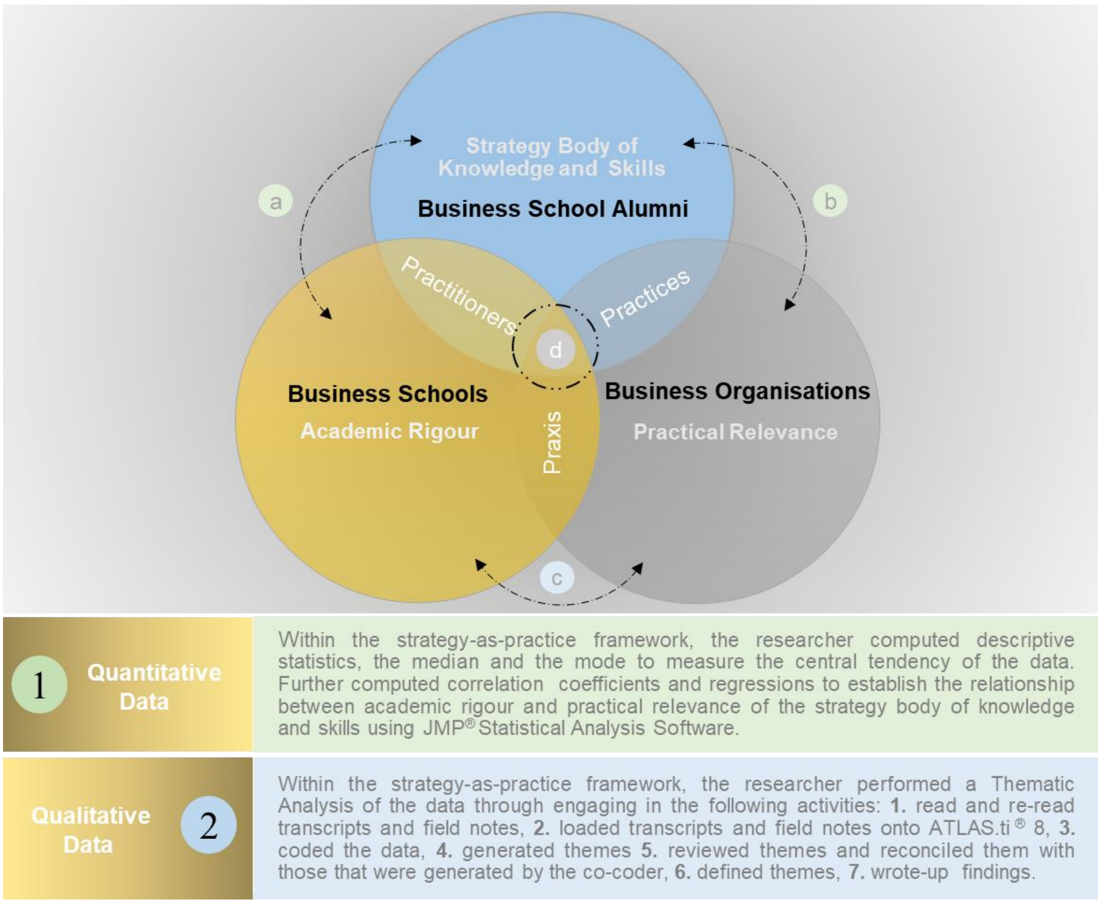
Source: Own Compilation

Figure 5.1 depicts the position of Chapter 5 within the broad structure of the dissertation. Specifically, Chapter 5 addresses the analyses of research data, presentation of study findings.

5.2 Data Analyses, Survey Results and Phenomenological Findings

Research data for the study were collected within a period of 7 months between July 2018 and January 2019 in a two-phase research data gathering and production process as outlined in Chapter 4. The survey (N = 57) was conducted during a four-week period from July to August 2018. Thereafter, semi-structured interviews (N = 16) were conducted between October 2018 and January 2019 with participants who were purposefully selected from a cohort of MBA graduates from South African business schools. Figure 5.2 presents an analytical framework according to which research data were analysed. In the top part of the graphic, the lower case letters indicate the interconnections between the cacademic rigour and practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge and skills relative to the strategy elements of strategy practitioners, practices, and praxis. In the bottom part, the numbers indicate the type of data that was analysed – (1) quantitative and (2) qualitative.

Figure 5.2: The Analytical Framework of the Study



Source: Own compilation

The analytical framework in Figure 5.2 connects the analytic unit in Figure 4.4, the conceptual model in Figure 1.2, and the theoretical framework in Figure 1. 3 of the study within a strategy-as-practice perspective which embodies practitioners, practices, and praxis. The analytic unit is the business school alumni's experiences with the academic rigour and practical relevance of their strategy body of knowledge and skills. Furthermore, the analytic framework presents elements of the study and the interconnection thereof. Although the elements and their corresponding embodiments have distinctive conceptual characters, they overlap and are interrelated

(Jonsen, Fendt & Point, 2018). The arrows connecting the elements are double headed, indicating bidirectional and constitutive influences between the elements. As Figure 5.2 reflects, business schools interconnect with business school alumni and business organisations – interconnection (*a*) and interconnection (*b*). Interconnection (*a*) embodies academic rigour of graduates' strategy knowledge and skills, whereas interconnection (*b*) embodies the practical relevance of such knowledge and skills to practitioners in work contexts.

The interaction between the triadic elements depicted in the framework is not in any way linear, but more nuanced and dynamic. Connection (*c*) illustrates this dynamic and nuanced interplay between rigour and relevance, which embodies the design and redesign of academic offerings informed by feedback from the world of practice. This feedback can be in the form of dialogues between academics and practitioners, research reports, media and press reports and other channels. As per connection (*d*), for the current study, the interaction plays out within a strategy-as-practice context. Research data comprised both quantitative and qualitative components. The framework also presents the processes that were followed in analysing both numeric (1) and textual (2) research data. An integrated analysis approach was appropriate for the study in that, though it had specific issues to explore, it was still open to discover other unexpected aspects of participants' experiences or the way they assigned meaning to the phenomena under study (Gale, Heath, Cameron, et al., 2013).

5.3 Quantitative Data Analysis and Results

The quantitative component of the study sought to answer the first research question: "What is the nature and extent of the relationship between management education and management practice in South Africa?" Survey response data were downloaded from the database onto the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and Microsoft® Excel spreadsheet. For analysis, the data was then exported to the JMP® statistical analysis software. Descriptive statistics, the median and the mode were calculated to describe the central location of the data. As the primary purpose of the study was to *conceptualise* the relationship between academic rigour and practical relevance, the Spearman's (ρ) *rho* intercorrelations and the regression analyses were calculated to measure and describe the relationship. Although this study investigated the nature of the relationship between *academic rigour* and *practical relevance*, it did not determine the causal nature of this relationship as correlation does not imply causality. Causality can only be determined when an experimental research design is adopted. Pertinent to the study was the direction and strength of the relationship.

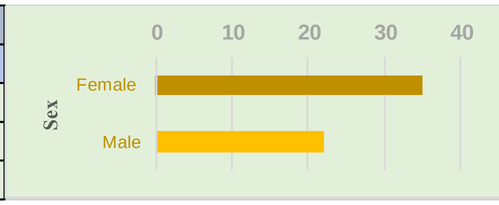
5.3.1 Survey Respondents

The study was initially planned to be conducted in the banking industry as the banking sector is understood to be one of the largest employers of graduates with higher [business] qualifications and skills (Oluwajodu, Blaawu, Greyling, & Keynhans, 2015). As such, the researcher conjectured that banks would provide an important context for an empirical investigation of the practical relevance of the strategy education produced by South African business schools. However, save for a single bank which was willing to grant the researcher access to conduct the study, other banks that were approached declined the request. The conditions imposed by the granting bank were also quite stringent, as a result, a sample of only 17 graduates was reached, only 8 of whom finally completed the survey. Such a low number of responses was statistically unusable, prompting the researcher to employ other means to reach a higher sample of potential respondents who met the criteria of the study.

To address the drawback, the researcher then expanded the scope of the study to include business school graduates working across industries in the South African economy. To access enough potential survey respondents, the researcher enlisted the services of a consulting firm that specialises in data gathering for purpose of academic research and has access to a database of respondents that met the sample criteria. Ethical considerations and inclusion criteria were clearly laid out and deliverables agreed upon. In all, over 180 e-mails that were distributed to business school alumni who met the study criteria elicited a total of 57 (32%) usable responses. In terms of the demographic profiles germane to the study, survey respondents were diverse. From a sex perspective, a total of 35 (61%) respondents were female and 22 (39%) were male. Table 5.1 presents respondents' sex distribution.

Table 5.1: Respondents' Sex Distribution

Sex Distribution		
Sex Distribution	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency
Female	35	61%
Male	22	39%
Total	**57**	**100%**



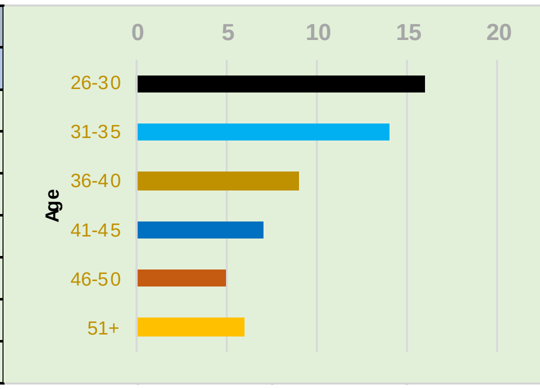
Source: Own compilation

Evident from Table 5.1 is that the sex distribution is skewed towards females. It could be that more women are taking up opportunities and consolidating their positions in the professional space, which by and large was a traditionally men's preserve. Alternatively, it could be that more women than men were inclined to respond to the survey. Be that as it may, there was no intention to obtain a sample where sexes are equally represented.

From an age perspective, 16 (28%) of the respondents fell within the 26 - 30 years category and 14 (25%) fell within the 31 - 35 years category. For purposes of the current study these two groups form the early career development and consolidation categories. Combined, they make up the biggest number of all the respondents, namely 30 (53%). Table 5.2 presents respondents' age distribution. Nine (16%) and 7(12%) of the respondents fell within the 36-40 years and 41-45 years categories respectively.

Table 5.2: Respondents' Age Distribution

Age Distribution		
Age	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency
26-30	16	28%
31-35	14	25%
36-40	9	16%
41-45	7	12%
46-50	5	9%
51+	6	11%
Total	**57**	**100%**



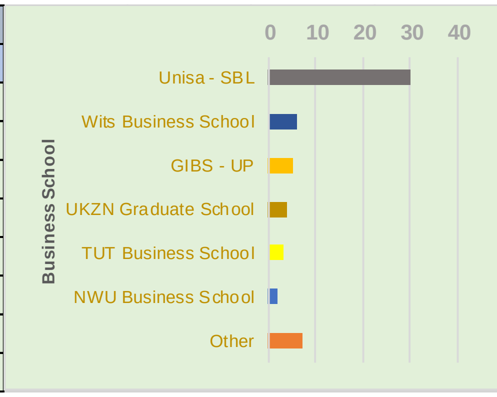
Source: Own Compilation

As is evident from Table 5.2, much older respondents in the 46 - 50 (n = 5; 9%) and 51+ (n = 6; 11%) age categories had the lowest number of respondents. A close examination of the results revealed that almost 64% of these respondents had completed their qualifications 9 or 10 years before and 91% of them occupied either middle or senior management positions with more than 10 years' experience. The result may point to a scenario where older, experienced professionals occupy higher positions with wider scopes of responsibilities that take up much of their time, leaving them with little or no time to respond to surveys. Plausible still, is that older professionals may have occupied director positions which effectively ruled them out of the study.

Survey respondents graduated from 12 different South African business schools. Most of them (n = 30; 53%) graduated from the Unisa School of Business Leadership, followed by Wits Business School (n = 6; 11%); Gordon Institute of Business Science (n = 5; 9%), UKZN Graduate School (n = 4; 7%); TUT Business School (n = 3; 5%); NWU Business School (n = 2; 4%) and the rest (n = 7; 12%) from different business schools across South Africa, both public and private. Table 5.3 presents the distribution of business schools from which respondents graduated.

Table 5.3: Respondents' Business School

Respondents' Businesss Schools		
Name of Business School	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency
Unisa - SBL	30	53%
Wits Business School	6	11%
GIBS - UP	5	9%
UKZN Graduate School	4	7%
TUT Business School	3	5%
NWU Business School	2	4%
Other	7	12%
Total	**57**	**100%**



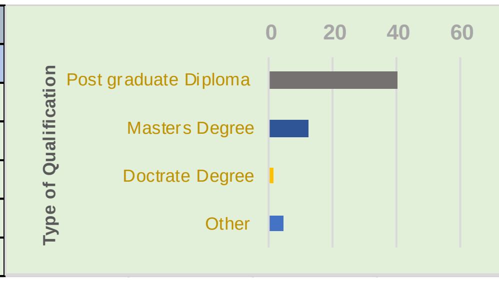
Source: Own Compilation

There was only 1 respondent from each of the 7 business schools labelled 'other' in Figure 5.3, and hence, the researcher thought it prudent to group them into one. Also conspicuous from Figure 5.3 is that most respondents (72%) came from the 3 biggest business schools in the Gauteng province, which are also ranked among the best in the country (Financial Mail, 2019: 29).

The type of qualification each respondent holds is biased towards postgraduate diplomas (n = 40; 70%). The rest are distributed as follows: Master's degrees (n = 12; 21%) Doctoral degree (n = 1; 2%), and other (n = 4; 7%). Table 5.4 presents the distribution of respondents' type of qualifications.

Table 5.4: Respondents' Academic Qualifications

Qualification Obtained		
Type of Qualification	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency
Post graduate Diploma	40	70%
Masters Degree	12	21%
Doctrate Degree	1	2%
Other	4	7%
Total	**57**	**100%**



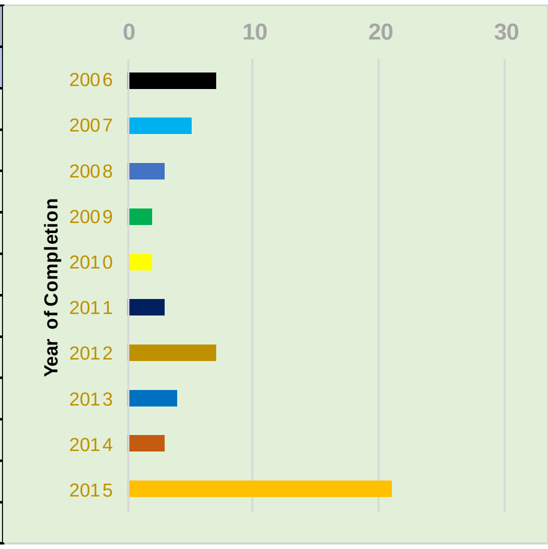
Source: Own Compilation

Such a skewed distribution is difficult to explain. One would expect most respondents to be MBA degree holders since an MBA is a premier business management qualification offered by most business schools in the country. One possible explanation could be the one posited by Sewchurran and Nair (2019), that the high cost of an MBA degree could be forcing individuals in the early stages of their careers to opt for shorter courses as a cost-effective alternative This conjecture may hold true, since 49% of respondents of the survey who hold postgraduate diplomas are between 26 and 35 years. Such a result could also have been influenced by the mailing list put together and sent to potential respondents by the consulting firm that was contracted by the researcher. Another argument may be linked to the shorter duration of the non-MBA qualifications.

Survey respondents graduated within a period of ten years between 2006 and 2015. The study was designed to cover a period of 10 years, with a view to capture different levels of respondents' experiences and to gauge the moderating effects of the passage of time after graduation, on the application and utility of academic knowledge and skills. Table 5.5 graphically depicts the distribution of respondents' years of graduation. Though respondents appear to have been evenly distributed between the years 2006 and 2014, as is evident in Table 5.5, most respondents (n = 21; 37%) graduated within 3 years of the study.

Table 5.5: Year of Respondents' Graduation

Year Qualification Completed		
Year	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency
2006	7	12%
2007	5	9%
2008	3	5%
2009	2	4%
2010	2	4%
2011	3	5%
2012	7	12%
2013	4	7%
2014	3	5%
2015	21	37%
Total	**57**	**100%**



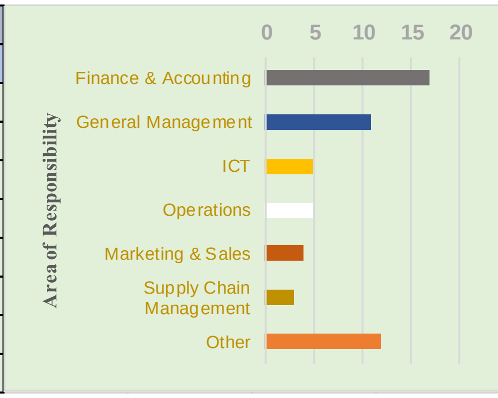
Source: Own Compilation

The skewed distribution in Table 5.5 may be difficult to explain but it could be that recent graduates whose experiences at business schools are still fresh were more willing to share those experiences than those who graduated some years earlier. Another possibility could be that most graduates who graduated some years earlier now occupy top positions (directorships) and were thus rendered out of the scope of the current study.

From an area of responsibility perspective, respondents worked across functions and departments of their organisations. However, a large number (n = 17; 33%) worked in the finance and accounting function, followed by general management (n = 11; 19%). Table 5.6 graphically depicts each respondent's area of responsibility in their organisations.

Table 5.6: Respondents' Areas of Responsibility

Areas of Responsibility		
Function/Department	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency
Finance & Accounting	17	30%
General Management	11	19%
ICT	5	9%
Operations	5	9%
Marketing & Sales	4	7%
Supply Chain Management	3	5%
Other	12	21%
Total	**57**	**100%**



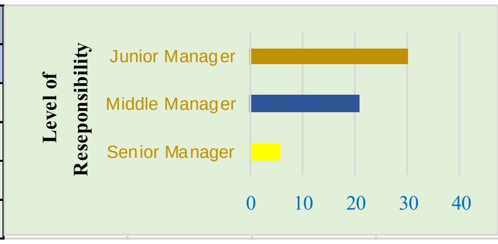
Source: Own Compilation

Supply chain management had only 3 (5%) respondents. Areas of responsibility that are labelled 'other' (n = 12; 21%) in Table 5.6 had only two or less respondents, as such, theyare grouped into one category.

The target population of the study consisted of managers and professionals excluding top managers and directors. More than half (30; 53%) of the respondents were professionals at junior management level, the second highest number of respondents (21; 37%) were middle managers, whereas respondents at senior management level (6; 11%) constituted the least. Table 5.7 presents the distribution of respondents' levels of responsibility.

Table 5.7: Respondents' Levels of Responsibility

Levels of Responsibility		
ResponsibilityLevel	Absolute Frequency	Relative Frequency
Junior Manager	30	53%
Middle Manager	21	37%
Senior Manager	6	11%
Total	**57**	**100%**



Source: Own Compilation

The distribution of respondents' levels of responsibility may suggest that junior managers and professionals, given the scope of their responsibilities relative to middle and senior managers, may have had some time from their busy work schedules to engage in other activities like completing a survey. The demographic diversity of the respondents embedded a wider range of experiences and perspectives and therefore, enriched the study. Unlike in traditional forms of strategising where strategy is a function performed only by top managers, in strategy-as-practice strategy making is devolved to other organisational members across organisational levels.

5.3.2 Academic Preparation

In preparing professional practitioners for practice in different fields, great emphasis is put on their professional knowledge (Kemmis, 2009). Rapidly changing 21st century business management contexts require business education that engages uncertainty, diversity, paradox, ambiguity, and complexity to prepare students for more than routinised practice based solely on theoretical, procedural, and technical knowledge and skills (Higgs, Loftus & Trede, 2010). For the current study, the context for academic rigour were business schools responsible for academic preparation of business management students. The primary purpose of business schools is to produce competent graduates for professional positions in business. To achieve such ideals, business schools prepare their students for professional practice under rigorous conditions, which should promote deep learning. In the sub-sections that follow, activities that, for purposes of the current study, promote deep learning are discussed in detail.

5.3.2.1 Higher Order Learning

Global trends impacting the quality of management education have rendered surface and rote learning insufficient in preparing graduates for swampy (Schön, 1995) management practice landscapes. Social, economic, technological, and labour market dynamics have been a driving force for change in business school education (Childs & Tulloch, 2010). Rigorous intellectual and creative work is central to deep student learning and quality education for practice. Higher order learning promotes high levels of student achievement by inspiring them to engage in complex cognitive tasks. Defined as a function of an interaction between cognitive strategies, metacognition, and domain-specific knowledge (Young, 1997) higher-order learning is foundational to rigorous academic preparation by business schools. Table 5.5 presents the cognitive tasks that business school coursework emphasised in order to promote deep learning

(National Survey of Student Engagement, 2019) and the frequency with which students performed such tasks in their process of learning.

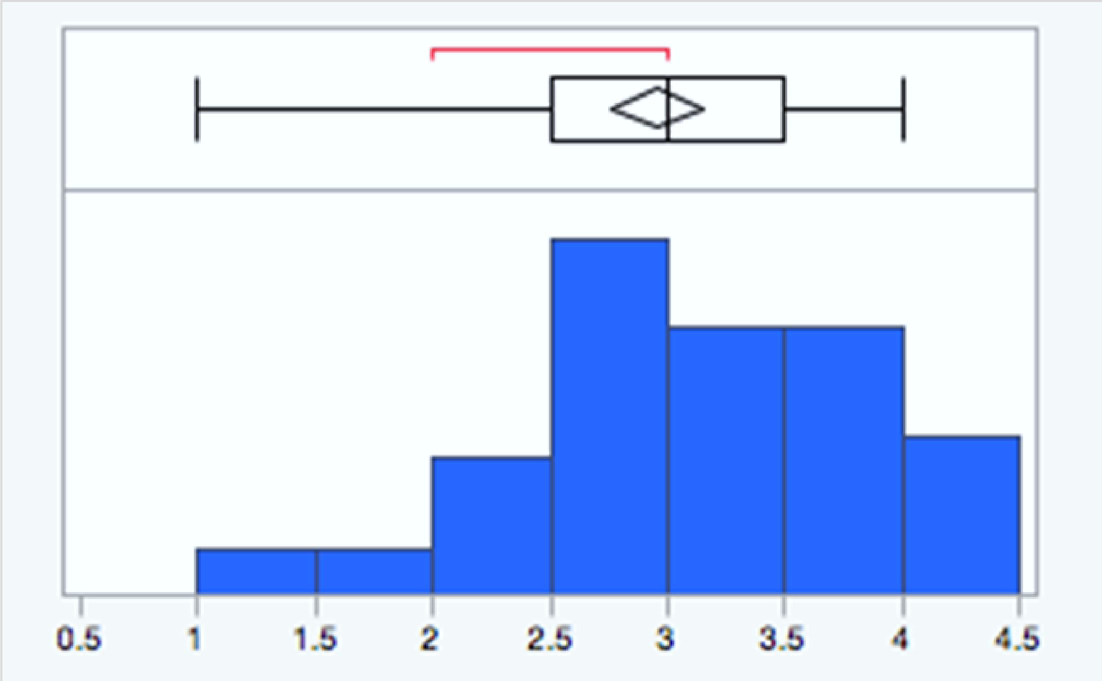
Table 5.8: Higher Order Learning Frequency Distribution

Higher-Order Learning Cognitive Tasks	**x̃**	**Mo**	**Relative Frequency**			
			1	2	3	4
Applying facts, theories, or methods to practical problems or new situations	3	3	.088	.158	.456	.298
Analysing an idea, experience, or line of reasoning in depth by examining its parts	3	3	.070	.246	.404	.280
Evaluating a point of view, decision, or information source	3	3	.053	.263	.386	.298
Solving complex real-world problems	3	4	.053	.228	.351	.368

Source: Own Compilation

The higher order learning construct consisted of 4 items designed to measure how business school coursework emphasised challenging cognitive tasks for students. On a ranking scale measuring how often (1 *never* – 4 *very often*), graduates performed some tasks designed to develop their cognitive skills the median score was 3 for all the 4 items and the mode was 3 for the first 3 items and 4 for the last item. Between 68% and 75% of the respondents ranked all 4 higher order learning items with either a score of 3 or a score of 4, a result that signifies a rigorous learning process that promoted deep learning for graduates. The results are visually displayed in the boxplot and the histogram presented in Figure 5.3. There are no outliers related to this construct.

Figure 5.3: High Order Learning Distribution Scores



Source: JMP output

As depicted in Figure 5.3, the higher order learning distribution is negatively skewed (*SKp =-0.518105*) as the left whisker is longer than the right one. This is the case because the mean is lower than the median. That is, the scores are clustered more toward the high end of the distribution, suggesting that most respondents often performed higher order learning tasks during their time at business school.

5.3.2.2 Reflective and Integrative Learning

Other than being a process of knowledge accumulation, learning is about how the new knowledge acquired by graduates integrates with prior knowledge from different sources and experiences. As Ramsden (1992) notes, learning is better conceptualised as a change in the ways in which learners understand themselves and the world around them, other than being a quantitative accretion of facts and procedures. Savin-baden (2000) defines learning as a 'cyclical process' where learners develop understandings of themselves and their contexts, and the ways and situations in which they learn effectively. Personally connecting with course material requires students to relate their understandings and experiences to the content at hand (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2019). Lecturers emphasising reflective and integrative learning, motivate students to make connections between their learning and the world around them, reexamining their own beliefs and considering issues and ideas from others' perspectives (Brckalorenz & Nelson Laird, 2017). Table 5.6 presents the behaviours and practices business school graduates engaged in during their studies to make connections between their learning and the world around them.

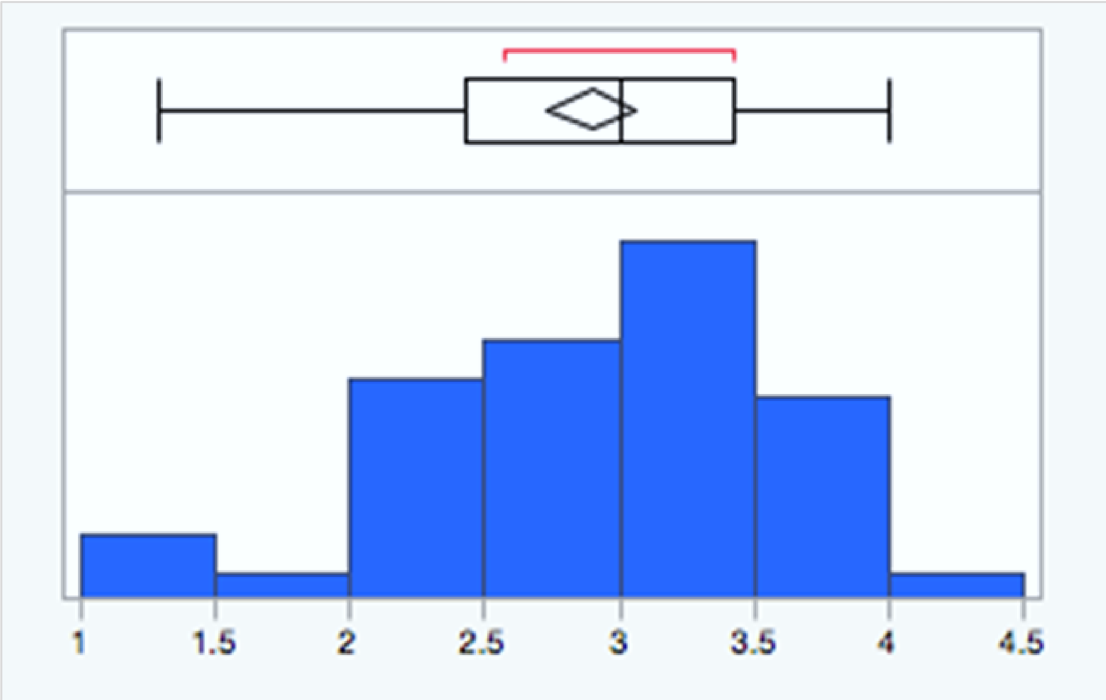
Table 5.9: Reflective and Integrative Learning Frequency Distribution

Reflective & Integrative Learning	x̃	Mo	Relative Frequency			
			1	2	3	4
Combined ideas from different courses when completing assignments?	3	3	.175	.193	.421	.211
Integrated real-world societal problems or issues into your learning processes?	3	3	.070	.263	.439	.228
Included diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, sex, etc.) in course discussions or assignments?	3	3	.123	.298	.386	.193
Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue?	3	3	.052	.263	.439	.246
Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective?	3	3	.070	.211	.439	.280
Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept?	3	3	.053	.053	.474	.420
Integrated knowledge and skills from different sources and experiences?	3	3	.035	.105	.632	.228

Source: Own Compilation

The reflective and integrative learning construct consisted of 7 items designed to measure how business school lecturers, in delivering learning material, promoted reflection and interconnected thinking in their students. On a ranking scale measuring how often (1 - *never* and 4 - *very often*) students reflected on what they learned and integrated their learning with real-world problems, both the median and the mode came at 3 for all the 7 items. Between 58% and 89% of respondents ranked all 7 reflective and integrated learning items with a score of either 3 or a score of 4, a result that would underscore the idea that most graduates went through reflective and integrative learning processes. The boxplot and the histogram in Figure 5.4 visually display the results which reflect no outliers related to the construct.

Figure 5.4: Reflective and Integrative Learning Distribution Scores



Source: JMP output

For the reflective and integrative learning construct, as visually depicted on the boxplot and histogram in Figure 5.4, the distribution of scores is negatively skewed (*SKp = -0.578269*). The scores are also clustered more on the high end of the distribution than on the lower end and the mean is lower than the median. These findings suggest that most respondents performed reflective and integrative learning tasks at business schools.

5.3.2.3 Quantitative Reasoning

Quantitative literacy, the ability to use and understand numerical and statistical information in everyday life is an increasingly important outcome of higher education. Business school students should have ample opportunities to develop their ability to reason quantitatively, to evaluate, support, and critique arguments using numerical and statistical information (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2019). Quantitative reasoning is not only important for meaningful career development but also for a life of informed citizenship (Gaze, 2018). Although not necessarily taught as a standalone skills set (Hillyard, 2007), quantitative literacy forms an important part of business school students' skills repertoire. Table 5.7 presents behaviours and practices that business school students engaged in in order to develop their quantitative reasoning skills.

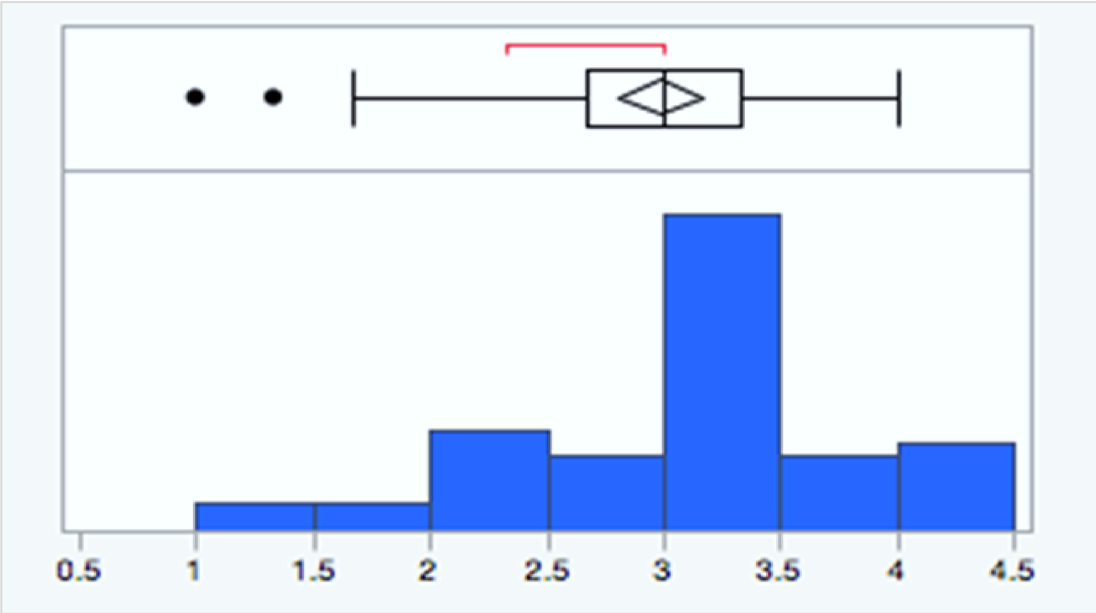
Table 5.10: Quantitative Reasoning Descriptive Statistics

Quantitative Reasoning	x̃	Mo	Relative Frequency			
			1	2	3	4
Reached conclusions based on your own analysis of numerical information?	3	3	.018	.228	.456	.298
Used numerical information to examine a real-world problem or issue?	3	3	.053	.158	.509	.280
Evaluated what others have concluded from numerical information?	3	3	.088	.175	.491	.246

Source: Own compilation

The quantitative reasoning construct consisted of 3 items designed to measure how business school students engaged in behaviours and practices that developed their quantitative reasoning skills for application in real-world settings. On a ranking scale measuring how often (1 - *never* and 4 - *very often*) students engaged in behaviours and practices that promoted the development of their quantitative reasoning skills, both the median and the mode came at the score of 3 for all the 3 items. Between 73% and 78% of respondents ranked the 3 items with a score of either 3 or a score of 4, a result which suggests that most respondents went through and engaged in rigorous processes of developing their quantitative reasoning skills. As visually displayed in the boxplot and histogram in Figure 5.5, there are two outliers on the lower end of the distribution. Outliers are data points that deviate from the rest of the data points (Kwak & Kim, 2017). At the upper end, they are way above the maximum observation, while at the lower end, they are far below the minimum observation.

Figure 5.5: Quantitative Reasoning Distribution Scores



Source: JMP Output

The distribution in Figure 5.5 is also slightly negatively skewed (*SKp = -0.637682*). Though the mean score is still lower than the median, the difference is negligible. Overall, the results suggest a well-developed set of quantitative skills for business school graduates.

5.3.3 Professional Practice

After graduation, business school students are expected to transpose their academic knowledge and skills to real-world work settings in professional practice. Such practice knowledge will be their resource, their style, and their state of being in the world of professional practice (Kemmis, 2009). In this study, the term professional practice is operationalised to mean *practising a profession,* Green (2009). That is, "*practising strategy*". As Pitman (2012) observes, at the heart of professional practice lies the dialectic between theory and practice. Academic knowledge takes on meaning through enaction in practice (Feldman & Worline, 2016) as human capital is transformed into productivity (Nilsson, 2010). Based on practice theory, the strategy-as-practice perspective focuses on strategy as it is enacted through constellations of everyday activities and the actions of practitioners across levels of an organisation (Feldman &

Worline, 2016). For the current study, these activities and actions are undergirded by academic knowledge and skills.

5.3.3.1 Application of Strategy Theoretical Knowledge

The strategy body of knowledge taught at most business schools embody some theoretical frameworks intended to provide insight and foresight into complex business phenomena in real-world unpredictable situations. When combined with contextual insights, theoretical knowledge can be an important resource (Grønhaug & Ottesen, 2007). For the Chinese management scholar and practitioner, Youmin Xi, the real value of management theory lies in its dependence on perspective, predictability, intervention, and its guiding significance to real management phenomena (Zhang, Fu & Xi, 2018). Other than just filling the gap in existing theory, strategy theories address practical problems and enlighten strategy practitioners (Zhang, Fu & Xi, 2018). Strategy theory provides layering that lies beneath strategy action (Whittington, 2018). However, the actual use and utility of strategy theories depends on the competence of both producers and users of such theories – strategy academics and strategy practitioners (Grønhaug & Ottesen, 2007). Table 5.11 presents the dynamic capabilities provided to practitioners by strategy theories and the level of importance the surveyed practitioners attach to such capabilities.

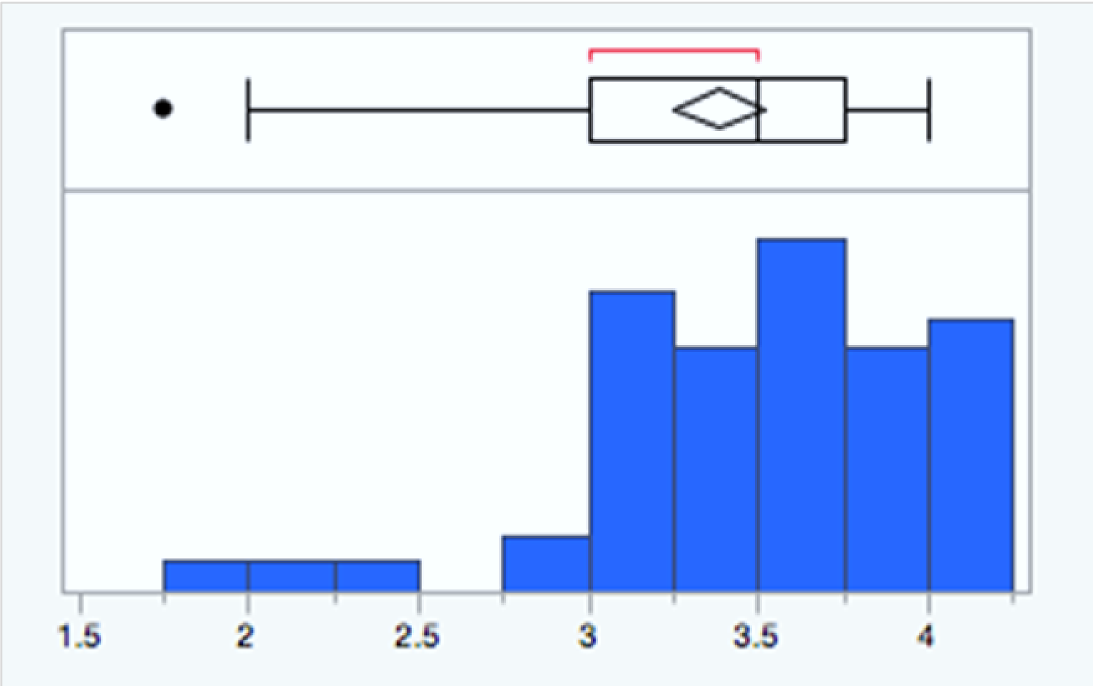
Table 5.11: Strategy Theoretical Knowledge Application Descriptive Statistics

Application of Strategy Theoretical Knowledge	$\tilde{x}$	Mo	Relative Frequency			
			1	2	3	4
A dynamic and eclectic view of the environment within which your organisation operates	3	3	.018	.035	.474	.473
A systemic view on strategy practice highlighting interconnections and interdependencies between business functions	3	4	--	.070	.439	.491
Multiple lenses necessary in dealing with the paradoxes in strategy practice	3	3	--	.053	.526	.421
Ability to engage in novel, value accretive actions	3	3	--	.053	.526	.421

Source: Own Compilation

The application of strategy theoretical knowledge construct consisted of 4 items designed to measure the level of importance strategy practitioners attached to the capabilities provided by strategy theories and principles. On a ranking scale measuring how important (1 – *not important* and 4 - *very important*) graduates considered strategy theoretical frameworks and principles to be in executing strategy activities, the median came at the score of 3 for all the 4 items and the mode 3 for item 1, at 4 for item 2, and at 3 for items 3 and 4. Between 93% and 95% of respondents ranked the 4 items with a score of either 3 or a score of 4, a result which would suggest that strategy theoretical knowledge obtained by business school graduates may be relevant to their strategising activities in practical work situations.

Figure 5.6: Application of Strategy Knowledge Distribution Scores



Source: JMP Output

The visual display of the boxplot and the histogram in Figure 5.6 presents a negatively skewed (*SKp = -1.064156*) distribution scores on the application of strategy knowledge construct. The whisker on the left is longer than the one on the right, signifying that the mean of the distribution is lower than the median. The scores are concentrated more towards the high end of the distribution, suggesting that strategy theoretical knowledge is important to the work of strategy practitioners. Again, the difference between the two scores is negligible. The boxplot also reflects an outlier on the lower end of the distribution indicating that there is a score that is extremely lower than the rest of the scores.

5.3.3.2 Application of Strategy Practice Skills

Business schools impart in their students hard and soft skills necessary for their efficacy in their personal as well as professional lives after graduation. In the context of the current study, skills are the competent application of knowledge gained through formal education that can be improved through practice (Mamabolo, Myres & Kelo, 2017). As knowledge that is demonstrated by action (Wickham, 2001), skills are productive resources embodied in the human capital of any given organisation. These "practice skills" primarily fall into hard and soft skills sets. In complement, these skills significantly increase practitioners' productivity (Balcar, 2016). Hard Skills embody specific competencies to perform a particular job, whereas soft skills embody transversal competencies like social adeptness, ability to communicate at different levels, and the ability to work in teams and collaborate with others (Cimatti, 2016). Table 5.9 presents the nuanced competencies provided to strategy practitioners by strategy practice skills and the level of importance the respondents attach to such competencies.

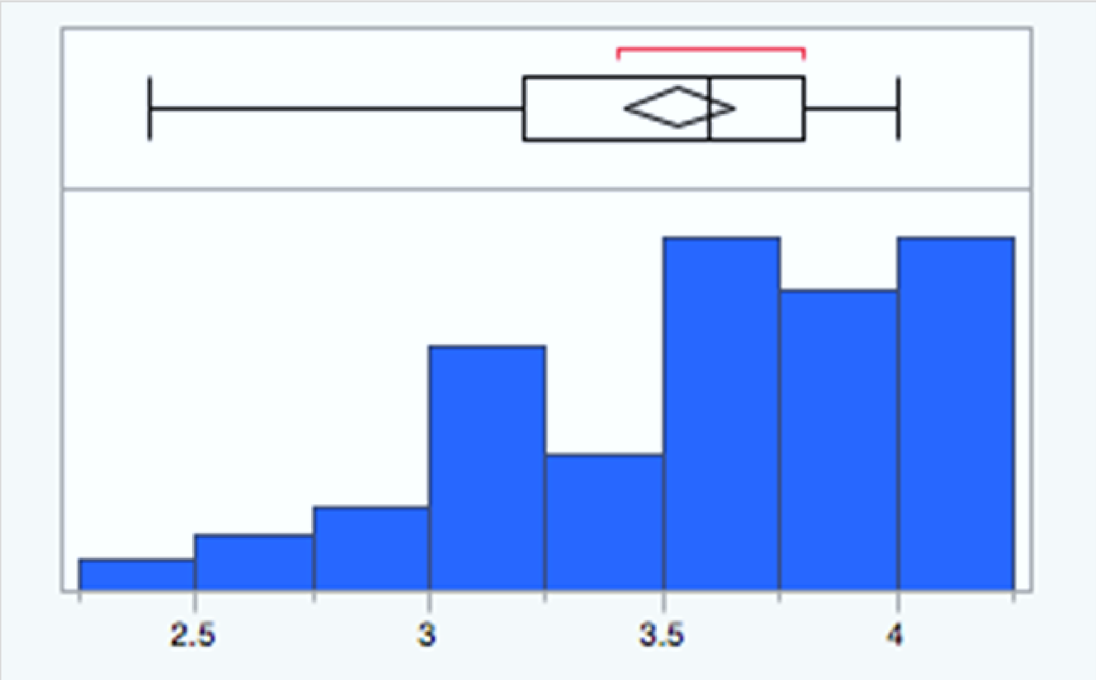
Table 5.12: Strategy Practice Skills Application Descriptive Statistics

Strategy Practice Skills Application	$\tilde{x}$	**Mo**	**Relative Frequency**			
			1	2	3	4
Critically evaluate multiple situations to generate novel ideas necessary for creative problem-solving	4	4	--	.053	.439	.508
Effectively communicate both orally and in writing with diverse stakeholders at different levels	4	4	--	.035	.368	.597
Analyse and evaluate complex business situations to determine the best possible course of action	4	4	--	.018	.333	.649
Analyse large sets of information from different sources to make sound and effective decisions under conditions of uncertainty	4	4	--	.053	.368	.579
Collaborate and effectively manage conflict in teams with diverse talents and cultural backgrounds	4	4	--	.053	.404	.543

Source: Own Compilation

The application of strategy skills construct consisted of 5 items designed to measure the level of importance strategy practitioners attached to the competencies provided by strategy skills. On a ranking scale measuring how important (1 – *not important* and 4 - *very important*) graduates considered strategy theoretical frameworks and principles to be, in helping them effectively perform strategy activities, both the median and the mode came at the score of 4 for all 5 items. Between 95% and 98% of respondents ranked the 4 items with a score of either 3 or a score of 4, a result that would suggest that strategy skills obtained by strategy practitioners from business school may be relevant to their strategising activities in the workplace. The visual display in the boxplot and histogram in Figure 5.7 presents an asymmetric distribution which is negatively skewed (SKp = -0.8605).

Figure 5.7: Application of Strategy Practice Skills Distribution Scores



Source: JMP Output

The scores are more concentrated on the high side of the distribution and the mean is lower than the median. Such results would suggest that for most of the respondents, strategy practice skills they obtained from their business school qualification are of importance in their strategising practices and praxis.

5.3.3.3 Adoption of Strategy Tools

Strategy tools constitute an important element of the strategy body of knowledge taught at most business schools across South Africa and globally. Such tools are posited to have become part of strategy practitioners' professional lives. As 'actionable forms of knowledge' (Jarzabkowski & Wilson, 2006), these tools are an important means by which practitioners navigate the dynamics of strategy practice while developing strategic insights (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015). Table 5.10 presents the strategy tools germane to the study and the level of importance which respondents attach to them.

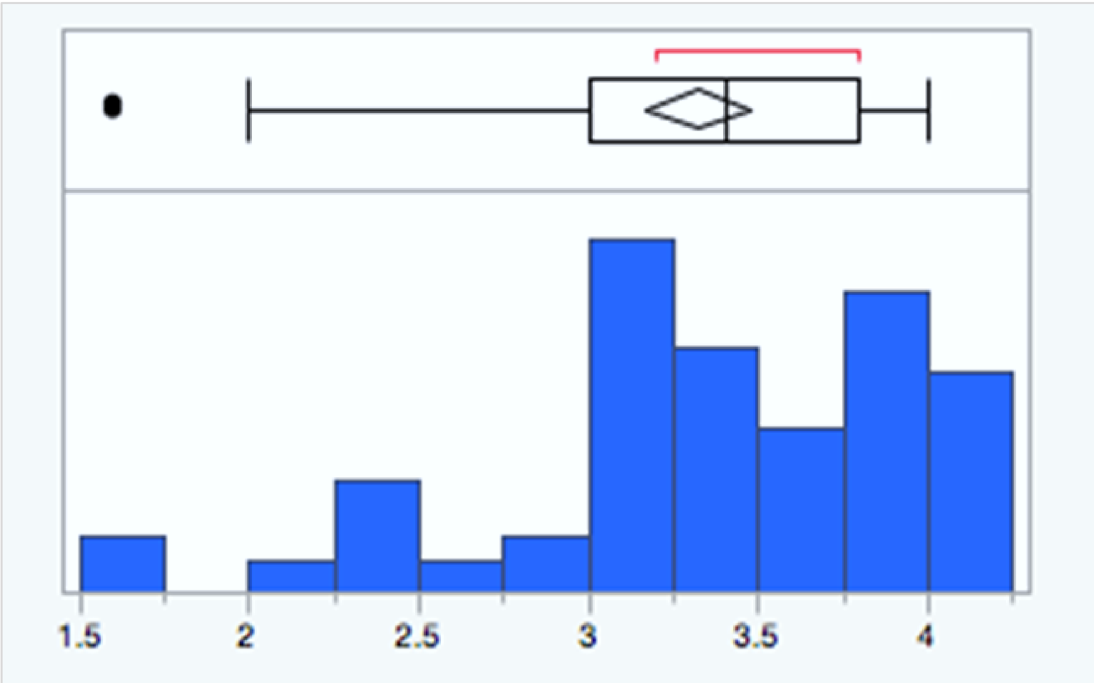
Table 5.13: Strategy Tools Adoption Descriptive Statistics

Adoption of Strategy Tools	x̃	Mo	Relative Frequency			
			1	2	3	4
SWOT Analysis	3	4	.018	.105	.439	.438
Porter's Five Forces	3	3	.035	.105	.439	.421
Value Chain Analysis	4	4	.035	.088	.351	.526
Scenario Planning	3	4	.018	.088	.404	.490
Balanced Scorecard	4	4	.053	.070	.368	.509

Source: Own compilation

The adoption of strategy tools construct consisted of 5 tools. The construct was designed to measure the level of importance strategy practitioners attached to some of the strategy tools they used in their day-to-day strategising. On a ranking scale measuring how important (1 – *not important* and 4 - *very important*) graduates considered some strategy tools to be in executing their strategy activities, the median score was 3 for the SWOT analysis, Porter's Five Forces analysis, and Scenario Planning, and 4 for the Value Chain analysis and the Balanced Scorecard. The mode came at the score of 3 for Porter's Five Forces analysis and at 4 for the other tools. Between 86% and 89% of respondents ranked the 5 tools with a score of either 3 or a score of 4, a result that would suggest that some strategy tools form an important part of strategy practitioners' knowledge stocks.

Figure 5.8: Strategy Tools Adoption Distribution Scores



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Source: JMP Output

Figure 5.8 presents a visual display of an asymmetric distribution of scores on the Adoption of Strategy Tools by practitioners that is negatively skewed (*SKp = -1.1414*). The scores are more concentrated on the high end of the scale and the mean score is less than the median. Such results would suggest that most of the respondents find some strategy tools to play an important role in their strategising activities. However, the distribution also reflects an outlier on the lower end of the scale, an indication that a score is extremely lower than the rest of the observed scores.

5.3.3.4 The Utility of Strategy Tools

The question whether the strategy tools taught at business schools are useful to practicing managers goes to the heart of the practical relevance debates and discourses (Wright, Paroutis & Blettner, 2013). These tools and techniques comprise a pervasive set of concepts that are implicitly involved in the work of strategising (Whittington, et al., 2003). Strategy tools structure strategic issues for analysis and interrogation and provide valuable strategic insights to practitioners. In a practice epistemology, strategy tools are situated within specific social contexts and are shaped by both the affordances that pattern practices and the practitioners who apply them (Jarzabkowski & Kaplan, 2015). Table 5.11 presents the capabilities which some strategy tools afford strategy practitioners and the level of importance respondents attached to such capabilities.

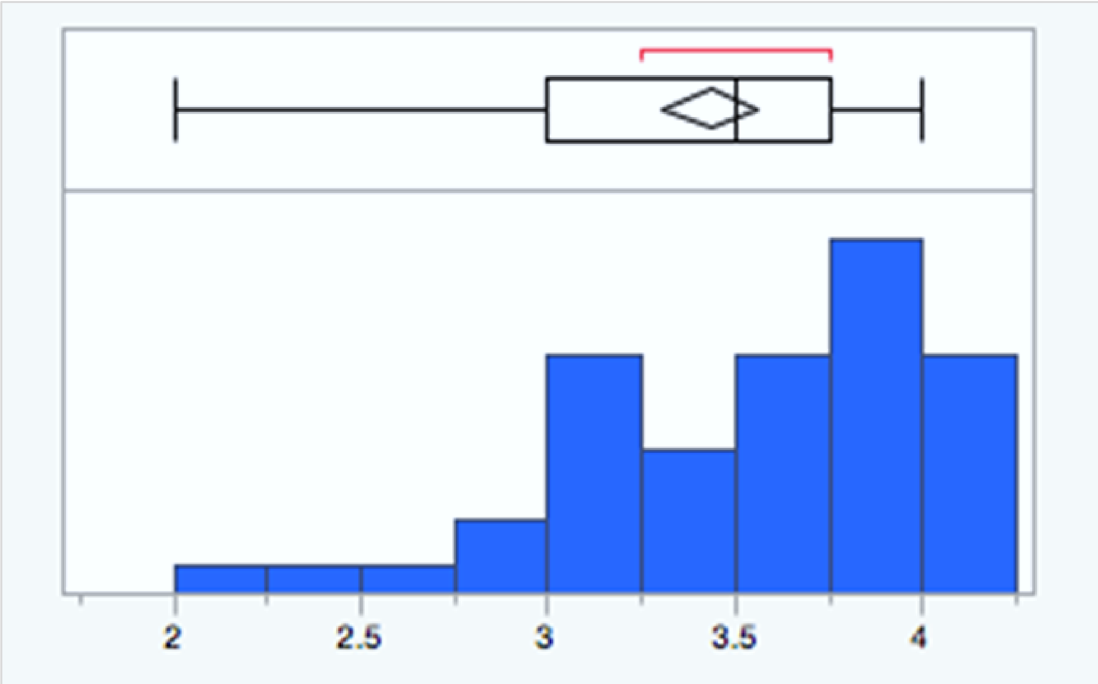
Table 5.14: Strategy Tools Utility Descriptive Statistics

The Utility of Strategy Tools	x̃	Mo	Relative Frequency			
			1	2	3	4
Ability to streamline ambiguous and messy business problems and issues	3	3	--	.035	.526	.439
Capabilities that allow you to perform routinised as well as innovate activities	3	3	--	.053	.526	.421
Support in your decision-making processes in complex business situations	4	4	--	.070	.333	.597
Guidance on particular courses of action	4	4	--	.105	.351	.544

Source: Own Compilation

The utility of strategy tools construct consisted of 4 items. The construct was designed to measure the level of importance strategy practitioners attached to the utility provided by strategy tools in their day-to-day strategising practices. On a ranking scale measuring how important (1 – *not important* and 4 - *very important*) graduates considered the utility provided by the strategy tools they used in their strategising activities, both the median score and the mode were 3 for the first 2 items and 4 for the last 2 items. Between 93% and 97% of respondents ranked the utility provided by the strategy tools to be either important (3) or very important (4). Such a result would suggest that some strategy tools are very useful in the strategising work of strategy practitioners.

Figure 5.9: Strategy Tools Utility Distribution Scores



Source: JMP Output

Figure 5.9 presents a visual display of an asymmetric distribution of scores on the utility of strategy skills construct which is negatively skewed (*SKp = -0.8630*). As with the other constructs, the distribution of the scores is concentrated at the high end of the scale. With the mean score being a little lower than the median. This result would suggest that most respondents find the strategy tools they use in their strategising to be important and useful.

5.3.4 The Nexus Between Academic Rigour and Practical Relevance of Strategy Theory

Academic rigour without practical relevance is pedantic learning (Woodside, 2018), and practical relevance that is not based on underlying theory lacks concrete foundations. Business education must be dynamic as it is sensitive to the evolving character of business and to the advances in the fields of knowledge on which an understanding of business should be built (Gordon & Howell, 1959). The *raison d'eˆtre* of management education is to develop knowledge that advances the practice of management (Tranfield & Starkey, 1998; Ven de Van & Johnson, 2006). For management education to have an impact on, and improve management practice, academic rigour and practical relevance should co-exist (Starbuck, 2018; Narasimhan, 2018). The current study investigated the interplay between the conceptual and the practical domains of business management, findings of which are presented in the following sub-sections.

5.3.4.1 Correlation Between Academic Rigour and Practical Relevance of Strategy Theory

A Spearman's rank and order correlation analysis was performed on research data to examine whether a relationship exists between academic rigour and practical relevance of strategy education. An extract of the JMP® output of the intercorrelations is provided as appendix 7. As presented in Figure 5.10, the results reveal a positive and significant relationship of moderate strength between the concepts as measured by the constructs of higher order learning, reflective and integrative learning, practical reasoning (rigour), application of the strategy knowledge and skills and the adoption and utility of strategy tools (relevance).

Figure 5.10: Nonparametric Intercorrelations - The Spearman's *Rho (ρ)*

			Academic Preparation			**Professional Practice**		
	$\tilde{x}$	Mo	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. High Order Learning	3	3	--					
2. Reflective & Integrative Learning	3	3	.321*.	--				
3. Quantitative Reasoning	3	3	.393**	.367**	--			
4. Application of Strategy Knowledge	4	3	.333*	.349**	.346**	--		
5. Application of Strategy Skills	4	4	.068…	.168…	-.064...	.430***	--	
6. Adoption of Strategy Tools	3	4	.162…	.330*.	.206	.458***	.331*.	--
7. Utility of Strategy Tools	4	4	.414***	.335*.	.257*	.578***	.604***	.477***

Level of significance - * *p < .05,* ** *p < .01,* *** *p < .001.*
Effect size estimates - *.10 -.29*, small; *.30 –.49*, medium; *.50 – 1*, large.
Source: Own Compilation

The results are significant at a 95% confidence level. That is, the probability of concluding that there is a relationship between academic rigour and practical relevance when there is none, is less than 1 in 20 times ($p < .05$). Findings reveal that there is a weak, negative relationship ($\rho = -.064$; $p = .635$) between quantitative reasoning and the application of strategy skills. The strongest association is revealed between skills application and the utility of strategy tools ($\rho = .604$; $p = .0001$). The findings further reveal that the application of strategy knowledge (theories, concepts, tools, and techniques) positively correlates with the 3 constructs of academic preparation (1.4 $\rho = .333; p = .011$: 2.4 $\rho = .349; p = .008$: 3.4 $\rho = .346; .009$). However, the application of strategy skills does not significantly and positively correlate with any of academic preparation constructs, 1.5 $\rho = .068; p = .616$: 2.5 $\rho = .168; p = .211$: 3.5 $\rho = -.064; p = .635$). overall, the findings reveal a positive and significant correlation between academic rigour and practical relevance. That is, rigorous academic preparation of business school graduates, to some degree, translates into practitioners with knowledge and skills relevant to practice.

5.3.4.2 Modeling the Relationship Between Academic Rigour and Practical Relevance of Strategy Theory

To further examine the predictive power of the academic preparation constructs on practical relevance, a regression analysis was conducted the results of which are presented in Figure 5.11. Unlike correlation analysis which measures the association between variables, regression analysis's goal is to express the response variable as a function of the predictor variables (Gunst & Mason, 2017). As reflected in Figure 5:11, the regression model sought to measure how the predictor variables of higher order learning, reflective and integrative learning and quantitative reasoning influence the practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge and skills. The model explains 23.81% of the variance in practical relevance, which is found to be statistically significant, $R^2 = 23.81$, $F(3, 53) = 5.22, p < 0 .01$.

Figure 5.11: Regression Results

Summary of Fit

Regression Statistics	
R Square	0.2381
Adjusted R Square	0.1950
Standard Error	0.3531
Observations	57

Analysis of Variance

	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F
Regression	3	2.0655	0.6885	5.5522	0.0022**
Residual	53	6.6080	0.1247		
Total	56	8.6735			

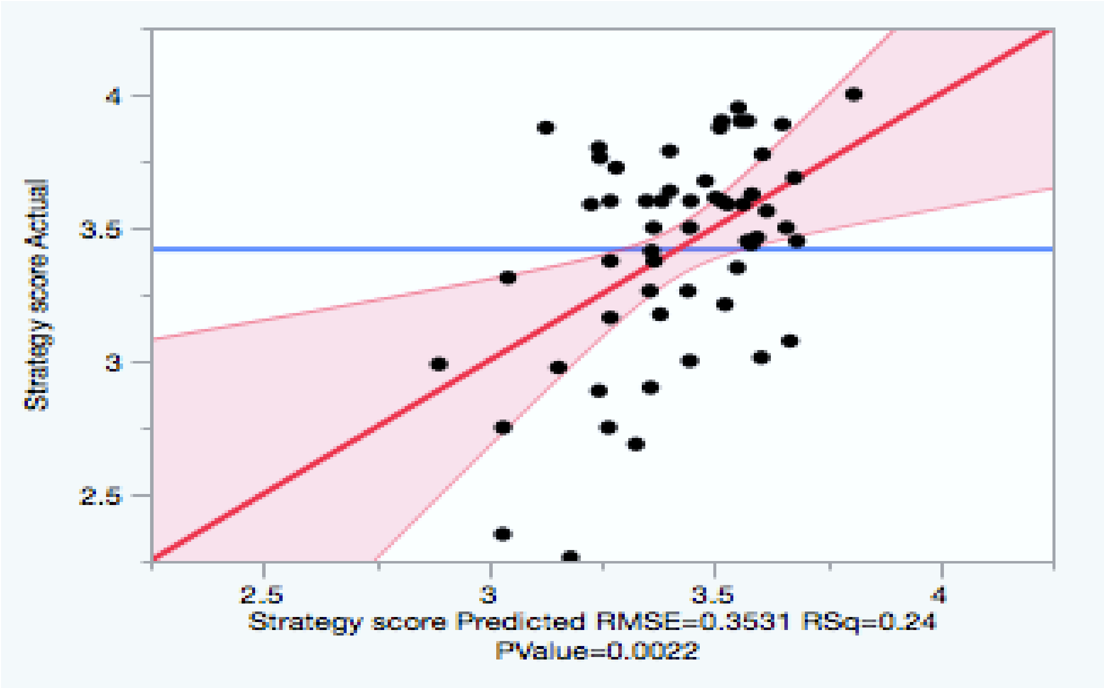
Parameter Estimates

	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	Std Beta	VIF
Intercept	2.3539	0.2711	8.6800	0.0000	1.8102	2.8976		
Higher-Order Learning	0.0691	0.0722	0.9600	0.3429	-0.0757	0.2139	0.1307	1.2967
Relective & Integrative Learning	0.2148	0.0085	2.5200	0.0150*	0.0435	0.3861	0.3411	1.2789
Quantitative Reasoning	0.0801	0.0776	1.0300	0.3063	-0.0755	0.2358	0.1390	1.2597

Source: Own Compilation

A closer examination of individual predictors reveal that reflective and integrative learning, *β = .3411, t(56) = 2.52, p < 0 .05* is a significant predictor of practical relevance while higher order learning has the least predictive power, *β = .1307, t(56) = 0.96, p > 0 .30*. Overall, rigorous academic preparation appears to translate into knowledge and skills that are practically relevant. The graph in Figure 5.12 presents a linear fit between academic rigour and practical relevance. As the graph depicts, there is a positive, linear relationship of moderate strength between the two concepts. The results indicate that the respondents who ranked academic rigour with a high score, on average, also ranked practical relevance with a high score.

Figure 5.12: The Model Fit Between Academic Rigour and Practical Relevance



Source: JMP Output

However, as presented in Table 5.15, a close examination of the model reveals that reflective and integrative learning is the major predictor (*LogWorth = 1.825, p = 0.01496*) of practical relevance of strategy knowledge and skills.

Table 5.15: The Effect Summary

Source	LogWorth	P-Value
Reflective & Integrative Learning	1.825	0.01496
Quantitative Reasoning	0.514	0.30629
Higher-Order Learning	0.465	0.34293

Source: JMP Output

The other two constructs, although they have a positive contribution to practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge, such a contribution is negligible, quantitative reasoning (*LogWorth = 0.514; p = 0.306*) and higher-order learning (*LogWorth = 0.465, p = 0.343*). It is surmised that the reflective and integrative learning construct has more predictive power on practical relevance because it has a greater number of individual items.

5.3.5 Summary of Quantitative Data Analysis and Results

Quantitative data were statistically analysed using relevant statistical analysis software. The statistics that we computed were relevant for the type of data (ordinal) and the phenomenon the study sought to measure (relationships among variables). To measure the central tendency of the data (ordinal) the median and the mode were computed, while correlations and regressions were computed to measure the relationship between academic rigour and practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge and skills produced by South African business schools. Survey findings reveal a positive and significant relationship between academic rigour and practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge and skills produced by South African business schools. Among the seven factors that were measured for their contribution to the rigour and relevance of strategy theory that were analysed, reflective and integrative learning were found to have the most predictive power on the practical relevance of academic knowledge and skills.

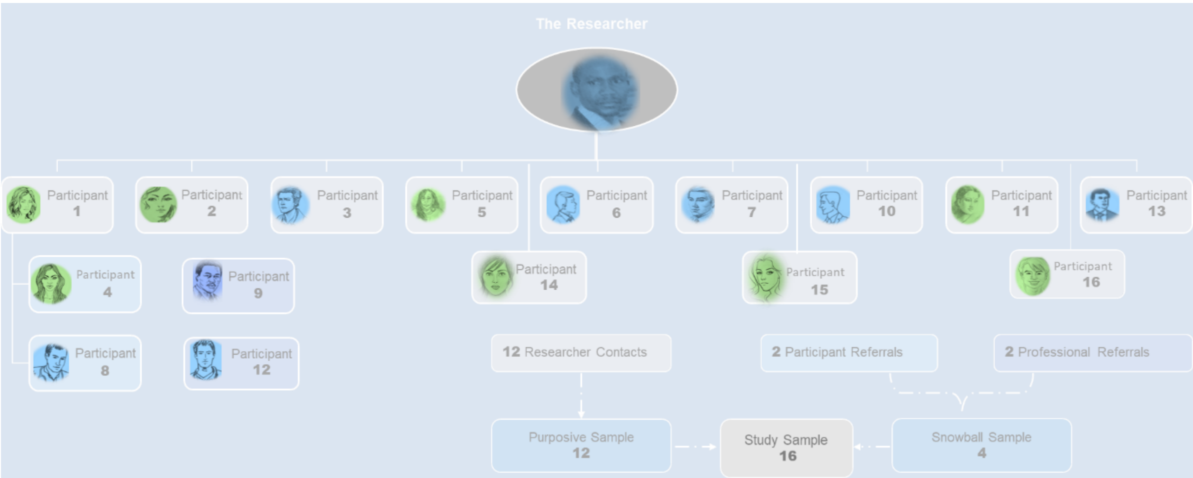
5.4 Qualitative Data Analysis and Findings

The qualitative component of the study sought to answer the research question: "How is the relationship between management education and management practice constituted in South Africa?" The qualitative component rested on phenomenology, with the researcher being the primary instrument of data production through direct engagement with participants in one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The analysis of interview data and fieldnotes rested on abductive reasoning, an iterative process that allows the researcher to move back and forth between data analysis and the process of explanation (Mason, 2002). Qualitative data analysis is a complicated, messy, and time consuming process (Denscombe, 2010; Leedy & Ormrod, 2015) that seeks to bring order, structure and interpretive meaning to a volume of raw data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). As such, it requires the researcher to be creative, diligent, and adept in the analysis. Audio-recorded interview responses were transcribed verbatim into text transcripts by a professional transcriber soon after each interview was conducted.

5.4.1 Study Participants

The unit of analysis of the study was presented in Chapter 4 as the ‘lived experiences of selected business school alumni with their academic preparation and the practical applicability in the workplace of their academic knowledge and skills’. Participants for the qualitative component of the study were drawn from Master of Business Administration (MBA) and Master of Business Leadership (MBL) degree holders who graduated from different South African business schools between 2006 and 2015, both years inclusive. A total of 16 business school alumni participated in phenomenological interviews. The infographic in Figure 5.13 provides the sample of study participants.

Figure 5.13: Sample of Study Participants



Source: Own Compilation

The pictures on the infographic are not in any way meant to provide the actual identities of study participants but rather to portray their sex distributions. The pictures do not in any way resemble those of participants, as such, no attempt should be made to connect them to the participants of the study. The infographic also provides some details on how participants were recruited for participation in the study. As presented in Figure 5.13, twelve (75%) of the participants were direct contacts of the researcher, two (12.5%) of the participants were referrals by participant 1, and the other two (12.5%) were professional referrals. That is, both purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed in the study.

As presented in Table 5.16, the number of male (n = 8) participants was equal to that of female (n = 8) participants. Furthermore, participation in the study cut across industries, functional or disciplinary domains, levels of responsibility and experience, business schools, and professional backgrounds.

Table 5.16: Profiles of Study Participants

Name & Sex	Level and Scope of Responsibility	Function	Industry	Institution	Year of Graduation
P1-F	Executive Manager	Executive Management	Pharmaceutical	Wits Business School	2012
P2-F	Professional	Marketing	Industrial Goods	Wits Business School	2012
P3-M	Executive Manager	Executive Management	Mining services	North West University Business School	2007
P4-F	Professional	Operations	Fast Moving Consumer Goods	Wits Business School	2012
P5-F	Executive Manager	Executive Management	Professional Services	Management College of Southern Africa	2015
P6-M	Entrepreneur	Entrepreneur	Cleaning and Hygiene	Gordon Institute of Business Science	2015
P7-M	Professional	Business Development	Intergovernmental Financial Services	Unisa School of Business Leadership	2011
P8-M	Executive Manager	Operations	Insurance Broking	Wits Business School	2012
P9-M	Professional	Engineering	Fast Moving Consumer Goods	Management College of Southern Africa	2014
P10-M	Professional	Engineering	Petro Chemicals	North West University Business School	2014
P11-F	Senior Manager	Strategy	Management Consulting	Gordon Institute of Business Science	2015
P12-M	Senior Manager	Strategy	Financial Services	Unisa School of Business Leadership	2015
P13-M	Executive Manager	Business Development	Project Management consulting	Stellenbosch University Business School	2014
P14-F	Executive Manager	Executive Management	Windscreen Repairs	Unisa School of Business Leadership	2008
P15-F	Executive Manager	Internal Audits	Professional Services	Unisa School of Business Leadership	2012
P16-F	Senior Manager	Client Services	Health Care	Gordon Institute of Business Science	2015

Source: Own compilation

From an industry perspective, participants came from as diverse industries as pharmaceuticals, mining services, professional services, management consulting and others. In terms of scope and level of responsibilities, participants held higher positions in their respective organisations, from professionals, senior managers, directors, to chief executive officers, and from entrepreneurial firms to multinational corporations. From a functional perspective, participants worked across functions and disciplines like marketing, internal auditing, client services, operations, engineering, strategy, and executive management. Participants graduated from six South African business schools, five public and one private. They graduated within a range of nine years between 2007 and 2015, both years inclusive.

5.4.2 Reflective and Reflexive Accounts on Fieldwork

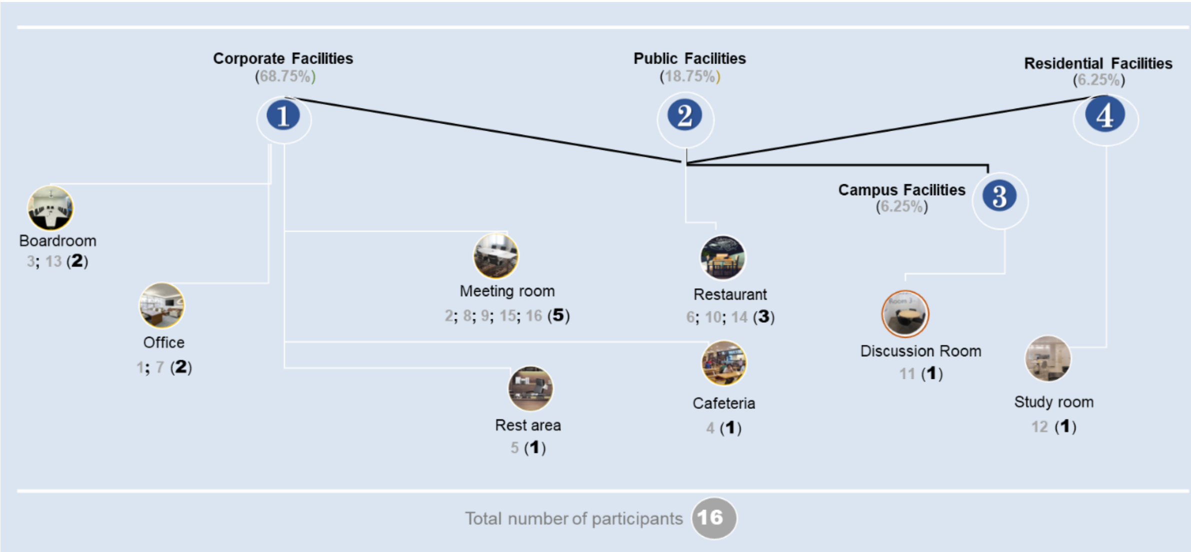
In fieldwork, researchers and study participants interact in social spaces (Korstjens & Moser, 2017). Hence, understanding the dynamics of the natural setting of the study 'supports' the creation of analytical notes that yield insightful research data and provides a proper context for analysing such data (Deggs & Hernandez, 2018). To produce thick descriptions of phenomena that provide the foundation for analytical writing and conceptual reasoning (Maharaj, 2016), researchers are called upon to be critically reflective and painstakingly reflexive on the field and in data analysis and interpretation. Critical reflection enhances the value and utility of qualitative data (Deggs & Hernandez, 2018), whereas reflexivity enriches and increases the rigour of the research process and its outcomes as researchers acknowledge the degree of influence they exert on the study (Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas, & Caricativo, 2017). Critical reflection entails the researcher's deep examination of the assumptions (beliefs, understandings, motivations, experiences, values) that guide and shape human actions, perspectives, meaning-making, and habits of mind (Brookfield, 2009). In turn, reflexivity embodies researchers' thoughtful and critical examination of the intersubjective influences between themselves and study participants (Goldblatt & Band-Winterstein, 2016), and the influences between themselves and research processes and their outcomes.

In qualitative research, immersing oneself in fieldwork, can be, as was the case with the current study, a life changing experience for the researcher. Fieldwork is a journey of discovery that shapes, and in turn, is shaped by the researcher as the research processes unfold. For the current study, drawing up the initial contact list and recruiting study participants was a crucial first step in the data production process, which required the researcher to command good communication skills. Initial contacts were largely by telephone, except in situations where the researcher did not have the prospective participant's phone number, in which case contact was made via email. Expectedly, the first call elicited a negative response that left the researcher somewhat dejected. During the brief call which lasted a couple of minutes, the prospective participant sounded cold and indifferent. It is possible that the researcher's approach was not convincing and lacked confidence, and thus failed to live up to the expectations of the prospective participant. Although some of the subsequent contacts still elicited negative responses, out of over thirty contacts made by the researcher, a little less than half elicited positive ones that resulted in sixteen interviews being conducted for the study. However, a few others who had initially agreed to participate in the study, for reasons as varied as lack of time, distance, and data saturation, were finally not interviewed.

During the interviews, which on average lasted about thirty-five and a half minutes, of sincere and dynamic engagement, most participants came across as warm and enthusiastic individuals who openly and candidly shared their experiences. They showed interest and some seemed passionate about the subject under discussion. Generally, the interviews were evocative, insightful, and illuminating interactions between the researcher and participants about management education and its implications to practice. As would be expected in an interview situation, occasionally there were moments of silence as participants recollected their thoughts, and at times some would ask rhetorical questions. To give voice to the participants, and to avoid own biases and preconceptions tainting the data production process, the researcher let participants speak without interruption or giving them any cues. Even in off-the-record, informal discussions, some participants championed the importance of business education. To underscore the importance of business education to business, one participant emphasised that it is a good idea to invest in oneself before one can invest in something else. Impliedly, business education is a precursor to business management.

In phenomenological research, contextual dimensions of the interviews provide a rich background of the interaction between the researcher, the participant and the environment. As Korstjens and Moser (2017) note, providing thick descriptions of the contexts of the interviews render the behaviours, experiences, perceptions, and feelings of participants meaningful. As such, capturing the essence of the contextual underpinnings of fieldwork is a crucial activity of any research project. That said, the infographic in Figure 5.23 presents a global view of the physical contexts within which the interviews were conducted. As depicted in the infographic, most of the interviews (73%) took place in corporate facilities such as boardrooms, offices, meeting rooms and rest areas, a small number (27%) took place at such facilities as restaurants, discussion rooms, and study rooms. All the interviews were conducted during the day on weekdays save for only three which were conducted on Sundays.

Figure 5.14: The Global View of the Interview Contexts



Source: Own Compilation

The three interviews that were conducted at restaurants were largely as a result of the unique circumstances in which participants found themselves, one worked at a national key point, the other participant was setting up his own business, while the other one happened to be in that area at a particular time. The interview that was held on campus was as a result of the participant's busy work schedule. The interview which was conducted at a participant's residence was because he had failed to secure a suitable venue at his workplace and then felt more comfortable at home than at any other place. To enrich the study's contextual descriptions within which interviews were conducted, the researcher provides detailed fieldnotes in Table 5.17.

Table 5.17: Contextual Underpinnings of the Interviews Taken from Fieldnotes

Participant 1. Managing Director – Pharmaceuticals
Recruitment: After reading abouth the credentials of the prospective participant from a reputable business magazine, the prospective participant was contacted telephonically and she agreed to participate in the study.

The interview: The interview took place in the participant's office. I arrived early and the interview started about 30 minutes earlier than scheduled. After introductions and the signing of the letter of informed consent, the interview began. The participant articulated her responses well and expressed herself clearly. She sounded passionate about the subject under discussion as she spoke candidly about some difficulties in dealing with the staff component of the business.
Closure: After the interview, the participant walked me out of the interview venue, through the reception and out the main door. We had a brief chat about some challenges of career guidance in the country.
Participant 2. Marketing Leader – Industrial Goods and Services
Recruitment: I had known the prospective participant at a professional level, having previously worked with her at one organisation for about a year but in different departments. Communication with her was via e-mail.
The interview: I arrived 30 minutes early. The interview took place in the meeting room. We had a brief discussion on ethical issues relevant to the study as she signed off the letter of informed consent. During the interview, she sounded passionate and enthusiastic about her strategising activities post MBA graduation.
Closure: After the interview the participant walked me through the main entrance into the parking area.
Participant 3. Chief Executive Officer – Mining Services
Recruitment: After reading about the credentials of the prospective participant from a reputable business magazine, I contacted him via his company's phone number and he agreed to participate in the study.
The Interview: Upon arrival, the receptionist ushered me to a big boardroom where the prospective participant was already awaiting me. After introductions and the signing of the informed consent letter, the interview began. The participant was so articulate and concise in answering the questions. He emphasised much on how his management education (MBA) has equipped him with formidable management knowledge and skills to run a basket of entrepreneurial businesses.
Closure: After the interview, the participant walked me through the corridor and out the reception door to the car park where he showed us around the beautiful gardens and allowed us to take some pictures.
Participant 4. Projects Coordinator – Alcoholic Beverages
Recruitment: The prospective participant, a referral by participant 1, was initially contacted telephonically. She agreed to participate in the study and suggested a date on which we could meet at her place of work.
The Interview: I arrived about 30 minutes early. The interview tool place at the cafeteria. She had already signed the informed consent latter that was sent with the meeting invite. The participant responded to each question enthusiasticlly. As an engineer, the participant found her business education, save for soft skills and the networks she had built not to be relevant to her current role and her overall career.
Closure: After the interview, the participant walked me through the reception and out the main entrance of the building. She offered that if I had any more questions for her on the study, I should not hesitate to contact her.
Participant 5. Deputy Director: Internal Audit – Education
Recruitment: After reading about the credentials of the prospective participant from a reputable business magazine, I contacted her via her company's telephone number and she agreed to participate in the study.
The Interview: I arrived at the interview venue about 20 minutes early. I called her when I got to the reception. She came down and took me to the rest area on the second floor. After formal introductions and the signing of the informed letter of consent, the interview began. The participant came across as an easy-going individual who responded to the questions thoughtfully and candidly. As an internal auditor, she sounded happy that her business management education provided her with the knowledge and skills she could use to improve her clients' work.
Closure: After the interview, the participant took me down to the reception area. She asked me to send her a copy of the article in which her profile featured as she had not read it. I did so soon after I got back to the office.
Participant 6. Entrepreneur – Cleaning and Hygiene Services
Recruitment: I identified the prospective participant through his MBA dissertation I had downloaded from his former business school's library. I contacted him telephonically and he agreed to participate in the study.
The Interview: The interview was held at a restaurant. After formal introductions and the signing of the letter of informed consent, we began the interview. He spoke candidly, passionately and with power and aplomb. He used a lot of gestures to

emphasise his points. He sounded happy with the knowledge and skills he obtained from his MBA but expressed some concerns with corporate environments that were not receptive to the use of new knowledge and skills.	
Closure: After the interview we had some brief, off the record chats and then he left immediately.	
Participant 7. Business Development Specialist– Intergovernmental Finance	
Recruitment: After reading about the prospective participant's credentials from the Who's Who Southern Africa database, I contacted him telephonically and he agreed to participate in the study.	
The Interview: I arrived at the venue on time. He came down and took me to the second floor where the interview took place in an empty office. After formal introductions and the signing of the letter of informed consent, we began the interview. The participant came across as a forthright individual who spoke candidly and passionately about the subject under discussion. He challenged those who say business education is not practicable in business to produce scientific evidence.	
Closure: After the interview, the participant walked me down to the reception on the ground floor.	
Participant 8. Operations Manager – Insurance Broking	
Recruitment: The participant was a referral by participant 1. I contacted him telephonically and he agreed to participate in the study.	
The Interview: I arrived at the venue early. The receptionist asked me to go to the second floor where the prospective participant met me at the door and took me to the boardroom. After formal introductions and the signing of the letter of informed consent, we began the interview. The participant came across as a very active and passionate individual. He answered each question through some illustrations which he drew on the whiteboard. He spoke with power and eloquence. He responded to each question thoughtfully and sounded both knowledgeable and experienced.	
Closure: After the interview, he walked me around and showed me a poster on *attitude* by Charles Swindon. He also showed me around the open plan offices and the notice board on which some of their strategy documents were displayed.	
Participant 9. Maintenance Planner – Consumer Goods	
Recruitment: The prospective participant was a professional referral. I contacted him via an e-mail and he agreed to participant in the study.	
The Interview: We met at the factory floor from where he took me to the meeting room on the first floor. After a briefing on ethical issues pertinent to the study and the signing of the letter of informed consent, we began the interview. The participant came across as a humble and soft spoken individual. He engaged openly and expressed his willingness to apply his business management knowledge and skills to make a difference for the business, for himself, and to improve the lives of others.	
Closure: After the interview, he took me down and walked me to the parking as he shared with me how rigorous the MBA programme had been.	
Participant 10. Area Manager – Petro Chemicals	
Recruitment: After reading about the prospective participant's credentials from the Who's Who Southern Africa database, I contacted him telephonically and he agreed to participate in the study.	
The Interview: The interview took place at a restaurant about 2 hours behind schedule as I experienced some difficulties locating the venue. I informed him about my challenges and he understood. Upon my arrival, I briefed him on ethical issues pertinent to the study and he signed the letter of informed consent, before we formally began the interview. The participant, an engineer by profession, was passionate about business education. He spoke with power and aplomb. He was very thoughtful, and he articulated himself well.	
Closure: After the interview, he drove with me some 4 km from the interview venue, an act of pure kindness.	
Participant 11. Senior Manager – Management Consulting	
Recruitment: The prospective participant was identified through her MBA dissertation which I had downloaded from her business school's library. I contacted her telephonically and she agreed to participant in the study.	
The Interview: The interview took place at the campus. I arrived a few mintes early. We met at the car park and then we went into the campus together. After I had explained the modalities of our interaction, and she had signed the letter of informed consent, we began the interview. The participant was an experienced. management consultant who projected a professional demeanor. In answering questions, she was very articulate and gave very detailed responses.	
Closure: After the interview, we walked together to the car park.	

Participant 12. Strategist – Banking
Recruitment: The participant was a professional referral. I contacted him telephonically and he agreed to participat in the study.
The Interview: The interview was conducted at his home. I arrived a few minutes early. After I had explained the modalities of our interaction and he had signed the letter of informed consent, we began the interview. Well-spoken and thoughtful, the participant articulated his responses well. He sounded so grateful that he had an MBA qualification that had provided him with unparalleled business management competencies.
Closure: After the interview, the participant walked me down to the reception on the ground floor.
Participant 13. Director – Project Management Consulting
Recruitment: After reading about the prospective participant's credentials from the Who's Who Southern Africa database, I contacted him telephonically and he agreed to participate in the study.
The interview: The interview took place at the participant's workplace. When I arrived, the prospective participant was not in his office. The receptionist located him in a colleague's office. He asked the receptionist to let me into the boardroom. After he arrived, I explained the modalities of our interaction and he signed the letter of informed consent and then we began the interview. The participant came across as a very soft spoken and good-natured individual who took his time to answer each question thoughtifully.
Closure: After the interview, he left me at reception as he hurried to the third floor, I reckoned for another meeting.
Participant 14. Managing Director – Windscreen Repair Franchise
Recruitment: I identified the prospective participant through her MBL dissertation I had downloaded from her former business school's library. I contacted her telephonically and she agreed to oarticipate in the study.
The Interview: The interview was conducted at a restaurant. I arrived a few minutes early, but the prospective participant was already at the venue. We chatted briefly as I explained the modalities of our interaction as she signed the letter of informed consent. However, our interaction did not get off well. It became difficult to build rapport. The participant appeared disinterested. She sounded a little glib in answering questions, resulting in some of the questions not being asked.
Closure: After the interview, the participant left me a bit confused as to what could have gone wrong.
Participant 15. Director: Professional Services
Recruitment: I met the prospective participant at a joint gathering of academics and practitioners organised by one university in partnership with private entities, where, after our brief chat about the study, she expressed her willingness to participate.
The Interview:The intrview took place at the participant's workplace. I arrived about 15 minutes early. The prospective participant took me to the meeting room where we had a brief discussion off-the-record as I provided some background information and explained the ethics underpinning the study. After she had signed the letter of informed consent, we began the interview. An experienced internal auditor, she spoke with eloquence and authority in answering interview questions. She spoke candidly about how her rigorous business school qualification prepared her for a leadership position.
Closure: After the interview, we had a brief chat off-the-record and then she walked me to the reception.
Participant 16. Senior Manager – Health Care Services
Recruitment: The prospective participant, who was identified through her dissertation that I had downloaded from her business schools' library was initial contacted telephonically and she agreed tonparticipate in the study.
The Interview: The intrview took place at the participant's workplace. I arrived at the venue about 5 minutes early but prospective participant was still in another meeting. After a while she came down and took me to the meeting room. We settled down and made some brief introductions as I explained the modalities of our interaction. After she had signed the letter of informed consent, we began the interview. The participant was a meek and soft-spoken person who spoke softly and slowly, but she exuded a lot of confidence. She gave each response a deep thought, her body language reflected someone thoroughly engaged with the subject. As a medical doctor in the corporate space, her business qualification came in hand for her though it was not a panacea for all the challenges she faced in her role.
Closure: After the interview, as we walked to the reception, she shared with me that media houses were regularly contacting MBA graduates asking about the value of their qualifications.

Source: Own compilation

The interaction with each participant was a rich and captivating experience for the researcher. As presented in Table 5.17, each participant had a personal experience and a unique perspective of the phenomena under study. Different experiences and unique perspectives enriched the findings of the study.

5.4.3 Data Preparation and Analysis

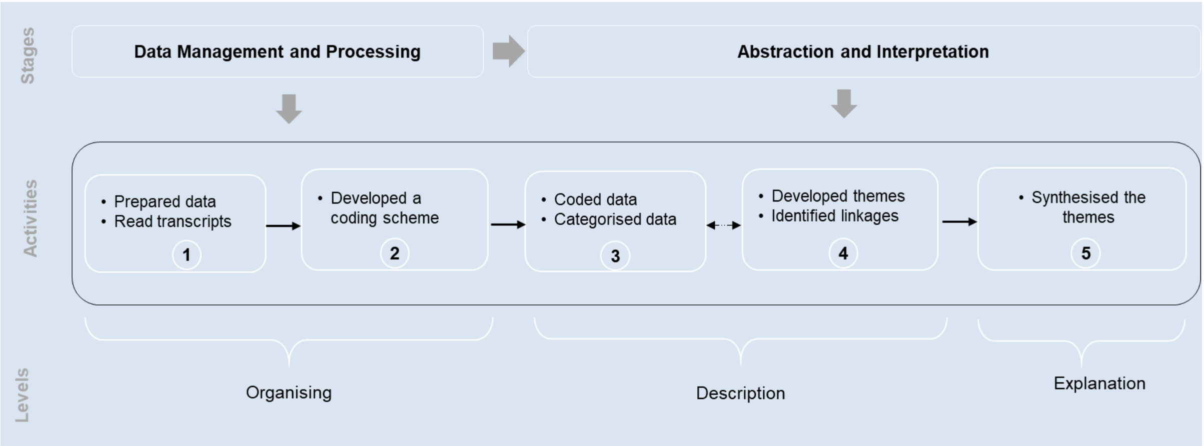
The sixteen interviews produced about 600 minutes (10 hours) of audio data which, after transcription, translated into 147 pages of text comprising over 75 600 words. Field notes produced a further 24 pages of text data comprising about 8 483 words. In total, fieldwork produced about 171 pages of text data comprising over 84 000 words. To familiarise self with the data, the researcher engrossed in the minute details of the accounts of participants' experiences by listening to audio recordings over and over, and reading and re-reading each transcript and the field notes (Denscombe, 2010). However, there are notable distinctions between textual and voice data. Spoken words tend to be mostly unstructured and messy, but they effectively capture the exuberance, dynamism, and enthusiasm characteristic of an engagement between the researcher and study participants during an interview - spoken words are richer and more nuanced. In turn, written words bring structure and order to the data, which makes them easier to analyse than the spoken word. Notwithstanding the distinctions between text and voice data, interpretations and meanings drawn from these two sources should effectively be the same, after all, one is the mirror image of the other.

Qualitative data analysis is neither a structured nor a linear process, instead, the process is iterative, cyclical, and yet systematic. Data coding approaches adopted for the study were inspired by Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014; Saldaña (2013) and to some degree, Spencer, Ritchie, Ormston, O'Connor, and Barnard (2013). Saldaña (2013) divides the coding process in qualitative data analysis into first cycle coding and second cycle coding, an approach adopted in the study. Each stage of the coding process comprises of quite a number of methods, which can be employed independently or in conjunction with other methods as dictated by the requirements of a given study. Miles et al. (2014) make a similar classification, arguing that data coding generates new ideas. First cycle coding impels the researcher to remain open to all possible theoretical directions established through reading and re-reading of the data

(Charmaz, 2006). First cycle coding breaks down qualitative data into discrete parts, opening them up for closer examination, and for comparison between similarities and differences (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The process gives the researcher an opportunity to deeply reflect on the content and nuances of the research data (Saldaña, 2013), since it is data driven. Second cycle coding employs advanced methods of re-organising and re-analysing coded data that require such analytical skills as classifying, integrating, abstracting, synthesising and theorising (Saldaña, 2013). Further, second cycle coding develops connections that lead to flashes of insights (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011) that are inherent in the data.

Spencer et al. (2013) identify two key stages that are pertinent in qualitative data analysis – data management, and abstraction and interpretation. These key stages comprise several activities that are performed at different levels of the analysis process – organisation, description, and explanation (Spencer et al., 2013). In this study, the data analysis processes as outlined by (Miles et al., 2014; Saldaña, 2013; Spencer et al., 2013) are melded to come up with a holistic approach to analysis. The activities which were performed in analysing research data for the current study are graphically depicted in Figure 5: 15 and explained further in Table 5.18.

Figure 5.15: The Qualitative Data Analysis Process



Source: Adapted from Spencer, et al. (2013)

As depicted in Table 5.18, the qualitative data analysis process comprised two key stages of data management and processing, and abstraction and interpretation involving eight distinct, yet interconnected activities at the level of organisation, description, and explanation. The activities are presented in the order in which they connect to each other but not necessarily in the order in which they were performed. To perform the activities, the researcher moved back and forth between the activities in an iterative fashion until the process was finalised. In organising the data, the researcher prepared interview transcripts, wrote-up fieldnotes and thoughtfully read all transcripts while developing the coding scheme. Engaging descriptively with the data, the researcher developed and categorised codes, developed themes and, to draw latent meanings from the study findings, established linkages between the themes through synthesis. Although all these activities were steeped in the data, the researcher had to maintain an interpretive stance in order to extract intersubjective meanings and draw formidable conclusions from the findings.

Data preparation involved carefully listening to each audio recording, and then making minor corrections to chunks of data that were captured incorrectly and to those that were labelled inaudible by the transcriber to make them more intelligible and sensible in a written form (Denscombe, 2010), and for clarity and easy reading. After careful preparation, each transcript, field notes, and qualification documents were loaded onto ATLAS.ti 8 for systematic analysis and interpretation. Data analyses were performed both at a descriptive level (coding and categorising) and at a conceptual level (developing and linking themes) from which a model was developed. Table 5.18 provides some finer details of the steps that the researcher followed to prepare and analyse the data and interpret and report the findings.

Table 5.18: Data Coding and Analysis Scheme

Activity	Activity Description
1. Data Preparation	
1.1. Transcribed interviews	Interview responses were transcribed into text data. To maintain accuracy and capture the meanings as assigned by participants, responses were transcribed verbatim. However, after listening to audio recordings, some chunks of data were reconstructed to improve clarity and readability. Transcripts were then uploaded on to ATLAS.ti 8 for further analysis.
1.2. Prepared field notes	Field notes were drafted before and during the interviews and then, after carefully reflecting on the context within which each interview was conducted and the interview itself, I then properly wrote the fieldnotes that were later uploaded onto ATLAS.ti 8 for further analysis.
1.3. Downloaded qualification documents	Downloaded qualification documents of each of the business schools from which participants had graduated from the South African Qualifications

	Authority (SAQA) website and then uploaded them onto ATLAS.ti 8 for systematic analysis.
1.4. Shared relevant documents With the co-coder	Shared interview scripts and fieldnotes with the co-coder for independent analysis and interpretation.
2. Descriptive Level Analysis	
2.1. Performed first cycle coding	Explored the data through reading, re-reading, and developed a coding scheme and initial codes that described the experiences of participants.
2.1.1. Descriptively coded data	To ground the analysis on primary data, the first cycle coding rested on descriptive accounts of what participants said about their experiences with their academic preparation and the practicability of the academic knowledge and skills they obtained from their MBA qualifications.
2.1.2. In vivo coded data	To capture participants' voices some chunks of data were coded 'in vivo'. That is, those codes represented the actual words used by the participants to describe their experiences, feelings, and perceptions. In vivo coding helped ground the analysis on participants' meanings
2.2. Performed second cycle coding	In second cycle coding, codes were refined and developed further into sub-categories and categories in order to abstract the latent meanings of the participant's accounts on phenomena under study and develop relevant themes.
2.2.1. Focused coded data	To develop salient categories from significant codes, I performed focused coding. I then incorporated the analysis performed by the co-coder.
2.2.2. Pattern coded data	To extract latent meanings and identify themes emerging from the data, I performed pattern coding. In the meantime, I had a discussion with the co-coder to reconcile and refine the themes that we identified independently.
3. Conceptual Level Analysis	
3.1. Developed themes	From carefully analysed research data emerged 5 themes. I had initially identified 6 themes whereas the co-coder had initially identified 4 of them. During our open discussions around differences in findings, the co-coder highlighted that theme 6 was a duplication of theme 3, resulting in theme 6 being collapsed into theme 3.
3.2. Established patterns	The themes that emerged from the data reveal the entwinement between the concepts of rigour and relevance in strategy education and practice. The dynamic interplay between theory and practice is informed by the contextual demands of the workplace and practitioners' ability to deconstruct academic knowledge and skills for application in diverse work environments.
4. Explanatory Level Analysis	
4.1. Synthesised themes	Synthesis of themes revealed a 'strong' association and mutual adaptation between them in response to contextual conditions. In this nuanced interplay, practitioners play a central and active role.

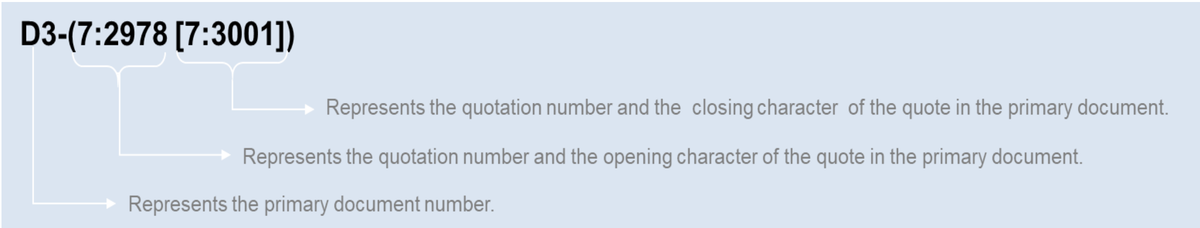
Source: Own compilation

A solid descriptive account of research data enables higher level analysis and interpretation (Miles et al., 2014). Wolcott (1994: 412) advocates that description is a qualitative representation that helps the reader see what the enquirer saw [and hear what the enquirer heard] whereas interpretation helps the reader understand what the enquirer understood. The details provided in Table 5.18 are meant to provide the reader with the descriptive accounts of the researchers' decisions and actions regarding the preparation and analysis of research data, and the interpretation and reporting of the findings. Such a detailed descriptive account of the researcher's journey is meant to assist the reader to judge the robustness of the processes followed and the trustworthiness of the reported findings.

5.4.4 Phenomenological Findings

The value of phenomenological research lies in its power to provide richer and deeper understanding of the meanings that actors assign to actions, relationships and experiences (Yin, 2011). In a similar vein, Miles et al. (2014) posits that, with their emphasis on people's lived experiences, phenomenological studies are well suited for locating meaning actors attach to events, activities, practices, experiences, and for connecting those meanings to their lifeworlds. The findings reported in this chapter capture the same spirit. To recap, the objective of the study was to investigate the relationship between management theory and management practice and to conceptualise how this relationship is constituted. The unit of analysis was the 'lived experiences of selected business school alumni with their academic preparation and the practical applicability of their strategy knowledge and skills'. The study findings are reported around the key concepts of academic rigour and practical relevance within a strategy-as-practice perspective. Data analysis revealed five broad themes, through which the relationship between strategy theory and strategy practice is constituted. The first two themes are rooted in academic rigour, the following three are rooted in practical relevance. In the following sections, the results of the study are presented and discussed in more detail. Reference will be made to ATLAS.ti® 8 output, the referencing system of which is presented in Figure 5.16.

Figure 5.16: The ATLAS.ti® 8 Quotation Referencing System



Source: Own Compilation

As is evident from Figure 5.16, the referencing system is divided into three parts; namely, the document number (D3), the quotation number (7), and the opening and closing characters on the document and quotation (7:2978 [7:3001]). An extract of the quotations is provided as appendix 8.

5.4.4.1 Academic Rigour

Business management knowledge and skills, particularly at business school level are produced within an environment meant to prepare graduates for a rapidly changing, dynamic and eclectic world of work. The content of business management education provided at postgraduate level is almost similar to that offered at undergraduate level. However, pedagogical and assessment methods are notably different. Undergraduate level pedagogics are mostly lecture based, at postgraduate level they are mostly case, and syndicate based. As Tan and Ko (2019) explain, the differences in pedagogy and assessment can be understood in terms of Boom's taxonomy, explicated in Chapter 2. Tan and Ko (2019) further explain that, owing to diverse student backgrounds, undergraduate learning focuses on lower-order cognitive domains such as remember, understand, and apply, whereas postgraduate learning focuses on higher-order cognitive domains such as analyse and evaluate. As part of their teaching and learning activities, some business schools offer site visits, industry seminars, and overseas study missions for their MBA students, the objective of which is to align their academic offerings to the practical needs of business. Such learning activities acquaint students with the vagaries of industry and keep them abreast with current industry trends while deepening their understanding of how academic knowledge is applied to solve real-world business problems (Tan & Ko, 2019). In this sense, the practical value of a postgraduate qualification does not lie so much in its content as it lies in the context of its development.

Theme 1: Applied Learning for Strategy Theory Development

The primary purpose of a business school education is to develop competent management and strategy practitioners who can execute managerial functions and activities efficiently and effectively to achieve practical outcomes. Such an education equips practitioners with the applied knowledge and skills required to analyse complex management situations, identify facets of such situations and then take the most appropriate action under the circumstances (Baldwin, Pierce, Joines, & Farouk, 2011). The claims of any profession in terms of its authority with clients, the esteem it enjoys in society, and the mandate of its members to practice, is closely tied to the kind of knowledge it embodies (Dunne, 2011). As a finding of the study, theme 1, *Applied Learning for strategy theory development*, reflects how business schools impart knowledge and skills in their graduates for application in varied and dynamic work environments. To be as close to the reified and messy realities of practice, applied learning takes place under rigorous teaching and learning conditions designed to mirror, as close as possible, those of the real-world. In addition, some business schools embed experiential learning in their delivery and assessment systems, in the form of site visits and international engagements, as substantiated by the following participant accounts:

> I had about ten people who were working in different industries and could rub minds together. We once went to visit one of them in the factory where she worked. She worked for a manufacturing company and we went around and saw how she worked, and we tried to relate a work environment to the assignments, D15-(3:1085 [3:1404]).

> …but the theoretical work or theoretical knowledge that I gained through my studies is very handy in my day-to-day work because I am in a position to think logically, to plan my work logically, to drive corporate and business planning logically as well as monitoring and reporting on performance in a logical manner, D7-(2:234 [2: 559]).

> I think they prepared you really well, they looked at innovation, they looked at customer centricity, they took you to do field work. I had an opportunity to go

> internationally and visit other universities and other companies there, D11-(11:1132 [11:1367]).

> The MBA gets you to a point where even if you don't have specialist knowledge, you've got basic understanding of each of these [functional areas], D6-(1:2621 [2761]).

Considering the above, as Carter and Stickney (2019) note, the capstone strategy course that forms part of most MBA programmes emphasises general management theory and analytical skills development, while providing for practical application. In this sense, strategy theory development appears to be an applied and embedded process which seeks to embed strategy theory and practice.

As presented in Table 5.19, firstly, an MBA degree is a comprehensive business management qualification which seeks to develop well-rounded management practitioners who are equipped with high level management competences and a deep conceptual understanding of complex business issues. The qualification integrates several functional and disciplinary facets of business with an emphasis on developing general management theory and analytical and interpersonal skills. The purpose statement of one of the business schools from where several participants graduated states the following: "To demonstrate a comprehensive and systematic knowledge base of business administration as a broad field, as well as the ability to apply the knowledge base to a wide range of business-related contexts", D22-(2:169 [2:373]). In support of the above purpose statement one participant from a different business school had the following to say: "What an MBA does, it gives you a baseline […] the basic theory and the tools, but what's great is it's *comprehensive*", D8-(9:483 [9:619]), emphasis added. Secondly, the study programme places some intense demands on students both in terms of workload and in terms of the level and extent of engagement with course material and fellow students. One participant expressed her experience of her academic preparation with the following words: "it was quite an intensive programme because we had to submit a paper every two weeks", D15-(1:668 [1:755]). The comprehensiveness and the intensity of MBA programmes are designed to mirror, as close as possible, the reified and messy realities of practice that are complex, everchanging, and tight deadline driven.

Table 5.19: Rigorous Academic Preparation

Sub-codes	Categories	Theme
Integrated All encompassing Develop whole person Deep conceptual understanding High level competencies	Comprehensive qualification	Applied learning for strategy theory development
Painstaking Daunting task Quite demanding Sleepless nights Gruelling hours Critical engagement Hard work	Intense and rigorous study programme	
Too theoretical Lack of integration HR theories impractical	Gaps in development and application	

Source: Own Compilation

Thirdly, though comprehensive and rigorous, the MBA qualification still manifests some inherent gaps. A few participants believed that the knowledge they gained from the qualification was too theoretical. Responding to a question on how does strategy theory assist her to cope in a volatile and dynamic business environment one participant responded: “in the end what helps you cope is who you are as a person, not book knowledge because an MBA is a very theoretical skills set” D14-(4:1164 [4:1193]). “It wasn’t practical enough, you walk out with some knowledge, but you don’t have enough practical experience”, D14-(5:1230 [5:1339]) she explained. Another gaping element identified is the one relating to the lack of integration between the content material from different modules. One participant raised this concern in the following manner:

> Although they had group work […] it was disconnected because you had twelve different lectures on twelve different topics that didn’t build on each other. In one you’re doing product innovation; you’re creating a product and then it finishes there. Then in another you’re doing a marketing plan, but it’s completely separate, D11-(2:2932 [2:3294]).

Theories relating to human capital management are also reportedly difficult to apply in practice. The primary reason for such difficulties, as one participant succinctly put it, is that people are “*so fundamentally different*”, D2-(5:2481 [5:2511]) emphasis added.

> The hardest thing about the business and the workplace is the staff complement. You can have all these theories about work hygiene and motivation theories [but] the actual application of that in the workplace is a very difficult thing, D1-(7:1519 [7:1771]).

> …motivation is something that's actually very internally driven and no matter what you do for someone, if in fact it's not internally part of their upbringing, it's actually a very difficult thing to try to impart on someone in the workplace. You can try everything from incentive strategies, to giving them prizes, to rewarding them in some way, those things are actually very difficult to implement, D1-(7:1773 [7:2187]).

In addition to the inherent gaps between theory and practice that may not be completely eliminated, as the above participant accounts illustrate, the study also found that personal motivation for taking up a certain qualification can have profound effects on the application of the acquired knowledge and the utility derived from such application. In this study, motivation is defined as the ambition, inclination, urge, intention or drive to achieve set goals (Bergman, Bergman, & Gravett, 2011). As a wellspring of the underlying attitudes that spur actions, motivation can be intrinsic - engaging in activities for their inherent worth, or extrinsic - engaging in activities for an outcome that is separable from the activity (Ryan & Deci, 2000). As such, motivation plays a great role in the obtainment and subsequent use of knowledge and skills.

For example, participants who indicated that they were either driven by boredom or influenced by others to enroll for an MBA, also reported the lowest levels of satisfaction with the applicability of their academic knowledge and skills. When asked about her experience with the connection between the practical demands of her job and the knowledge and skills she obtained from her MBA, one participant who provided the reason for enrolling for an MBA as being bored said the following: "for me, what I learnt in the MBA I think didn't really have any relevance to my job." D4-(1:856 [1:943]). However, when asked about the return on her investment in the qualification, she indicated that soft skills, such as leadership and people management skills were very useful in her job. The participant was an engineer by profession, whose background was in a manufacturing setting. At the time of the interview, she was in the project management space. Another participant, a franchisee, after seeing that many job applicants' CVs in her previous job included MBAs, and in order to stay relevant and keep up with her peers, felt motivated to do one herself as she loved studying. After graduating, she however found the knowledge she obtained from her qualification to be primarily ‘book knowledge’ with little practical value. She encapsulated her experience in the following manner: “The MBL is book knowledge and book knowledge doesn’t help you to cope with the environment, it’s the skills you have as a person that helps you to cope with volatile environments” (D14-(4: 633 [4:816]). In a sense the knowledge she obtained from her premier business qualification was too theoretical and largely irrelevant to her strategising activities. Responding to a question on whether she would recommend anyone to take up an MBA one participant had the following to say:

> …but I would also say whoever wants to do an MBA needs to know and have a vision in terms of why do you want to do it? […] if somebody just wants to do it for the sake of ticking a box in terms of academic qualifications, maybe not. But if you really want to be a broad thinking business leader, I think you should do it, D15-(3:510 [3:844]).

In contrast, most participants who indicated that they were driven by the desire to consolidate their careers at a strategic level and make a difference for themselves and their organisations found much of the knowledge and skills relevant. This, despite the challenges they face in work environments that may be unreceptive to new knowledge and new ways of doing things. The following is a quote by a participant who had taken up an MBA in order to prepare for a position at a senior management level in future:

> I think you are able to sort of gain confidence and respect from senior members of the organisation because you normally walk into conversations, meetings, proposals where one has already done their homework and you’re already speaking a language that they understand which speaks to measurability, speaks to bottom line impact and speaks to making decisions based on data as opposed to decisions based on intuition, D2-(5:239 [5:674]).

Management education is an applied, comprehensive process by business schools that seeks to produce a practically relevant body of knowledge and skills for application in practice. The effectiveness of the process depends as much on the business school which develops the process, as it depends on students who ultimately transpose the knowledge and skills produced to practical, real-world work settings. Students' motivation to acquire a business qualification may have a profound effect on how such knowledge and skills are subsequently utilised in the workplace, and the utility derived by practitioners from their use.

Theme 2: The Astute Professional Practitioner

Education is a life changing experience for many. Education *shapes* the thinking and *guides* the actions of an educated individual. People are not only educated to liberate them from ignorance and irrationality, but also to commit certain acts and execute certain functions well (Calkins, 1946). Calkins affirms that, more than anything else, the quality of an individual is their behaviour. That is, an educated person chooses what he/she becomes. In other words, it is not necessarily about the qualification one has obtained, but rather about what the person becomes after obtaining such a qualification. Educated men and women in business and other branches of society normally stand out. It is important to be conscious though, that those who stand out in society are not always the educated ones. However, education can still be credited with moulding 'professional beings' of educated individuals with astuteness - the ability to turn situations to their advantage. Findings of this study appear to reinforce these affirmations. Though work environments are reportedly hostile and restrictive at times, most participants indicated that it is up to them as practitioners to apply the knowledge and skills they acquired from business school. As some participants avowed:

> ...in my environment it came up with me being more proactive than the employer now expecting it because now I have the qualification. It's about me now creating that environment to say I've got this qualification, I've got this knowledge, how can I now incorporate it into my environment and not the other way around, D5-(2:1621 [2:1945]).

> … I'm utilising the knowledge that I got to change my life and to change the way I'm thinking. But I'm doing it. It's not for the [business school] that I studied with. It's not the material that I studied, but the issue is [with] the individual. How do you carry yourself forward after graduating because you make the difference. So, it's upon an individual […] I said to myself that this knowledge, I must utilise it, D9-(8:2013 [8:2429]).

What a person becomes and is able to do after obtaining a given qualification is embodied in the individual attributes the qualification developed in that person. As much as practical relevance of academic knowledge is a function of the content of a given body of knowledge and contextual conditions of practice, the interplay between strategy theory and strategy practice is strongly influenced by strategy practitioners themselves. Most participants described how their MBA qualifications propelled their thinking from a narrow, silo mentality to a more open and integrative mindset. For example, one participant commented, “My attitude towards how business behaves changed. I moved from that silo mentality to a holistic business mind set”, D10-(4:2527 [4:2639]). Participants further described how analytic and reflective they have become, thus becoming astute, well rounded practitioners. The following quotations speak to such experiences:

> “Sometimes it comes from reflecting. So, when I do that, and I reflect back, and I say that’s not the way that a leader or a manager that really wants to carry people along should have handled this thing”, D15-(4:2445 [4:2649]).

> And then reflection is quite an important one […] you go into the day-to-day things, make decisions on the fly, and then later […] you start reflecting [on] why did I make that decision? Was it the correct decision because sometimes you make it just in the spur of the moment, D13-(2:156 [2:531]).

Table 5.20: Academic Qualifications and the Individual

Codes	Categories	Theme
Open minded Influential Assertive Respected Reflective Analytic Action oriented Well rounded	Individual attributes	The astute professional practitioner
Managing change Critical thinking Ethical conduct Work collaboratively	Developed competencies	
Challenging the status quo Embracing diversity Thinking strategically Taking the initiative Leading effectively	Adopted practices and behaviours	

Source: Own Compilation

Some participants described how their business school qualifications (e.g. an MBA) developed in them such critical skills as integrative thinking, ethical conduct, better management of change and working collaboratively in diverse teams that are constantly being constituted and re-constituted. Asked how he used the knowledge and skills he obtained from an MBA to manage people and execute his functions as an engineer, one participant described an MBA as “more than just an academic qualification but an experience that prepared him for different situations”, D10-(3:689 [3:794]). Another participant, also an engineer, described his experience in the following manner: “the modules that I studied […] they will empower you to know that you don’t work in silos, everything connects”, D9-(1:1975 [1:2084]). Business ethics are a significant consideration for strategy practitioners, especially given the aporias, quandaries, and paradoxes of strategy practice in complex and ill-defined decision situations. Stressing the importance of ethical behaviour in business, one participant, a medical doctor in the corporate space, said the following: “I think if there’s one thing I valued more than most, it would be the ethical teachings about how to do ethical business or ethical business behaviour”, D16-(5:2279 [5:2436]). Business ethics has become an extremely important topical area in business school teaching and learning in the face of scandals which have seen established business going under in South Africa and around the globe owing to corporate malfeasance by managers.

Equally important, most participants reported that after graduating from business school, they adopted new practices and behaviours that enabled them to work better and more effectively. One participant, a marketing professional, responding to a question on the new ways of doing things which she adopted after graduating from business school, provided the following response:

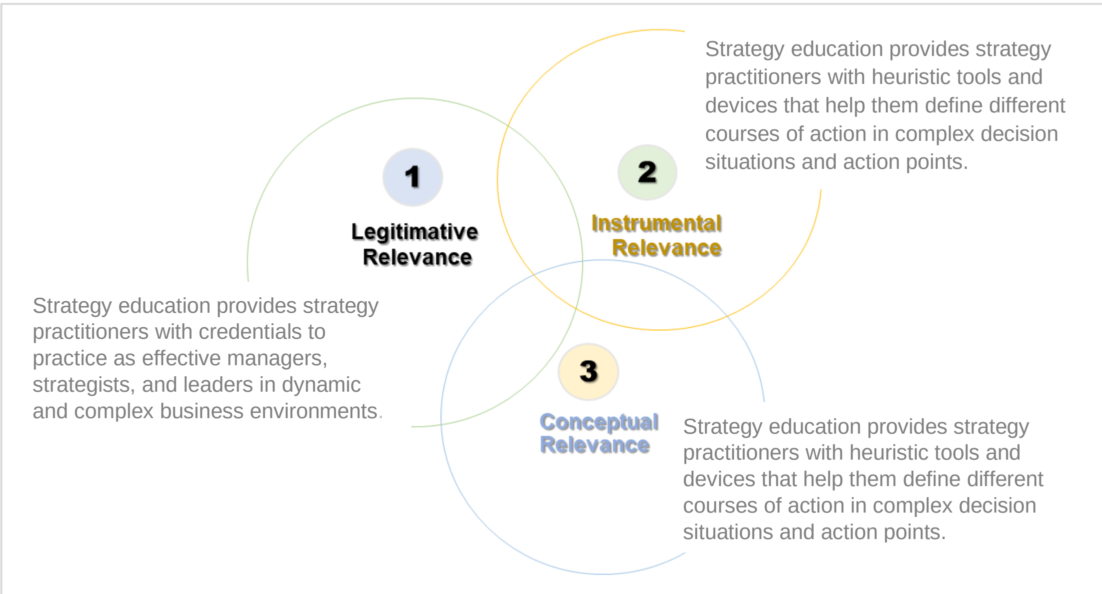
> I think working in syndicates and having to gain consensus of a team before one is able to start [with] the work. I think [that] has given me a lot of understanding about influence and being able to work cross-functionally where there are many stakeholders, D2-(3:1127 [3:1381]).

Most participants indicated that after graduating from business school their approach to doing their work changed, for some, in more profound ways, especially in areas involving working with people or teams. People in the workplace are not only diverse in terms of race or colour, they are diverse in terms of other attributes, such as age, knowledge levels and skills sets, and positions in an organisation. Importantly, they also differ in terms of temperaments, motivations, needs, and aspirations. Notwithstanding these profound differences, people need to work together to achieve common objectives.

5.4.4.2 Practical Relevance

As Nicolai and Seidl (2010) note, management science is a prime example of an applied discipline, and as such, 'practical relevance' should be its distinguishing feature. Findings of the current study suggest that *practical relevance* in management science is primarily a function of practitioners' re-construction of academic knowledge to suit the contextual demands of their professional practices. In the manner of Nicolai and Seidl (2010) the current study identifies three forms of practical relevance in management education, namely: legitimative relevance, instrumental relevance, and conceptual relevance. The three forms of practical relevance identified by the study are graphically depicted in Figure 5.17. As per participants' accounts, *conceptual relevance* and *instrumental relevance* are grounded in participants practices and praxis, whereas *legitimative relevance* is grounded in the qualification as well as participant actions.

Figure 5.17: Forms of Practical Relevance in Management Education



Source: Own Compilation

As can be deduced from Figure 5.17, the level of abstraction associated with each form of practical relevance is different. As it is rooted in a given qualification and in what practitioners ‘can actually do’ with the knowledge and skills they gained from that qualification, legitimative relevance appears to be more concrete than abstract.

Legitimative relevance – At most business schools, criteria for admission into an MBA programme are stringent. Over and above the requirement of a first-grade undergraduate or honours degree, coupled with a minimum of 2 – 3 years of practical experience, most business schools require candidates to write an admission test. In that light, Whitely (1995) posits that business schools serve as talent filters. Qualifications from these business schools, therefore, certify that talent (Nicolai & Seidl, 2010). Findings of the study indicate that South African business school alumni perceive their business school education to have prepared them for management and leadership roles in different types of organisations and that the knowledge they gained from their qualifications legitimises their actions. That is, a business management qualification embodies *legitimative relevance* for the holder. The qualification then has both extrinsic and intrinsic value. Extrinsically, the qualification improves the holder’s job and career prospects, in that it makes him/her appeal to employers, current and potential. The following quote by an internal auditor illustrates this point:

> I strongly believe that the manifestation of some of the things and some of the ways of thinking that I learnt in business school helped me to be able to easily demonstrate that I could direct and lead my own portfolio, D15-(5:718 [5:946]).

Intrinsically, holders have the confidence that they are competent to perform their functions effectively even if they may not always produce the intended results. One participant raised the following point: “when you feel confident you are comfortable to make mistakes because you don’t assume those mistakes come from not knowing”, D16-(5:1503 [5:1627]). Another participant shared a similar experience when she said: “sometimes you miss but it was done in a calculated manner and so there’s confidence to continue to endorse and to support you”, D2-(5:939 [5:1067]). Legitimative relevance was found to be fairly prevalent, but less so compared to conceptual relevance.

Instrumental relevance – Another key finding of the study is that academic knowledge and skills embody *instrumental relevance,* which, according to Astley and Zammuto (1992) is the direct influence of management theory on managerial action. That is, academic knowledge and skills provide practitioners with heuristic tools, techniques, and systems that enable them to take appropriate action in different, complex, and ill-defined practical situations. The instrumentality of academic knowledge and skills to practitioners is illustrated by the following quotations:

> ...It helped in the way that when I now create my reports and recommendations for my clients, I can give them even a better perspective of how they can do things in a more innovative way D5-(2:392 [2:580]).

> You have systems that you put into place that you make sure you can catch any hurdles or any bottlenecks or challenges that might impact on your final delivery well before they become problems D2-(4:855 [4:1052]).

The instrumentality of academic knowledge was; however, found to be the least prevalent. This may be the case, since instrumentality involves specific and more direct ways of knowledge application (Beyer & Trice, 1982), which may not be suitable, given the complexities and messy realities of modern-day practice environments. Beyer and Trice posit that management theory may have relatively little direct impact on managerial practice because they are semiautonomous domains, and theory is somewhat detached from the situational contingencies of the everyday world of managers.

Conceptual relevance – Findings of the study further indicate that academic knowledge and skills embody *conceptual relevance*. In addition to providing management practitioners with tools and techniques, management education also provides them with highly general concepts and ideas (Astley & Zammuto, 1992). That is, academic knowledge provides *conceptual frames* that allow practitioners to frame decision situations and to connect business activities in a holistic manner. Other than providing practitioners with recommendations on what courses of action to take in complex, ill-defined decision situations, conceptual knowledge enriches practitioners' understanding of the decision situation (Nicolai & Seidl, 2010). Nicolai and Seidl posit that, to integrate conceptual knowledge in their concrete experiences, practitioners need to be actively engaged, and to some degree, be acquainted with the theoretical background of the concepts. Conceptual knowledge aids decision making in that it allows practitioners to see the business as a complete entity, while assisting them to appreciate the interconnectedness of the individual parts that make up the whole. One participant, a marketing professional summed up this notion in the following way: “What my MBA qualification has given me is an ability to have a big picture perspective with regards to all the aspects of the business and how they work together”, D2-(1:1085 [1:1264]). Another participant, a bank strategist, shared a similar experience when he said: “What I’ve found with these programmes is that there is the underlying theory which gives you the join the dot knowledge to understand how a corporate works”, D12-(4:638 [4:803]).

Of all the forms of practical relevance, conceptual relevance was found to be the most prevalent. Perhaps the most plausible explanation supporting this finding is the one captured by Cronbach (1982: 71), who argues: "Our main stock in trade is not prescriptions or laws or definitive assessments of proposed action; we supply concepts, and these alter perceptions". Astley and Zammuto (1992) observe that the primary role of academics is to assemble conceptual schemes, develop models for understanding, and thus translate events into meaningful experiences for practitioners. Academic concepts are readily acceptable to practitioners because they can capitalise on them in their own idiosyncratic ways (Cronbach, 1982).

Theme 3: Firm Foundation for Effective Strategy Practice

The strategy body of knowledge comprises a pervasive array of fundamental principles, frameworks, models, and concepts, the ultimate purpose of which is to inform, guide, and shape the thinking, activities, and actions of strategy practitioners in their day-to-day strategising. In this sense, strategy theory is foundational to strategy practice. Findings of the study indicate that these principles guide practitioners’ courses of action, and enhance their strategy practices and praxis, as they have become embodied in their professional beings and ways of doing. Generally, practitioners apply those principles unconsciously as they have become ingrained in them. Describing his lived experience with the application of theory in real-world practical settings, one participant expressed the following: “I must say, sometimes we do these things on the fly, but there’s always a theory behind it”, D13-(9:1509 [9:1603]). In a similar vein, another participant commented:

> It becomes embedded. […] It’s not something that you just wake up and say now I’m going to academically make sure I use those things. No, they develop on you and you kind of learn to think in terms of those models and you just begin to apply them unconsciously. If you truly embed the things that you were taught in business school, they just become part of your everyday life, D15-(3:2186 [3:2572]).

Furthermore, the strategy body of knowledge consists of frameworks that provide different perspectives through which practitioners frame decision situations for appropriate courses of action. In practice environments where ill-defined, complex business problems place competing demands of overwhelming proportions on strategy practitioners, such frameworks assist them to structure and better organise their strategising activities for efficient and effective execution. One participant encapsulated her experience with the use of strategy tools normally taught at business school, in the following manner: “they help me a lot because they kind of structure my thinking”, D15-(3:2816 [3:2877]). She further explained that most of the time she has to contend with a lot of things vying for her attention, and as such, strategy tools help her structure the way she operates, such that she is able to customise and give what is relevant to each client, D-15-(3:3333 [4:166]).

Table 5.21: Theoretical Foundations of Strategy Practice

Codes	Categories	Theme
Foundation for practice Basis for action Fundamentals Basic knowledge Basic understanding Ingrained and embodied	Guiding principles	Firm foundation for effective strategy practice
Provides lenses 360o view of business	Organising frameworks	
Creates the future Building blocks Road maps	Simplifying models	

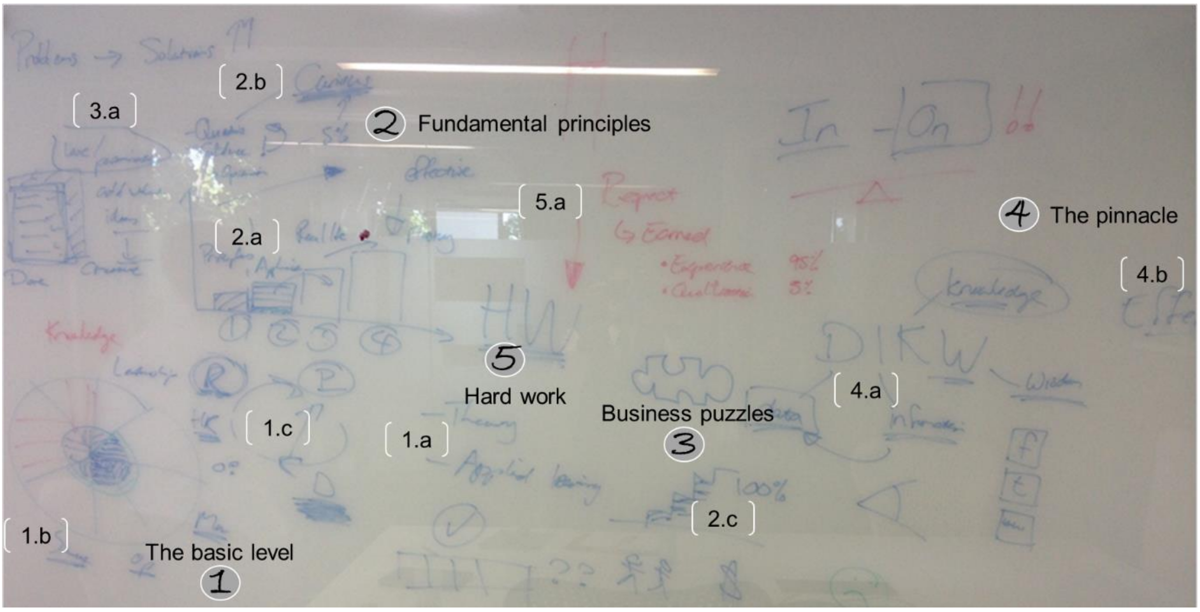
Source: Own Compilation

Unlike a map which is not the territory it represents, in the maze of strategy practice complexities and aporias, as a performative enterprise, strategy theory carves out the desired future outcomes for practitioners. Strategy theory further maps out the activities that practitioners need to perform in order to achieve those desired outcomes. One participant, an MD of a mining services company shared his experiences with the following words: “there’s little that we know about the future, but your MBA will better craft you towards good decision making for the future, D3-(6:2063 [6:2192]). He indicated that he drew his insights into [strategic] decision making from the models he studied in his MBA degree, D3-(4:1320 [4:1413]). The models that constitute strategy theory appear to simplify the otherwise complex and ill-defined business problems encountered by practitioners in their day-to-day strategising.

Although strategy theory is not a panacea for all the problems facing strategy practitioners, it nonetheless plays a critical role in strategy practice by providing guiding principles and organising frameworks. As one participant explained, “practice overrules theories, but the theories are the foundation for the practice. So, it’s kind of […] practice is very important, but you need to know the knowledge and the theory behind the practice, right”, D11-(12:634 [12:847]).

The foundational role that strategy theory plays in effective strategy practice is further illustrated by the graphic presented in Figure 5.18. The graphic provides a classical example of how the nuanced interplay between strategy theory and practice plays out in varied work environments. Although the graphic was sketched by a single participant, the main themes it captures resonate with other participants’ lived experiences. A closer analysis of the graphic reveals a complex web of interconnected elements between strategy theory and practitioner’s praxis. These interconnected elements are not in any way linear and representational, rather, they are more nuanced, dynamic, complex, and iterative.

Figure 5.18: The Nexus Between Theory and Practice



Source: Adapted from a Participant's Illustrations

As elegantly captured in Figure 5.18, at the most basic level (1), strategy is an applied discipline which can be mastered through applied learning (1.a). Within the milieu of situated practice (1.b), strategy theory initially takes up a small space at the base (shaded area), before it is widely diffused within activity areas and action points over time. Theory is foundational to practice. Once the theory has been applied in practice, to gauge its contextual relevance, its application should be reviewed (1.c) through the plan, do, and review (PDR) framework. A careful review of the utility of the theory allows for adaptative and innovative application of such theory. As presented in the graphic (2.a), academic concepts place practitioners at the bottom of the practice table. For them to get to the top, their academic knowledge should be blended with solid practical experience gained in the field. The participant encapsulated his experience in the following manner:

> "[theory] gives you a pretty good view in terms of level one. It's up to us, and each single one of us to move to level two, three and four. And you know how you get there? Through hard work. There is no silver bullet", D8- (8:3287 [8:3505]).

An important mechanism through which strategy practitioners wed theory to practice and gain practical experience is curiosity (2.b), defined as a penchant for seeking new knowledge, experiences, and feedback, exploring novel possibilities, and embracing change (Fernández-Aráoz, Roscoe, Aramaki, 2018; Gino, 2018). According to the participant, curiosity allows practitioners to explore, experiment, and innovate with theories at hand, and in the process, contextually relevant ones are adopted while irrelevant ones are discarded. Summing up his experience with his business school qualification he said:

> …it gave me confidence around each of those different areas […] to be curious because curiosity is […] kind of challenging yourself, thinking outside the box from a personal perspective, and that's how organisations and societies move towards innovation, D8-(4:3145 [5:229]).

As practitioners move up the rungs of the corporate ladder (2.c), their level of responsibilities increase as the scope of activities they perform widen and become more complex. Within the maze of business activities (3), relevant theory guides the strategy practitioner in solving business problems, thereby adding value (3.a) to the business. Strategy practitioners attain peak performance (4) through successful application of theory in addressing complex business problems in practical settings over time. The fusion of academic knowledge and practical experience in practical settings leads practitioners to attain wisdom (4.a) and become *sapiens.* To emphasise, wisdom is neither a form of knowledge, nor a type of skill but *quiddity* – a state of being that render individuals to be effective (4.b) practitioners. Practical wisdom "is the ability to bring to bear a general schema upon the particularities of the situation" (Caputo, 1993: 99). It goes beyond the possession of general knowledge, to the ability to actuate this knowledge with relevance, appropriateness, and sensitivity to context (Dunne, 2011). As posited by the participant, practitioner effectiveness is largely rooted in practical experience, and less so in academic knowledge. Even so, theory is still critical to effective practice as it lays the foundation. Individual practitioners consolidate their curiosity, activities, actions, and efforts through hard work (5) and ingenuity, and in the process they earn respect (5.a) from stakeholders, particularly clients.

Theme 4: Contextual Conditions of Strategy Knowledge and Skills Application

Notwithstanding the fact that strategy practitioners may have similar academic credentials, they operate in varied work environments. Differences between the environments in which management concepts are developed, and those in which they are to be applied, makes their direct application near impossible. Although the strategy body of knowledge is broad and general in nature, findings of the study reveal that the application thereof is idiosyncratic and contextual. As Rumelt (1979: 200) observes, "strategy is a strongly contextual concept". The findings lend credence to the notion that strategy concepts are malleable to suit contextual conditions of practice. Realistically, corporate environments differ considerably. Most participants acknowledged that environments and situations under which such knowledge would be applied plays an important role for its effective application. For example, responding to a question on how the content of his MBA qualification compares with the practical demands of his job, one participant's response was, "in my position, I leverage a lot of what I've learnt and it is highly applicable", D-8-(1:2587 [1:2668]). The following participant accounts further support the notion that strategy theory is contextually applicable:

> "I think it is applicable. But again, I get to use it a lot because my work allows me to. I have very different types of projects, D11- (7:1860 [7:1996]).

> … you need to know which the right tools are and apply the right tools in the right situation and those tools are great and I have used them multiple times before, D-8 (7:1143 [7:1310]).

As Splitter (2017) notes, the practical relevance of academic knowledge and skills in business is actively constructed by practitioners according to the contextual demands of their organisations. This is particularly important because practice contexts are so diverse, making it difficult for academic concepts to be applied directly. To get the most out of academic knowledge, practitioners interpret the situations they find themselves in and the kind of problems they are facing in those contexts and then apply the knowledge as dictated by the situation.

Table 5.22: Contextual Conditions of Practice

Codes	Categories	Theme
Type of work allows it Different organisations Areas of focus Different situations	Situational application	Contextual conditions of strategy knowledge and skills application
Restrictive Rigid Hostile Limiting	Unconducive work environments	

Source: Own Compilation

Another important finding of the study that may solidify perceptions about the gap between strategy theory and practice speaks to practical work environments. Some participants felt that their work environments hinder the effective application of otherwise relevant academic knowledge. Some work environments are reportedly rigid, and limit the effective application of academic knowledge. The following participant accounts speak to some challenges that practitioners encounter at their workplaces:

> …maybe for a different environment it will be easier where it's more receptive of the qualification, but where I am it was not really that receptive, I had to now come up with ways of making sure that I utilise whatever knowledge I've gained, but it was not really that receptive, D5-(8:2067 [8:2351]).

> The theory is very much relevant, but organisations are very rigid, regardless of the kind of innovative ideas that you're coming with. If you do not have […] some sort of delegated authority to implement that, you are not going to go anywhere. So, the theory is very relevant, but the environment is rigid, D7-(4:430 [4:751]).

Despite the despondence and the disappointment regarding the unconducive environments within which they work, some participants still believe that the onus is on them to break the barriers and unleash the practical value of their new knowledge and skills. Describing his experience with unconducive work environments, one participant said the following: "You know, you almost feel defeated, but that being said, if you want to be a great leader, and you want to move the organisation [forward], you have to lead by example", D12-(7:763 [7:889]). As much as practitioners are trying hard to be innovative with the application of their academic knowledge and skills to solve a bewildering array of business problems, they face the challenges that are presented by environments that are rigid and hostile to such application. Such unconducive practice environments may indeed exacerbate the problem of the gap between strategy theory and practice.

Theme 5: Adaptive and Innovative Application of Strategy Knowledge

The practice epistemology on which this study is premised assumes that the use of academic concepts is a practical-evaluative wisdom that deals with the ability to get things done on the spur of the moment within the particular contingencies and dictates of the situation (Jarzabkwoski & Wilson, 2006). That is, practitioners make do with what they have, to solve unstructured and ambiguous problems they encounter in their day-to-day strategising. Findings of the study reveal that, to achieve such an ideal, practitioners engage in adaptive and innovative ways of academic knowledge application to address the problems that they encounter in their work. The process of adaptation and innovation involves the deconstruction of academic knowledge to extract valuable elements that have contextual relevance and meaning to practitioners' immediate environments. Deconstructing theoretical concepts means tearing them apart in search of ways in which they make points other than those they appear to make, opening them up, expanding them, and encouraging a limitless number of their interpretations (Summers, Boje, Dennehy, & Rosile, 1997). In a sense, to get the most out of theoretical concepts in context, practitioners 'double up' as bricoleurs. That is, they engage in inventive use of theory. Bricolage, as Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2006) argue, combines theory and practice, both of which develop out of, and because of the particular contextual setting in which application takes place.

Other than being a body of law-like statements and technical specifications to be applied stringently, strategy theory is a body of knowledge that is constituted in concepts and principles that are adaptable to practitioner demands. As presented in Table 5.23, the adaptive and innovative use of academic knowledge involves inventiveness, a process that involves practitioners' deconstruction of academic knowledge to extract elements that suit their practical demands in context.

Table 5.23: Adaptation of Management Theory

Codes	**Categories**	**Theme**
Apply certain elements Malleable for changing environments Modified Innovative application Used indirectly Creative with the learnings	Inventive use of theory (bricolage)	Adaptive and innovative use of strategy knowledge

Source: Own compilation

Bricolage is rooted in the malleability of theoretical concepts and principles to suit practitioners' emergent patterns of activities in response to their changing work environments. In a sense, faced with the complexities and multidimensionalities of strategy practice, practitioners 'construct' their own relevance out of academic knowledge. One participant had this to say: "it's up to me to do that, […] it gave me the principles of what the art of the possibility is" D8-(9:483 [9:677]). Study findings reveal that, strategy theory is hardly, if ever, applied in practice as raw as it is taught at business school. The following participant account supports the above postulation:

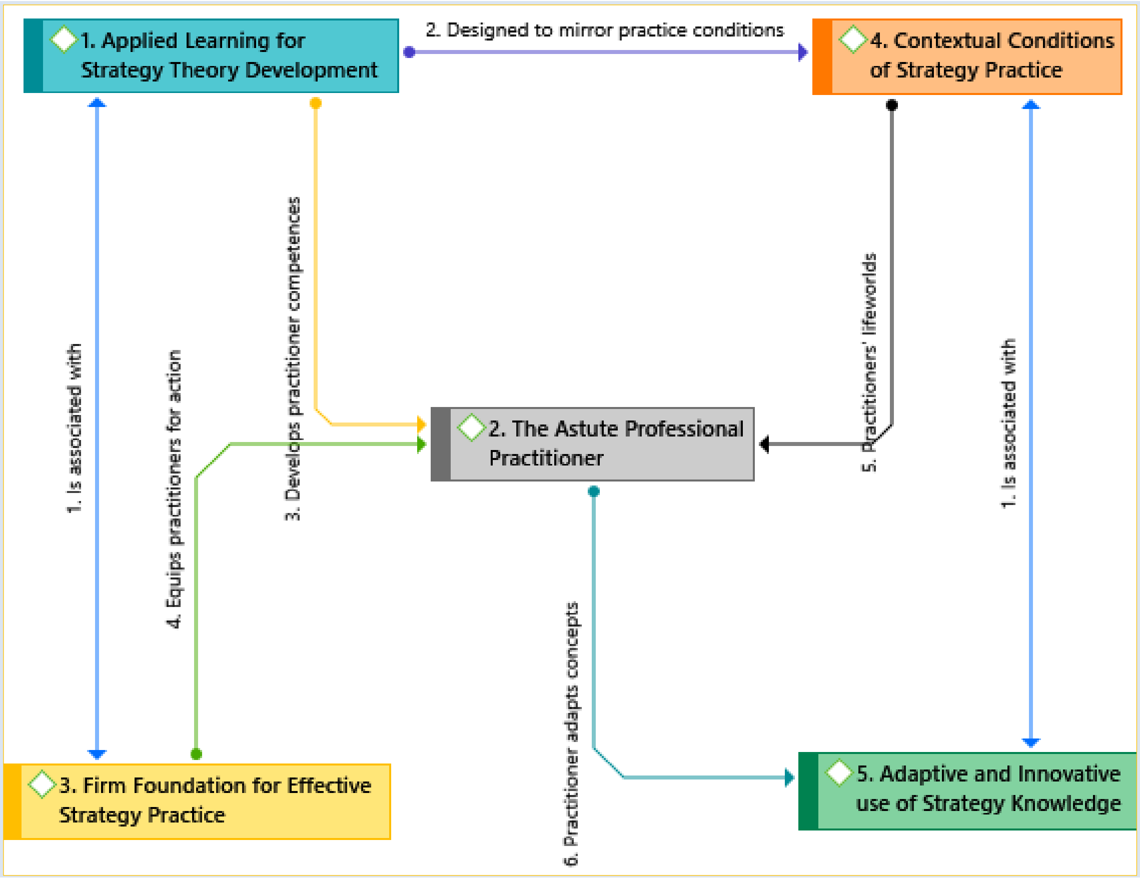
> I have learnt that the practical application of the theory sometimes must be softened or modified […] but the integrity of the intent doesn't change, […] the execution and the how we do it sometimes must change, D2-(5:2560 [5:2791]).

As much as strategy practitioners are knowledgeable and skilled individuals, to be highly effective in their work, they need to exercise some degree of evaluative judgement and inventiveness. This is so, because, as mentioned earlier, academic knowledge tends to be broader and more general in nature, such that its specific and direct application in diverse work environments would be extremely difficult, if not impossible. As such, one's adeptness in evaluative judgement neither lies in the knowledge of the general, nor in dealing with particulars, but rather, it lies in the connection between the general and the particular that calls for perceptiveness in reading the particularly situation (Dunne, 2011). The ability to interpret and adapt knowledge to particular contexts, situations or problems is rooted in practical wisdom (Fukami, 2007).

5.4.4.3 Academic Rigour and Practical Relevance: A Symbiotic Relationship

The environments within which strategy theory and strategy practice play out are very complex and besides, they are not static. As such, strategy practitioners' lifeworlds are constantly being constituted, de-constituted and reconstituted (Garud, Gehman, & Tharchen, 2018). To capture the richness and the dynamism of such lifeworlds and to tease out the value of the interactions that take place therein, the researcher borrowed from bioecology, a discipline primarily concerned with how organisms 'adapt' to their environments (Astley & Fombrun, 1983). Despite the debates and discourses on the gap between management theory and management practice, the study findings reveal that academic rigour and practical relevance are the two sides of the same coin. The relationship between the concepts appears to be governed by '*mutual adaptation'*, a process by which both concepts become more suited to their environments. Bioecologically, mutual adaptation can either be comensalistic or symbiotic. Comensalistic adaptations arise between intraspecies, which make similar demands on their environments, whereas symbiotic adaptations involve interspecies that make dissimilar demands on their environments (Astley & Fombrun, 1983). Importantly, Astley and Fombrun note that members of different species that constitute symbiotic relationships may supplement the efforts of one another and thus become mutually interdependent. As already indicated, academic rigour and practical relevance amplify each other through mutual adaptation. Rigorous academic preparation enhances the practical relevance of the knowledge and skills produced, whereas feedback from the field improves academic offerings. The symbiosis constituting the relationship between rigorous strategy theory and strategy practice is encapsulated in Figure 5.19. As depicted in Figure 5.19, in strategy work, strategy theory and strategy practice are co-constituted (Cabantous, Gond, & Wright, 2018) in a dynamic interplay where competent strategy practitioners are the main actors (Theme 2). However, it is important to note that, in practical terms, the interplay is more complex and more nuanced than portrayed in Figure 5.19.

Figure 5.19: The Interplay Between Strategy Theory and Practice



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As indicated in Chapter 1, the interplay between strategy theory and strategy practice is rooted in performativity, a pragmatic view of strategy which contends that, other than mirroring a pre-existing reality, strategy theory co-constructs that reality (Cabantous et al., 2018). The performativity of strategy theory is constituted and re-constituted through repeated enactment of unique conceptual elements and idiosyncratic ideas (Vargha, 2018) in the workplace. Study findings appear to lend credence to these assertions, as participants indicated that, in performing their strategy praxis, as much as they draw on academic concepts, they do not explicitly refer to them as such, since they have become ingrained in their professional beings. In practice, a neat distinction between *knowledge for* and *knowledge in* practice (Smith, 2018) is difficult to draw. Spurred by the complexities and the messy realities of strategy practice, strategy practitioners apply their academic knowledge in novel and idiosyncratic ways.

As Figure 5.19 reflects, the five themes that were identified during data analysis are interconnected, thus:

1. Applied learning for strategy theory development (Theme 1) is *associated with* the firm foundation of effective strategy practice (Theme 3), whereas contextual conditions of strategy practice (Theme 4) is *associated with* adaptive and innovative use of strategy knowledge (Theme 5). That is, applied learning develops strategy theory, which becomes a bedrock of effective strategy practice, whereas strategy practitioners *adapt* and apply strategy theory in novel and innovative ways in diverse practice contexts.
2. Applied strategy development (Theme 1) is designed to *mirror*, as closely as possible, varied practice contexts (Theme 4). As indicated above, the mirroring is rooted in pedagogical methods that comprise case studies, site visits and international assignments. Responding to an inquiry on how important case studies were during the learning process, one participant said the following:

> It allowed you to take what you had learnt in theory to put it into practice in a practical setting. You know, these were the challenges, and this is how they overcame those challenges and you can somewhat apply those to any business, D1-(2:1888 [2:2126]).

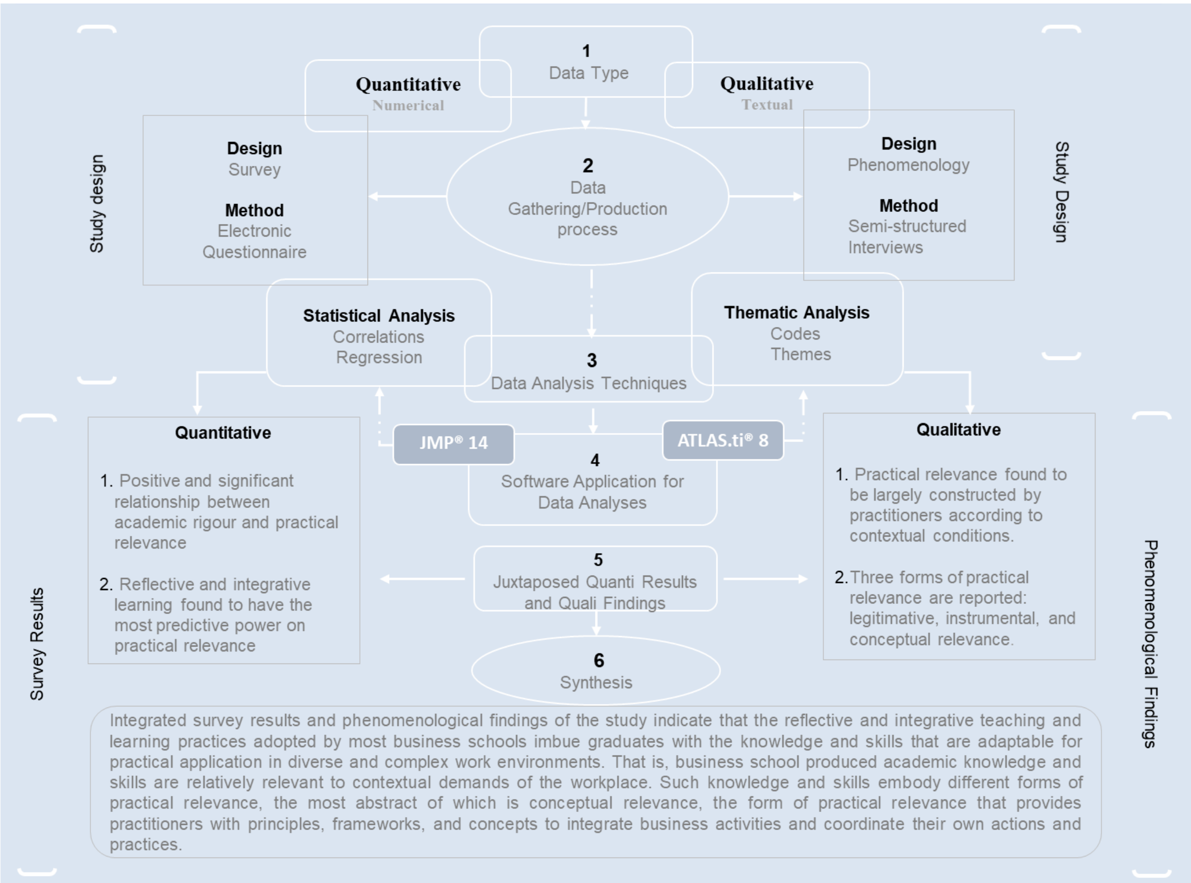
3. Applied learning (Theme 1) develops competence in astute practitioners (theme 2). Astuteness in practitioners is developed through rigorous teaching and learning at business school.
4. Strategy theory (Theme 3) *equips* astute strategy practitioners (Theme 2) with the knowledge and skills for effective execution of strategy functions and activities.
5. Practice contexts (Theme 4) are astute strategy practitioners' (Theme 2) *lifeworlds*. Practitioners' lifeworlds, their workplaces, are grand theatres of ontic performances, immediate experiences, and praxis.

Strategy theory (Theme 5) is adapted by astute strategy practitioners (Theme 2) according to the dictates of practice conditions (Theme 4). Strategy practice is ontic, complex, and multidimensional, whereas strategy theory is more abstract. To meld the two in ways that are concrete, astute strategy practitioners adapt such theory for contextual application in novel and innovative ways.

5.5 Synthesis of Survey and Phenomenological Findings

Findings from the two strands of the study offer some interesting insights into the dialectics between academic rigour and practical relevance. Although juxtaposing rigour and relevance at first glance appears a stark contrast, a closer look at the phenomena reveals a symbiotic entwinement between them. That is, you cannot separate one from the other without damaging both. The quantitative component of the study sought to answer the question: "What is the *nature* and *extent* of the relationship between the academic rigour and practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge and skills produced by South African business schools?" The qualitative component of the study sought to answer the question: "How is the relationship between strategy theory and strategy practice constituted in South Africa?" Figure 5.21 presents a graphic depiction of the steps and activities the researcher performed in order to find answers to the research questions.

Figure 5.20: Synthesis of Survey Results and Phenomenological Findings



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Although the activities of each component of the study were performed separately, findings of each component were later synthesised.

As reflected in Figure 5:21, to answer the first question, an internet mediated survey questionnaire was administered to business school alumni with a formal business qualification obtained between 2006 and 2015. Fifty-seven alumni completed the questionnaire. To answer the second question, semi-structured interviews were conducted with sixteen MBA graduates from different business schools working in industry. Data analyses were performed using relevant data analysis software, JMP® 14 in the case of statistical analysis of quantitative survey data and ATLAS.ti ® 8 in the case of qualitative interview data. The results of the correlational statistical analysis that was performed revealed a positive and significant relationship between academic rigour and practical relevance. Results of the regression analysis further revealed that the reflective and integrative learning construct had the strongest predictive power on practical relevance. The results of the thematic analyses that were performed on interview data reveal that the practical relevance of strategy theory is largely constructed by strategy practitioners, according to the contextual demands of their practice. That is, strategy practitioners engage in adaptive and innovative use of strategy theory in order to achieve practical outcomes. Practical relevance, the study found, comes in three different forms: legitimative, instrumental and conceptual. Overall, the integrated findings of the study reveal that business school produced strategy knowledge and skills are rigorous, yet relevant to practice. Importantly, 'relevance' is largely a function of practitioners' own interpretation of the concepts relative to the situation at hand.

Surmised in Chapter 1 is that practitioners' biographical profiles may have moderating effects on their application of academic knowledge and skills. Although the findings may not be conclusive, both strands of the study appear to support this thesis. Regarding the moderating effects of one's *period after graduation* on their application of knowledge, more participants who graduated between 10 and 7 years before, indicated that strategy concepts and tools were slightly important in their strategising work. In contrast, most of those who had completed their qualifications between 6 and 1 year before indicated that such concepts and tools were either important or very important in their work. Concerning *age*, respondents in the 26-40 years category indicated that strategy concepts and tools were important in their work but less so to respondents in the 41-50+ years category. From a *sex* perspective, the study found no discernible differences between males and females, a similar result with the *type of qualification*. In terms of a practitioner's *level of experience*, more experienced respondents (senior managers) indicated that strategy concepts and tools are less important in their work as compared to less experienced respondents (junior and middle managers) most of whom indicated that strategy concepts and tools were important in their work. This finding may also be influenced by the level of position occupied by the individual practitioner, but not necessarily the level of experience the individual has gained over time.

Some interview participants also indicated that immediately after graduation, they would occasionally refer to their textbooks for conceptual guidance in addressing certain issues. However, as time progressed, such concepts became part of their professional lives as they gained more confidence and experience. Overall, practitioners' demographic profiles appear to exert some degree of moderating influences on their application of strategy theory in their strategy practices. The concept of 'practical relevance' therefore, can be measured in relative, rather than absolute terms, as it appears to be more a function of individual construction than it is a function of the content of those concepts and tools.

5.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the processes, procedures, and activities the researcher performed in analysing both quantitative and qualitative data and the reporting of study findings. Both correlational analysis and regression analysis established a significant and positive relationship between academic rigour and practical relevance of moderate strength. In brief, business school produced knowledge and skills are theoretically sound as well as practically relevant. Reflective and integrative learning was found to have the post predictable power on practical relevance.

The thematic analysis that was performed on interview data provided further evidence of a symbiotic relationship between academic rigour (embodied in theory) and practical relevance (embodied in practice). The study found that academic rigour is a function of applied learning and the receptiveness and perceptiveness of graduates who have to be transformed by such learning. Strategy theory, the study found, is the foundation of effective strategy practice. However, strategy theoretical concepts are hardly, if ever, applied raw as they are taught at business school, but are adapted by practitioners to suit their contextual demands.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THE STUDY FINDINGS

> "*Discovery consists of seeing what everybody has seen and thinking what nobody has thought*" – Albert von Szent-Györgyi

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study, as presented in Chapter 1, was to *examine* and *conceptualise* the relationship between the rigour and relevance of strategy theory, while the objective was to *develop a better understanding* of the dynamic and nuanced interplay between strategy theory and practice. Building on data analyses and study findings presented in Chapter 5, the purpose of this chapter is to discuss the findings of the study and present the conclusions drawn from the findings and offer suggestions for further research. In this chapter, the researcher is essentially called upon to traverse the rich terrain of the study by reading through and beyond the findings in order to extract their latent meanings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019) at a higher level of abstraction. This interpretive exercise is underpinned by dialectical thinking that seeks to uncover inherent tensions or contradictions that are believed to exist between [strategy theory and practice] and to put them in dialogue with each other (Freeman, 2017). Thinking, asserts Jacobs (2017: 2) in his book *How to Think*:

> "is not the decision itself but what goes into the decision, the consideration, the assessment. It's testing your own responses and weighing the available evidence: it's grasping, as best you can and with all available and relevant senses, what is, and it's also speculating, as carefully and responsibly as you can, about what *might be*" (emphasis in original).

Jacobs' emphasis on carefully and responsibly speculating about what *might be* is consistent with the abductive reasoning that moves from factual premises to explanatory inferences (Haig & Evers, 2016; Haig, 2008) on which the interpretation of this study's findings is underpinned.

Against the background of perennial debates and discourses on the disconnect (real or perceived) between strategy education and practice, the motivation for the current study was to contribute to the conversations in strategy scholarship and practice in South Africa. In particular, the academic rigour and practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge and skills produced by South African business schools. The enquiry centred on strategy practitioners' experiences with the rigours of their academic preparation and the practical relevance of the knowledge and skills they obtained from their business school qualifications. Figure 6.1 graphically depicts Chapter 6 structure.

Figure 6.1: The Structure of Chapter 6

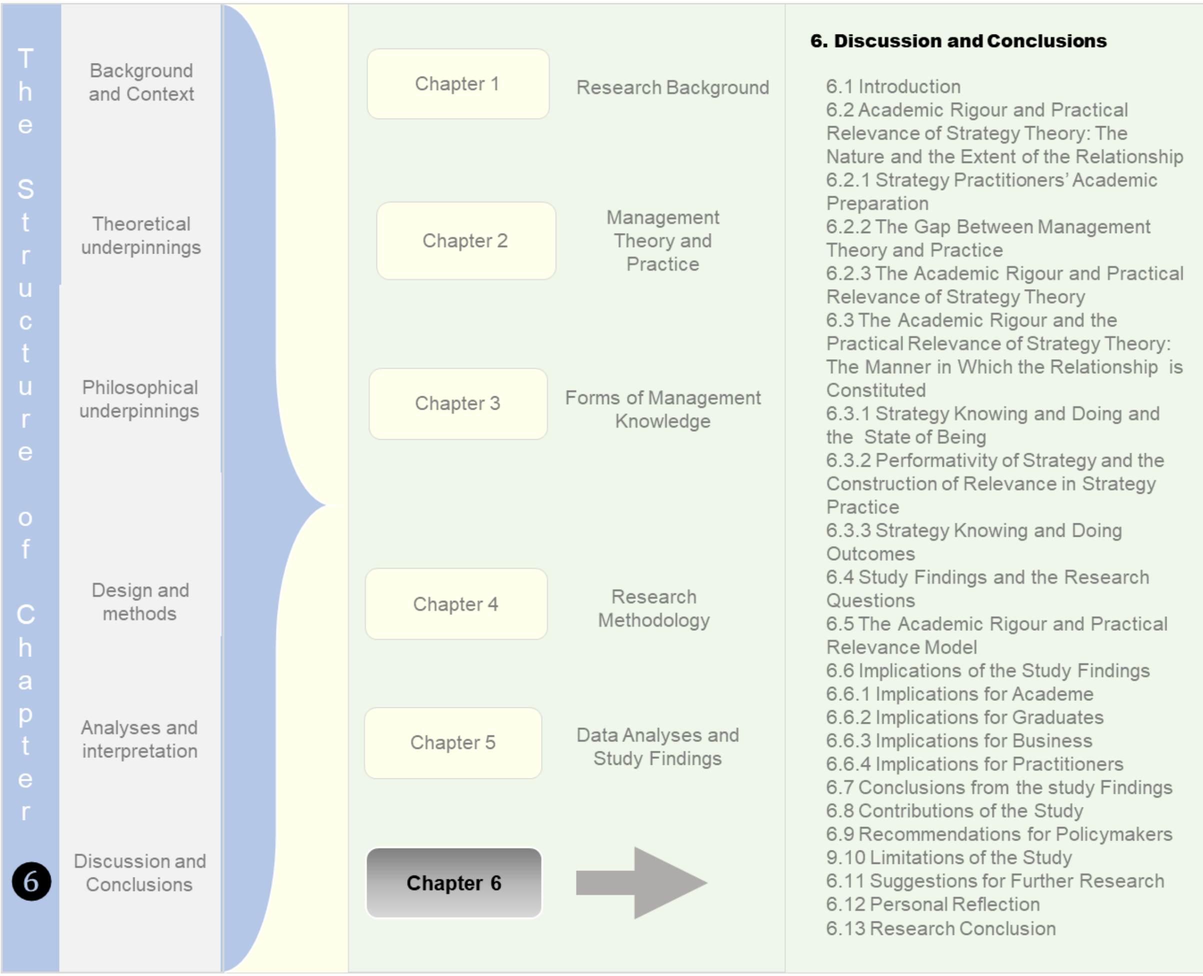

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Figure 6.1 depicts the position of Chapter 6 within the broad structure of the dissertation. Specifically, Chapter 6 presents the discussions, the theoretical model, implications of the study, conclusions drawn from the study findings, and suggestions for further research.

6.2 Academic Rigour and Practical Relevance of Strategy Theory: The Nature and Extent of the Relationship

Findings of the study presented in Chapter 5, indicate that there is a positive and significant relationship between academic rigour and practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge. Academic rigour is embodied in academic preparation of graduates by business schools, whereas practical relevance is embodied in professional practice in the workplace. In light of the debates and discourses in the scientific community bewailing the gap between strategy theory and strategy practice, the results are important in that they point to a situation where, instead of calling for rigour at the expense of relevance and vice versa, rather, the discussions should shift focus towards the *nexus and dynamic interplay* between the two. Given such findings, the next logical question to ask is: How is such a relationship to be explained?

As presented in Chapter 4, this study is underpinned by a pragmatist philosophy. The analysis of data and interpretation of study findings are rooted in abductive reasoning which can be considered to be broader than both the inductive and deductive accounts of scientific enquiry (Rambaree, 2018). Central to abductive reasoning is the idea of inference to the best explanation. In turn, *inference to the best explanation* is governed by the idea that researchers infer from the available evidence to the hypothesis, which would, if correct, best explain that evidence (Lipton, 2000). As Peirce (cited in Haig, 2008) puts it, ''abduction consists in studying the facts and devising a theory to explain them''. Provided below is an illuminating description by Haig (2008: 1015) of the concept of inference to the best explanation:

> F1, F2, … are surprising empirical facts.
> Hypothesis H explains F1, F2, …
> No other hypothesis can explain F1, F2, … as well as H does.
> Therefore, H is accepted as the best explanation.

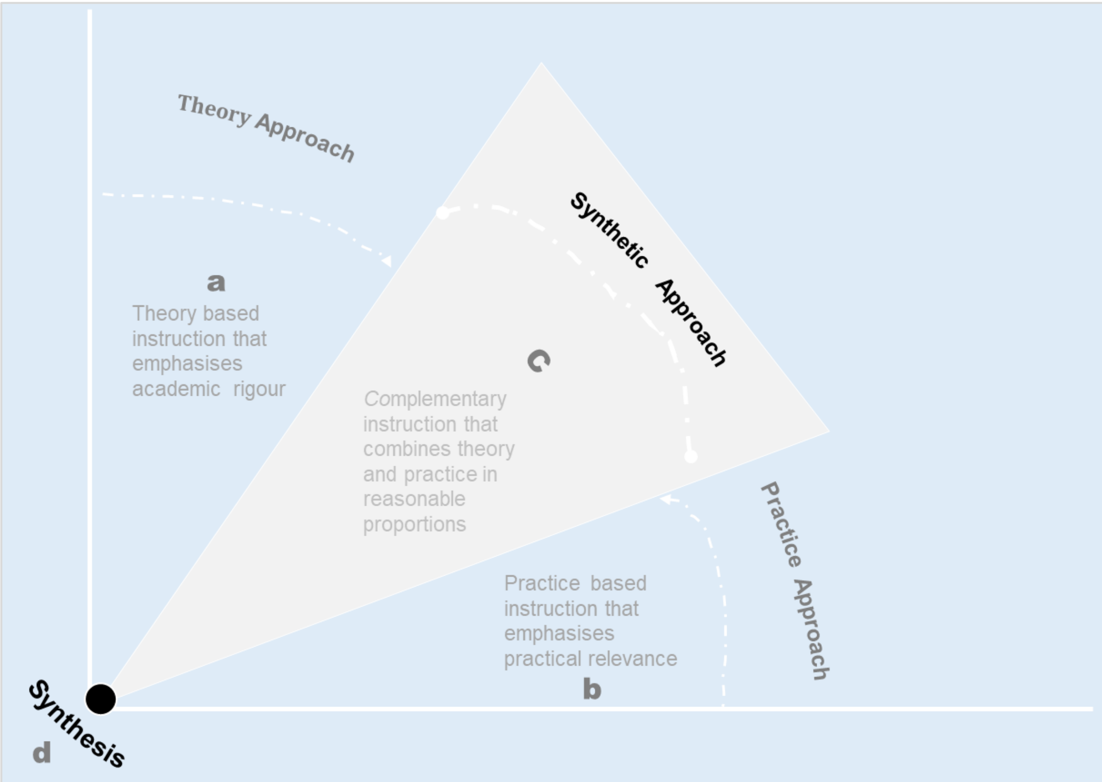
For the current study, empirical evidence that there is a positive and significant relationship between academic rigour and practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge and skills produced by South African business schools is observed. There is no better explanation of this empirical fact than that higher academic rigour leads to higher levels of practical relevance of academic offerings by business schools. Therefore: (i) rigorous academic preparation better explains the positive relationship between strategy theory and strategy practice; (ii) rigorous academic preparation that is rooted on pedagogy that blends theory and practice approaches to strategy teaching and learning, better explains the empirical fact of a positive and significant relationship between strategy theory and strategy practice.

6.2.1 Strategy Practitioners' Academic Preparation

Strategy pedagogy has been the subject of enduring debates for decades. Such debates, in which many scholars have weighed in, are mainly predicated on the underlying assumption that theory and practice are in tension (Yoder, 2019) and therefore mutually exclusive. For the most part, the debates have been between two main camps: one advocating for the theory approach to strategy teaching and learning (e.g., Grant, 2008; Buckley, 2018) and the other, advocating for the practice approach (e.g., Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002; Bower, 2008). As such debates have largely proven to be inconclusive, and maybe even counterproductive. A third line of argument that will likely illuminate the debate has recently emerged (e.g., Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008; Priem, 2018; Yoder, 2019). This line of argument is advocating for the blending of the two approaches in strategy teaching and learning. The idea is that, the theory and the practice approaches to strategy teaching and learning considered together, will likely improve both the rigour and relevance of the strategy body of knowledge and skills produced. Given the findings of this study, such an objective in strategy teaching and learning is highly desirable. Theory and practice are marrow and bone, you may not have one and not the other. [Strategy] theory and [strategy] practice are better together (Yoder, 2019), beginning from the classroom.

The need to blend theory and practice in the classroom in preparing business school graduates for novel, complex, eclectic, and contextual strategy practice environments cannot be overemphasised. Business school graduates should become better able to perceive key variables in decision situations, identify bivariate relationships among those variables, and examine multiple contingencies and configurations of such variables to determine for their own contexts their own theory of 'how the world works' (Priem & Harrison, 1994). Surely, such competencies should be developed in the classroom and the best way to develop them is through a blend of theory and practice in pedagogy, thus bringing together the *knowledge for practice* and *knowledge in practice* (Smith, 2018) at the point of production. As Jarzabkowski and Whittington (2008) note, it is in strategy teaching and learning in the classroom that the connections between strategy theory and practice are crystalised. To this end, Yoder (2019) proposes a theoretical model that is presented in Figure 6.2 that strategy academics can deploy to maximise student learning outcomes.

Figure 6.2: Theory and Practice Complementarity Framework



Source: Adapted from Yoder (2019)

The theoretical model presented in Figure 6.2 seeks to 'synthesise' theory and practice (d) in strategy teaching and learning in the classroom, by combining the two approaches (c), thus moving away from instruction that is either theory-heavy (a) or practice-heavy (b). Synthetic strategy teaching and learning that combines theory and practice in the classroom to form a solid, connected, and coherent learning experience is better positioned to prepare strategy graduates for complex, high velocity, and uncertain work environments. The complementarity model suggests that, for optimal student learning [that prepares graduates for swampy practice landscapes (Schön, 1995)] to occur, a synthesis of theory and practice in the classroom is necessary (Yoder, 2019). However, Yoder acknowledges, rightly so, that there is no single best means for achieving such a synthesis, as there are a myriad of contingencies at play that may affect the combination of theory and practice that translates into student learning. What is important though, she emphasises, is that the model assists in moving the discussion beyond the question of what the optimum level of theory and practice is that goes into strategy teaching and learning, toward a more nuanced exploration of how to increase the effectiveness of strategy instruction. As a capstone module with an integrative function (Priem, 2018), strategy would be better taught in a manner that weaves together theory and practice. Stressing the dialectics between theory and practice, Levins and Lewontin (1985) write, […] one [concept] cannot exist without the other, one acquires its properties from its relation to the other, and […] the properties of both evolve because of their interpenetration. After all, the purpose of [strategy] education is to improve the practice of [strategy] (Carter & Stickney, 2019).

6.2.2 Strategy Practitioners' Professional Practice

The strategy body of knowledge taught at most business schools embody some theoretical concepts that provide insight and foresight into complex business phenomena in real-world unpredictable business situations. Furthermore, business schools impart in their graduates hard and soft skills necessary for their efficacy in their personal, as well as professional lives, post-graduation. Professional strategy practice, empirical evidence shows, is informed by strategy theory, which provides strategy practitioners with capabilities to work in dynamic and eclectic practice environments. Strategy theory provides strategy practitioners with the multiple lenses necessary in dealing with the paradoxes, uncertainties, and contradictions of strategy practice and the ability to engage in novel, value accretive actions. As Patton and Higgs (2018) affirm, professional practice is a dynamic, multidimensional, and experiential phenomenon that is embedded in practice contexts, embodied in, and transformed through individual actions and praxis.

In practice engagements, practitioners develop mastery, and ideally, practical wisdom. As Hahn and Vignon (2019) observe, practical wisdom is the fruit of continuous behavioural adjustments that is developed through banal, non-heroic experiences of situated, everyday action. They further note that practitioners who achieve mastery in their work have come up against a myriad of [challenging] situations. Their mastery embodies what they learned in [business] school (Raelin, 2007) and lessons from their own experiences as they transcend rational explanations to find creative solutions to novel situations they encounter (Hahn & Vignon, 2019). The coalescence between practitioner competences, their 'professional beings', and the contextual settings of their practice determine the relevance of the knowledge and skills that they draw on in their day-to-day strategising. Practice is a situated and idiosyncratic phenomenon, and as such, as Pattton and Higgs (2018) note, professional practice is inseparably interwoven with the context within which it takes place.

6.2.3 The Academic Rigour and Practical Relevance of Strategy Theory

Generally, strategy theory produced by South African business schools whose graduates participated in the current study, was found to be academically sound and practically relevant as viewed from the perspective of the graduates themselves. Now viewed as a well-established academic discipline, strategy is rooted on a rigorous body of knowledge (Wiklund, Wright, & Zhara, 2019). The practical relevance of such knowledge is demonstrated by the findings of this study, thus cementing the legitimacy of the discipline. Importantly, academic rigour and practical relevance in strategy are not antithetical concepts, one of which should be elevated, while the other is sacrificed. Instead, one magnifies the other, they are better together. Quality strategy scholarship embodies both, and anything short of this ideal is not worth the paper on which it is written. "Relevance without rigor is not relevant" (Wiklund et al., 2019: 421) and rigour that does not translate into practical relevance is not rigour at all. Findings of the study point to a scenario where, to some degree, the strategy body of knowledge and skills produced by South African business schools are both scholarly sound and practically relevant. Rigour is embodied in both subject content and the delivery of such content to learners, while the relevance of such content is more a function of practitioners' reinterpretation of the content as applicable to contextual settings. To this end, discussions and conversations by scholarly communities on strategy scholarship and practice should not view the concepts of rigour and relevance as separate from each other but very much entwined.

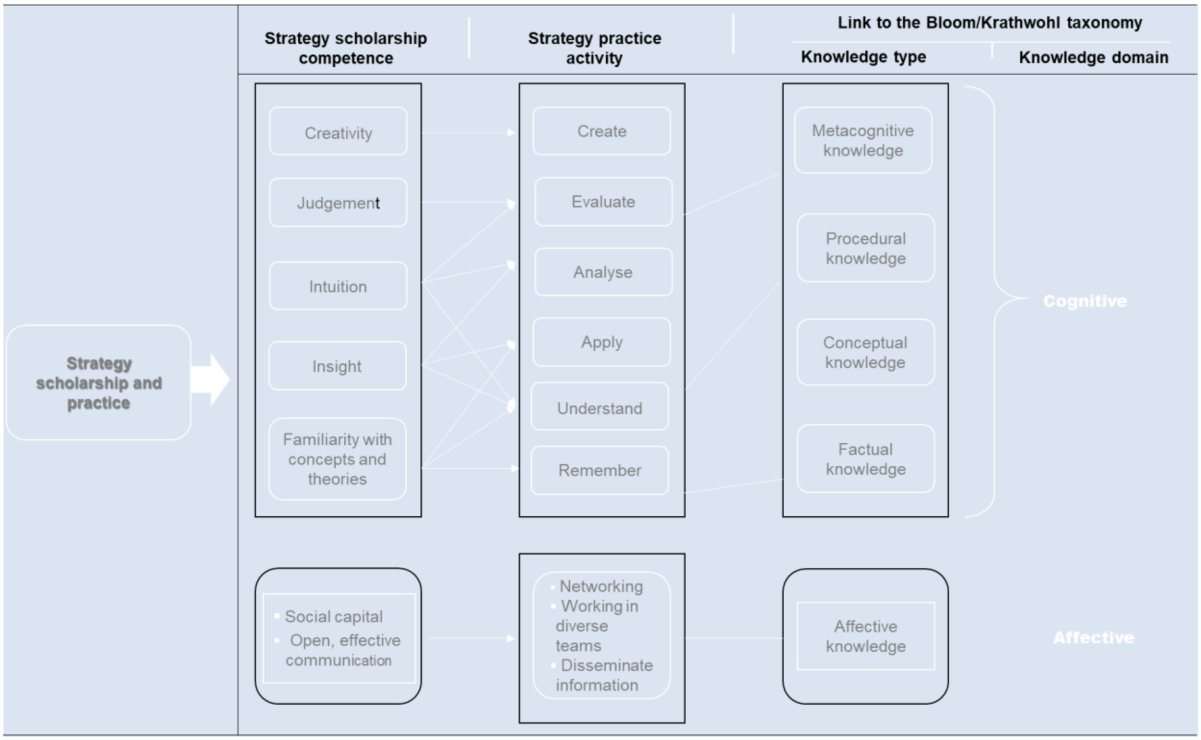
6.3 Academic Rigour and Practical Relevance of Strategy Theory: The Manner in Which the Relationship is Constituted

Findings of the study further show that, contrary to some assertions in extant literature that academic rigour and practical relevance are antithetical concepts devoid of mutual existence (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Ghoshal, 2005), the concepts are mutually constitutive and magnify each other. That is, rigorous academic preparation invigorates greater degrees of practical relevance and feedback from professional practice, in turn, invigorates rigour in knowledge production. To this end, there are synergies to be had in seamlessly melding theory and practice (Yoder, 2019). The findings lend credence to the *obiter dictum* that theory and practice are inextricably intertwined (Kolb, 2015).

6.3.1 Strategy Knowing and Doing and the 'State of Being'

In their analysis of graduate professional education, Radosevitch and Ulrich (cited in Mintzberg, 1980) note that teaching and learning should produce both intellectual and behavioural outcomes. In that light, Radosevitch and Ulrich conclude that [business school] graduates should be *thinkers* as well as *doers*, emphasis added. [Strategy] is not [just] an intellectual pursuit, [beyond that], it involves *doing* (Grant & Baden-Fuller, 2018) (emphasis in original). Very few, if any, graduates would acquire an education just for the sake of it, especially business management graduates. Business management is an applied science, the purpose of which, is to apply academic knowledge to solve business problems. A business management qualification takes the holder to a higher realm of *thought* and *action* – the knowing and doing of strategy. [Business school graduates] acquire knowledge and skills and develop values, attitudes and [behaviours] (Azizi & Mahmoudi, 2019) necessary for effective strategy practice. The strategy knowing and doing nexus that shapes the strategy practitioner as a 'professional being' is graphically depicted in Figure 6.3.

Figure 6.3: Strategy Practice and Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives



Source: Adapted from Grant and Baden-Fuller (2018)

Figure 6.3 provides a rich tapestry of the study findings that interweaves strategy scholarship and practice in complex work situations. The study found that strategy scholarship (academic learning at a high level) develops such competencies as insight, intuition, judgement, and creativity that enables strategy practitioners to analyse and evaluate diverse practice situations to create solutions that are appropriate for the context. At a basic level, such scholarship equips business school graduates with strategy concepts and principles they need to understand and be able to apply in novel situations. In a sense, a meaningful integration between surface and deep learning approaches leads to *effective learning* that makes it much easier for strategy graduates to transpose strategy knowledge and skills from the classroom to the workplace. Surface learning involves memorisation, understanding of [strategy] concepts, reflection on and application of those concepts, whereas deep learning requires graduates to meld [strategy] concepts with their personal experiences to develop innovative new meanings for themselves (Priem, 2018). Deep learning, as defined by Harlen and James (1997) means that concepts are actively understood and internalised by learners as they make sense in terms of their experiences of the world and so can be used in situations different from that in which they were learned.

Strategy practitioners do not necessarily act according to blueprints or recipes. A great deal of their praxis involve solving complex, unstructured, ill-defined and novel business problems in ambiguous, uncertain, and high stakes situations. As such activities require insight and judgement, strategy knowledge enables them to frame such problems by connecting disparate pieces of information (Bhardwaj, Crocker, Sims, & Wang, 2018). Impliedly, strategy theory is a bedrock of strategy action. As Figure 6.3 reflects, strategy practitioners' theoretical knowledge consists of factual and conceptual knowledge at quadrants A and B of Bloom's taxonomy and procedural and metacognitive knowledge at higher order thinking quadrants C and D of the taxonomy. Effective, more complete learning sufficiently covers all the quadrants.

Another important issue to note is that the knowing and doing of strategy plays out within social spaces. As depicted in Figure 6.3, graduates build social capital through interactions among themselves, academics, and experts in the field through the process of learning as they also hone their effective and open communication skills. As they transition to professional practice, they continue to build networks as they work in diverse teams and disseminate information to internal and external stakeholders. Functioning effectively in these social spaces draws heavily on affective knowledge. That is, astute strategy graduates, in their professional practice, draw from both cognitive and affective knowledge domains for them to function effectively in diverse and complex work environments.

6.3.2 The Performativity of Strategy Theory and the Construction of Relevance in Strategy Practice

In contrast with strategy theory, which is abstract and more general in nature, strategy practice is contextual, idiosyncratic, and concrete. However, strategy theory connects with practice through its performative power. Other than merely describing scenarios, situations, and conditions of practice, strategy theory creates them over time. To make effective use of such theoretical concepts in practical settings, strategy practitioners also deconstruct and reconstruct them to suit their contextual demands. In other words, the practical relevance of strategy academic concepts is not so much embodied in the actual content of the concepts as it is embodied in 'meanings' that practitioners assign to those concepts in perfomation of strategy. As Splitter (2017) notes, academic knowledge is considered practically relevant on the basis of practitioners' own experiences, regardless of how such knowledge was produced and disseminated, an assertion to which the current findings lend credence. That is, practitioners infuse 'imprecise' academic concepts with 'contextual' and 'idiosyncratic' meaning (Rasche & Seidl, 2016) that determines how such concepts become useful (Splitter, 2017).

As much as the content of business management curricula and the delivery thereof in the classroom is important, the meanings practitioners in professional practice assign to certain elements of such content and the value they extract from the knowledge gained and then applied in their work is even more important. Out of academic knowledge embodied in business management qualifications that they hold; strategy practitioners construct practical relevance as per their contextual demands of their practice. Strategy theories cannot be applied 'mechanically' – they are not 'hard and fast rules' of the strategising game. After all, they are social theories that do not necessarily address tangible phenomena that can always be objectively measured. Instead, they seek to address 'intangible', 'socially constructed' phenomena that are entangled in the praxis of everyday strategising and therefore, do not always, if ever, lend themselves squarely and neatly to positivistic, linear, and rational-analytic assessment and explanatory criteria that are characteristic of the natural sciences.

6.3.3 Strategy Knowing and Doing Outcomes

Despite assertions to the contrary, consistent with previous studies (e.g. Hay, 2006; Sturges, Simpson, & Altman, 2003; Holman, 2000; Hilgert, 1998), current study findings suggest that strategy knowing and doing produce practical outcomes for individual strategy practitioners. In the process, strategy process and practices are illuminated and enriched to the benefit of the organisation. Strategy scholarship appears to have a 'transformational learning experience' which influences [professional] practice in indirect, subtle and more nuanced ways (Hay, 2006). The critical outcomes of strategy knowing and doing, study findings suggest, are encapsulated in professional capital that strategy practitioners forge during their academic preparation and in professional practice. Professional capital is a multidimensional construct that speaks to highly committed, thoroughly prepared, continually developing [strategy practitioners] that are well networked among each other to maximise their personal development, and to be able to make effective judgments drawing from all their competences (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). In a nutshell, professional capital weaves together synergies between human, social, and decisional capital. Human capital embodies the stock of knowledge and skills that [strategy practitioners] use to create economic value (Ikoma & Zhang, 2019). Social capital embodies attitudes and values that govern human interactions (Vera-Toscano, Rodriques, & Costa, 2017). Whereas, decisional capital embodies the extent to which [strategy practitioners] can make judgements and well-informed decisions in circumstances where limited guidance is available (Ikoma & Zhang, 2019).

From a human capital perspective, strategy knowing and doing provides strategy practitioners with alternative ways of thinking and doing that broadens their perspectives (Hay, 2006). To strategy practitioners, strategy concepts are descriptive other than being prescriptive, providing them with insights that facilitate greater understanding of business problems. That is, they exude confidence and command influence among their peers and superiors alike. They feel that, though sometimes they may not achieve intended results, the actions they take and the activities they engage in are legitimated and validated by the competencies rooted in their academic knowledge and skills. From a social capital perspective, they build networks with fellow alumni and other professionals for mutual support and development. They also work in and manage teams better, competences that may be critically important in project-based settings. From a decisional capital perspective, strategy concepts, tools, and techniques provide strategy practitioners with multiple frames of decision situations, thereby enhancing their decision making. These strategy knowing and doing outcomes render the relationship between strategy theory and strategy practice even more critical, calling for a better understanding and management of their nuanced interplay.

6.4 Study Findings and the Research Questions

At the heart of any scientific enquiry are research questions that call for answers. As presented in Chapter 1, the study set out to find answers to the following questions:

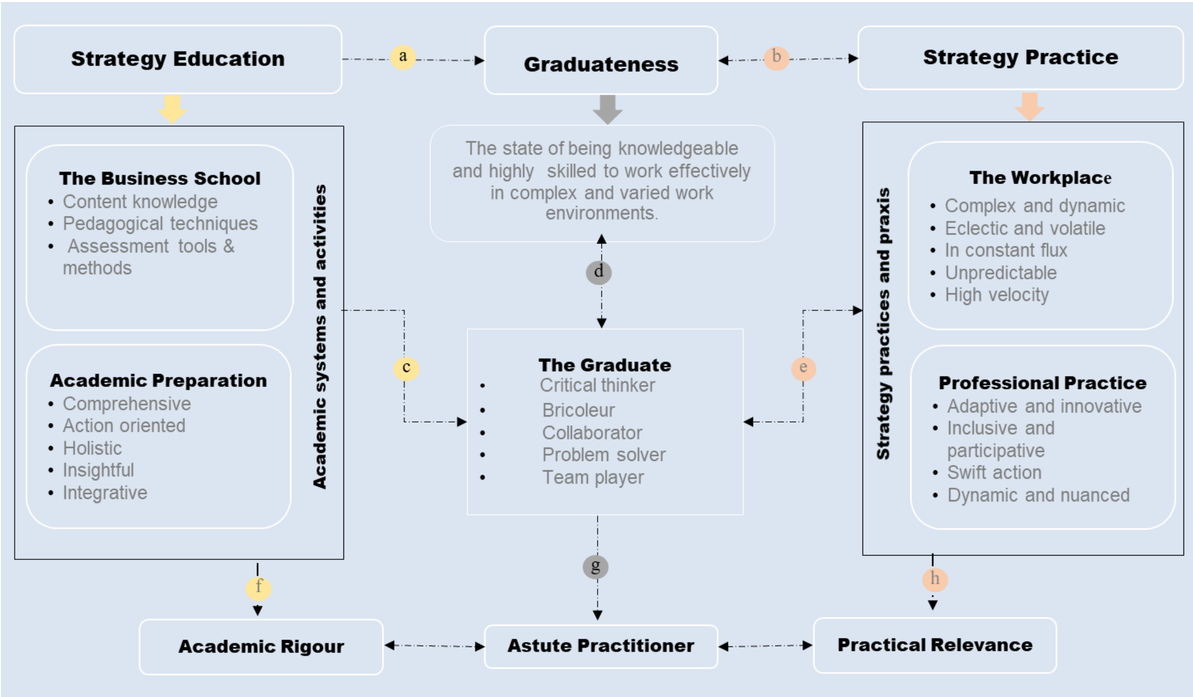
1. ‘What is the *relationship* between strategy theory and strategy practice in South Africa”?
    1.1. What is the *nature* of the relationship between academic rigour and practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge and skills produced by South African business schools?
    1.2. What is the *extent* of the relationship between academic rigour and practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge and skills produced by South African business schools?
2. How is the relationship between strategy theory and strategy practice constituted in South Africa?

The survey results provide answers to the questions on nature and the extent of the relationship between strategy and strategy theory. In a nutshell, the survey results reveal that a positive relationship of moderate strength exists between strategy theory and strategy practice. Impliedly, regorous strategy scholarship embodies practical relevance. In answering question 2, the phenomenological findings reveal that strategy theory is foundational to effective strategy practice and that strategy practitioners adapt strategy concepts and principles to suit contextual demands of practice. In other words, the relationship between strategy theory and strategy practice is dynamic, nuanced, and mutually constituted.

6.5 The Academic Rigour and Practical Relevance Model

“Effective analysis requires using data to build a comprehensive, contextualised, and integrated understanding or a theoretical model of what has been found” (Bazeley, 2013: 191). In a similar vein, Bloomberg and Volpe (2019) emphasise that researchers should go beyond merely restating study findings to a higher level of abstraction. To this end, critical interpretation of the study findings that are encapsulated in the five themes presented in Chapter 5 resulted in the development of an explanatory model that is presented in Figure 6.4. By definition, “a model is a systematic depiction of relationships between a set of concepts” (Morgan, 2018: 340). However, the development of a model was never the initial ‘goal’ of the study, but became necessary as spurred by the findings of the study. As presented in Chapter 5, two of the themes, rooted in academic preparation: *applied learning* (Theme 1) and *astute practitioners* (Theme 2) embody rigorous theory development by business schools. The other three that are rooted in professional practice: *firm foundation for practice* (Theme 3), *contextual conditions of practice* (Theme 4), and *adaptive and innovative knowledge application* (Theme 5) speak to the practical relevance of strategy theory. Combined, these themes encapsulate the dynamic and eclectic relationship between strategy theory and practice.

Figure 6.4: The Academic Rigour and Practical Relevance Model



Source: Own Compilation

As encapsulated in Figure 6.4, the study posits that strategy education (a) produces 'graduateness' in business school graduates. Graduateness is the intellectual [and affective] ability that is grounded in both disciplinary and functional knowledge [and skills] that enable competent and ethically sound graduates to work efficiently and effectively in complex and varied work environments (Grant, 2010; Bernstein & Osman, 2012). In turn, 'graduateness' feeds into strategy practice (b) through graduates' abilities to work effectively in complex and varied work environments. Academic systems and activities (c) that produce applied learning and foundational knowledge (Theme 1 and Theme 2) for graduates (e) lays the foundation for the effective performance of strategy practices and praxis in the workplace. Since the workplace is highly complex and dynamic, ever changing and unpredictable, professional practice is contextual and idiosyncratic. As such, strategy practitioners are called upon to be adaptive and innovative in their application of academic knowledge and skills (Theme 4 and Theme 5). Applied learning that is comprehensive, integrative, holistic, and insightful improves the rigour (f) of academic offerings by business schools. Rigorous academic preparation by business schools produce graduates (d) who develop into competent and astute practitioners (g) that are equipped with practically relevant knowledge and skills (h) for professional practice. The relevance of academic concepts is largely constructed by practitioners themselves who adapt the concepts (Theme 5) to suit the contextual conditions (Theme 4) of their practice. Findings of the study suggest that the relevance of strategy theory is not so much underpinned by the content of such theories as it is underpinned by the meanings constructed by practitioners from those theories. However, the relationship between the concepts and the meanings constructed by practitioners from those concepts is a complex and nuanced one which is influenced by such factors as the demographic profile of the individual practitioner and the context or the decision situation. The model, however, is a tentative one that requires empirical testing for further development.

6.6 Implications of the Study Findings

The study advances several interesting theoretical and practical implications for the field of strategy education and practice. Study findings indicate that the dynamic interplay between strategy theory and practice is rooted on the relational exchange between academe and business. With academics, graduates, and practitioners each playing a critical role in the nuanced interplay between strategy theory and strategy practice. This is so because academics are the custodians of rigorous strategy scholarship, graduates transpose such scholarship to practical work situations and strategy practitioners construct their practical relevance from such scholarship in order to effectively address contextual and idiosyncratic business problems in the workplace.

6.6.1 Implications for Academe

> "But [a] teacher's usefulness depends not so much on the actual amount of his [knowledge and skills] as upon the standard at which he aims. [A] true teacher is

> not content with dull thoughts, an indolent mind, or a loose memory. He constantly seeks higher attainments and better methods. His life is one of continual growth. In the work of such a teacher there is a freshness, a quickening power that awakens and inspires his [students]", Ellen G. White.

To become a highly competent strategy teacher is an ongoing learning process the end goal of which can never be attained (Priem, 2018). A confluence of factors such as the rapidity and velocity of change, technological advancements, and the complexity of modern-day business problems that are at play demands that strategy academics should stay abreast with the latest developments in the discipline. As the above quotation suggests, strategy academics should constantly seek higher attainments by improving the content of their academic offerings and the teaching and assessment methods they employ to realise educational objectives. To achieve such splendid ideals, strategy academics, though still maintaining their distinctive character that ultimately allows them to make a genuinely useful contribution [to practice] (Chia, 2014a) should thoroughly engage the practices and praxis of strategy practitioners. Impliedly, to produce rigorous academic offerings that are relevant to practice, academics need to be close to the reified and messy realities of practice yet be distant enough to be able to abstract from them at a higher level as well as critique them effectively.

6.6.2 Implications for Graduates

> "Instead of educated weaklings, [business schools] may send forth [graduates] strong to think and to act, [graduates] who are masters and not slaves to circumstances, [graduates] who possess breath of mind, clearness of thought, and the courage of their convictions", Ellen G. White

The importance of graduate education cannot be overemphasised, particularly for business management graduates as business plays a critical role in society today. [The relationship between strategy scholarship and strategy practice that is governed by dialectics or different logics mean that] abstract concepts only apply indirectly to everyday actions (Starbuck, 2018). As such, strategy academic concepts are hardly, if ever, applied raw as they are taught at business school. The implication for business school graduates, therefore, is that, to be effective in professional practice after graduation, they need to develop into pragmatic, inventive, and eclectic practitioners through bricolage. In so doing, they can make the most out of their strategy body of knowledge and skills in dynamic, idiosyncratic, and contextual environments. As alluded to in Chapter 5, developing such attributes will strongly be influenced by personal motivation which embodies both intrinsic and extrinsic value. For motivation to be a potent driver, the study posits that both intrinsic and extrinsic elements should be present but in varying degrees.

6.6.3 Implications for Business

The dialectic relationship between business and academe demands that they reach out to each other more readily and openly. Business organisations, as primary consumers of knowledge and skills produced by business schools should take greater interest in how such knowledge and skills are produced and subsequently applied in practice. Importantly, business should open for academic research on their practices, processes, and activities the output of which largely informs business management curricula. As Watson (2011) observes, [students and academic researchers] face enormous difficulties in gaining access to business for high quality academic research.

In practical settings, business organisations also need to do a lot more to get the most out of the competences embedded in academic qualifications such as MBA degrees their organisational members hold. As some organisations sponsor their employees to obtain such qualifications, they should provide support to their employees and create flexible environments that are conducive and receptive to new, creative and innovative ways of doing things. Work environments are reportedly rigid and hostile to new and innovative ways of doing things which may render academic knowledge to be of limited utility to practice. Business organisations are therefore encouraged to challenge the status quo and empower strategy practitioners to address business problems in more innovative ways.

6.6.4 Implications for Practitioners

Having a business qualification (e.g. an MBA) behind one's name does not guarantee effective and competent performance by a strategy practitioner in the workplace. Instead, a formal qualification arms an individual practitioner with the knowledge and the skills necessary to put such knowledge into action. Application of such knowledge is neither a simple, straightforward, nor clear-cut exercise. By and large, it borders on the ingenuity, creativity, and quiddity of the individual practitioner for effectiveness. After all, knowledge does not act, practitioners do. All what knowledge does is call to be acted upon by the knower. The implication therefore is that, other than being primarily driven by external goods such as money, status, and prestige (MacIntyre, 2007), strategy practitioners should be motivated by standards of excellence and achievement to make a difference in their professional lives and in the operations of organisations for which they work and beyond. That is, the onus to make a difference in their professional spaces primarily resides with them as practitioners more than anyone else.

6.7 Conclusions from the Study Findings

The thesis advanced in Chapter 1 of the dissertation postulates that there is a positive relationship between the academic rigour and practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge and skills produced by South African business schools. After thorough and detailed analyses of both quantitative and qualitative research data, and the critical interpretation of the study findings, the following conclusions are drawn:

First, strategy theory is extremely important to strategy practice as it forms the bedrock on which effective strategy practice is built. In other words, there is theory behind every action. Strategy theory provides concepts, principles, and frameworks that aid practitioners in framing decision situations and spur action in complex and eclectic environments. The value of strategy theory rests on the development of such theory which should plausibly be steeped in a blend of both theory and practice. *Second*, contextual conditions of practice embedded in strategy practitioners' lifeworlds play an important role in their lived experiences with the relevance of the strategy academic knowledge and skills. Practitioners' lifeworlds (practice environments) are diverse, unique, and constantly changing, and therefore, context is very important in the use and utility of strategy concepts and tools in practical situations. *Third*, business school graduates not only play an important role in transposing knowledge and skills from academe to business but actively construct the relevance thereof in professional practice through adaptation and bricolage. Given the uniqueness, dynamism, and the ever-changing nature of strategy practitioners' lifeworlds, for effective application of strategy theory in these lifeworlds, each practitioner deconstructs and reconstructs strategy concepts as they enact and re-enact them in their day-to-day strategising. *Fourth*, much of academic offerings, notwithstanding some inherent shortcomings, are relevant to practice as they legitimise the ontic actions of strategy practitioners and add instrumental as well as conceptual value to their practice and praxis. In sum, contrary to some calls to the contrary (e.g. Parker, 2018) business schools, as producers of *knowlegde for [business] practice*, (Smith, 2018) create and add academic, personal, [business], and social value (Hay, 2008). They therefore, deserve support and greater appreciation of the work they are doing in dynamic, eclectic, intellectually challenging, and ever-changing environments.

6.8 Contributions of the Study

The study contributes to the existing literature on the dynamic interplay between strategy theory and practice in theoretical, methodological, and practical ways. Theoretically, study findings contribute to our understanding of the nuanced interplay between strategy theory and practice within a strategy-as-practice pespective. As the academic rigour and practical relevance model explains, rigorous strategy scholarship produces 'graduateness' in learners, an attribute that feeds to practitioners' effectiveness in professional practice. This finding provides solid evidence that strategy-as-practice can be a useful theoretical perspective for studying ontic phenomena like practices and praxis. Methodologically, the study adopted an integrated design that allowed phenomena under study to be dealt with in a more holistic and integrative manner. Study findings did not only reveal a relationship between the concepts of rigour and relevance but went further to explain how such a relationship is constituted. For example, the study found that rigorous academic preparation explains the empirical fact of a positive and significant relationship between strategy theory and strategy practice. Empirically, study findings provide evidence that points to a situation where the gap between theory and practice should not be a cause for concern. Instead, study findings suggest, understanding the nuances between theory and practice and better managing the dynamic interplay between them may assist in producing academic knowledge and skills that are not only academically rigorous but also practically relevant.

6.9 Recommendations for Policymakers

Study findings suggest that current debates bewailing the gap between management theory and management practice may be misdirrected. Instead of a scenario where management education is either theory or practice driven, findings of the study point to a situation where its development should encompass both. From a policy perspective, it is recommended that, instead of advocating for a practice oriented approach to management education, the primary objective of policy frameworks should be to promote academically sound management offerings that are relevant to the practical needs of business in a developmental state like South Africa.

6.10 Limitations of the study

Findings of the study provide important insights into the nuanced and dynamic interplay between strategy theory and strategy practice, however, it is not without limitations. *First*, given the small sample size for the survey (N = 57) and purposefully sampled interview participants (N = 16), the study’s findings are not generalisable. *Second*, it is possible that the practices, praxis, experiences, and perspectives of business school alumni who took part in the in the study differ from those that did not participate. *Third*, participants’ demographic details and that may affect their adoption and use of strategy knowledge and skills may not have been treated holistically. *Fourth,* participants only shared their experiences on the importance and utility of strategy concepts, tools and techniques without having to describe in detail how they used those concepts, tools, and techniques. *Fifth*, although this study examined the nature of the relationship between *academic rigour* and *practical relevance* of strategy scholarship, it did not determine the causal nature of this relationship, as correlation does not imply causality. Causality can only be determined when an experimental research design is adopted. Pertinent to the study was the direction and strength of the relationship. *Sixth*, the study did not consider the knowledge and skills strategy practitioners gained through in-house training or self-learning, other aspects that may play out in the relationship between academic rigour and practical relevance.

6.11 Suggestions for Further Research

The interplay between strategy theory and strategy practice has received scant regard in extant literature. Instead, discussions have largely centred around the gap between strategy theory and practice, mostly to the detriment of both. As noted earlier, what matters most in the dynamic interplay between strategy theory and strategy practice is not the similarities between the two but their differences which make each matter to the other. Ironically, differences between strategy theory and practice has been viewed in extant literature as a problem that is causing a lot of tension and contradictions that render much of strategy theory irrelevant to practice. Although the emphasis on the *gap* between strategy theory and practice is not entirely flawed, such an emphasis fails to capture and appreciate the richness of "the dynamic interplay between unified oppositions" (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996: 10) that characterises the relationship between theory and practice. To this end the researcher suggests the following research directions:

First, study findings point to a need for ethnographic research on how strategy practitioners make meaning out of strategy academic concepts in their day-to-day strategising. In the process of meaning making, strategy practitioners construct their own practical relevance of strategy concepts. Watson (2011: 205-6) defines ethnography as a 'style of social science writing which draws upon the writer's close observation of and involvement with people in a particular social setting and relates the words spoken and the practices observed or experienced to the overall cultural framework within which they occurred'. *Second*, study findings further point to a need for longitudinal research, spanning both the classroom at business schools and the workplace, with a view to understanding the development of strategy knowledge and skills and the subsequent application of such knowledge and skills in the workplace. Findings of such studies may likely address not only the gap between theory and practice but may shed some light on the interplay between theory and practice to add to the improvement of management theories. *Third*, experimental studies that are aimed at determining the causal nature of the relationship between academic rigour and practical relevance of strategy theory may lead to a better understanding of the phenomenon, such that the relationship can be better managed for practical outcomes. *Fourth*, a similar study may be undertaken, but from the perspective of employers.

6.12 Personal Reflection

After graduating with an undergraduate degree, I was now a learned person – a scholar. A university qualification qualifies the holder as a scholar, I thought. However, I soon realised that I had not reached my pinnacle with regards to my educational attainments – let alone my meaningful contribution to society. The more knowledge one gains, the more one realises how much more there is out there yet to be discovered. This fact is succinctly captured by Nelson Mandela when he says: "after climbing a great hill, one only finds that there are many more hills to climb". This sober reality resulted in me enrolling for and successfully completing an honours degree and thereafter enrolling for a master’s degree - the turning point of my scholarly journey.

The scholarly journey of discovery that culminated in this dissertation was not easy. Academic writing is hard work, it does not come naturally, at least for me. Many a times, scholarly writing would place heavy cognitive demands on me, at times to the point of stress. Occasionally, it would take me in excess of 4 days to construct a meaningful paragraph consisting of a few good sentences. One can imagine the frustration! Despite some moments of angst, turmoil, and despair, the scholarly journey that culminated in this dissertation had its moments of joy and fulfilment. Interacting and learning from great and amazing people, professionals and scholars alike, was a great and immensely rewarding experience. Will this kind of journey be worth repeating? Certainly, many times over, actually – the benefits far outweigh the costs.

6.13 Research Conclusion

Despite some strident voices from reputable scholars casting some aspersions on business school education, study findings suggest that management education, in particular strategy scholarship, could be of greater value to practice than is currently appreciated. As Lockett (2019) observes, criticisms that business school education is irrelevant and self-serving is increasingly outdated and may even be [misleading] as they fail to account for the changes business schools have made over time. Other than focusing scholarly efforts and energies on closing the gap between academic rigour and the practical relevance of business school education, such efforts and energies should be directed to understanding the nuanced interplay between the concepts. Academic rigour and practical relevance exist in a synergistic relationship, as together they are more valuable. Independent of each other, they may be of little, or of no consequence, but they are better, meaningful, and more potent together.

To appreciate the synergies and nuances between management education and practice, a close relationship between academics and practitioners should be developed. For business school academics, other than disparaging the corporate world and deriding practice, and for business to be looking at academe with disdain, they should increasingly be working together to increase the rigour and relevance of academic offerings. Business schools should foster open and collaborative relationships with practitioners, because together, they can create [sustainable] economic and social value (Lockett, 2019). Academe and business, though they exist and operate in different spaces, need to serve each other with passion and a spirit of camaraderie, as hostility towards, and detachment from each other, will be detrimental not only to them, but to society at large.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: The Faculty Survey of Student Engagement Item Usage Agreement

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FSSE faculty survey of student engagement

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For The Trustees of Indiana University:

Allison BrckaLorenz — 2/22/18

Thomas F. Nelson Laird — Date
Associate Professor& FSSE Principle Investigator
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For Licensee:

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Appendix 2: Copy of the Survey Questionnaire

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ACADEMIC RIGOUR AND PRACTICAL RELEVANCE SURVEY

Background

Debates and discourses on the practical relevance of academic knowledge and skills produced by South African Business Schools have been going on for some time both in business and academic circles. However, such debates and discourses appear to be informed by very little empirical findings. Against this background, the aim of this survey is to gather empirical data from professionals *like you* on the practical relevance of the Strategy body of knowledge and skills you gained from your business school.

The survey is divided into four sections. In section 1 the survey seeks to capture your experiences with the rigours of your academic preparation. In Section 2 it seeks to capture your experiences with the relevance of your academic knowledge and skills to your professional practice. In section 3, the researcher would like to know a bit about you. In section 4 the researcher extends a call for participation in subsequent interviews aimed at gathering thick and rich data on the phenomena of interest. Kindly answer **ALL** questions.

1. Academic Preparation

The primary purpose of Business Schools is to produce competent graduates for professional positions in business. To achieve such lofty ideals, Business Schools prepare their students for professional practice under rigorous academic conditions. This section seeks to capture how rigorous was your academic preparation by your business school for a successful career in business.

1.1. Higher-Order Learning

Rigorous intellectual and creative work is central to student learning and quality education. Business schools promote high levels of student achievement by inspiring students to engage in complex cognitive tasks requiring more than mere memorisation of facts. *For each of the below statements, kindly mark the option that best describes your own experience with deep learning.*

	During your time at business school, how often did your coursework emphasise the following:	**Never**	**Sometime**	**Often**	**Very Often**
1.1.1	Applying facts, theories, or methods to practical problems or new situations?	○	○	○	○
1.1.2	Analysing an idea, experience, or line of reasoning in depth by examining its parts?	○	○	○	○
1.1.3	Evaluating a point of view, decision, or information source?	○	○	○	○
1.1.4	Forming a new idea or understanding from various pieces of information?	○		○	○
1.1.5	Solving complex real-world problems?	○	○	○	○

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1.2. Reflective & Integrative Learning

Personally connecting with course material requires students to relate their understandings and experiences to the content at hand. Lecturers emphasising reflective and integrative learning inspire students to make connections between their learning and the world around them, reexamining their own beliefs and considering issues and ideas from others' perspectives. *For each of the below statements, Kindly mark the option that best describes your own experience with reflective and integrated learning.*

	During your time at business school, how often have you:	Never	Sometime	Often	Very Often
1.2.1.	Combined ideas from different courses when completing assignments?	○	○	○	○
1.2.2	Integrated real-world societal problems or issues into your learning processes.	○	○	○	○
1.2.3	Included diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) in course discussions or assignments?	○	○	○	○
1.2.4	Examined the strengths and weaknesses of your own views on a topic or issue?	○	○	○	○
1.2.5	Tried to better understand someone else's views by imagining how an issue looks from his or her perspective?	○	○	○	○
1.2.6	Learned something that changed the way you understand an issue or concept?	○	○	○	○
1.2.7	Integrated knowledge and skills from different sources and experiences?	○	○	○	○

1.3. Quantitative Reasoning

Quantitative literacy, the ability to use and understand numerical and statistical information in everyday life is an increasingly important outcome of higher education. Business school students should have ample opportunities to develop their ability to reason quantitatively, to evaluate, support, and critique arguments using numerical and statistical information. *For each of the below statements, kindly mark the option that best describes your experience with the development of your quantitative* reasoning *skills.*

	During your time at business school, how often have you:	Never	Sometime	Often	Very Often
1.3.1	Reached conclusions based on your own analysis of numerical information?	○	○	○	○
1.3.2	Used numerical information to examine a real-world problem or issue?	○	○	○	○
1.3.3	Evaluated what others have concluded from numerical information?	○	○	○	○

1.4. Learning Strategies

Business School students enhance their learning and development by actively engaging with and analysing course material rather than approaching learning as mere absorption. *For each of the below statements, kindly mark the option that best describes how often did you apply deep learning strategies during your time at business school.*

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During your time at business school, how often have you:		Never	Sometime	Often	Very Often
1.4.1	Identified and used relevant information from diverse sources when completing assignments?	○	○	○	○
1.4.2	Reviewed your notes after class?	○	○	○	○
1.4.3	Summarised what you learned in class or from course materials?	○	○	○	○

2. Professional Practice

As Business School graduates transition to professional practice, they are expected to transpose their academic knowledge and skills to real-world work settings. This section seeks to capture how practically relevant to your day-to-day strategising activities is the strategy body of knowledge and skills you gained from business school.

2.1. Strategy Theoretical Knowledge Application

The strategy body of knowledge taught at most business schools embody some theoretical frameworks intended to provide insight and foresight into complex business phenomena in real-world unpredictable business situations. *For each of the below statements, kindly mark the option that best describes the level of importance you attach thereto.*

In performing your strategising activities, how important do you consider the following capabilities provided by strategy theoretical knowledge?		Not Important	Slightly Important	Important	Very Important
2.1.1	A dynamic and eclectic view of the environment within which your organisation operates.	○	○	○	○
2.1.2	A systemic view on strategy practice highlighting interconnections and interdependencies between business functions.	○	○	○	○
2.1.3	Multiple lenses necessary in dealing with the paradoxes in strategy practice.	○	○	○	○
2.1.4	Ability to engage in novel, value accretive actions.	○	○	○	○

2.2. Strategy Practice Skills Application

Business schools impart in their students hard and soft skills necessary for their efficacy in their personal as well as professional lives after graduation. *For each of the below statements, kindly mark the option that best describes the level of importance you attach thereto.*

In performing your strategising activities, how important do you consider the competencies provided by strategy practice skills?		Not Important	Slightly Important	Important	Very Important
2.4.1	Critically evaluate multiple situations to generate novel ideas necessary for creative problem solving.	○	○	○	○
2.4.2	Effectively communicate both orally and in writing with diverse stakeholders at different levels.	○	○	○	○
2.4.3	Analyse and evaluate complex business situations to determine the best possible course of action.	○	○	○	○
2.4.4	Analyse large sets of information from different sources to make sound and effective decisions under conditions of uncertainty.	○	○	○	○
2.4.5	Collaborate and effectively manage conflict in teams with diverse talents and cultural backgrounds.	○	○	○	○

2.3. Strategy Tools Adoption

Strategy tools constitute an important element of the strategy body of knowledge taught at most business schools across South Africa. Such tools are posited to have become part of strategy practitioners' professional lives. *For each of the strategy tools named below, kindly mark the option that best describes the level of importance you attach thereto.*

In performing your strategising activities, how important do you consider the following strategy tools?		Not Important	Slightly Important	Important	Very Important
2.2.1.	SWOT Analysis	○	○	○	○
2.2.2	Porter's Five Forces	○	○	○	○
2.2.3	Value Chain Analysis	○	○	○	○
2.2.4	Scenario Planning	○	○	○	○
2.2.5	Balanced Scorecard	○	○	○	○

2.4. Strategy Tools Affordances

The curriculum of the strategy capstone course taught at most business schools includes an array of tools and techniques intended to structure strategic issues for analysis and interrogation. *For each of the below statements, kindly mark the option that best describes the level of importance you attach thereto.*

How important do you consider the following capabilities provided by the strategy tools that you use in performing your strategising activities?		Not Important	Slightly Important	Important	Very Important
2.3.1	Ability to streamline ambiguous and messy business problems and issues.	○	○	○	○
2.3.2	Capabilities that allow you to perform routinised as well as innovate activities.	○	○	○	○
2.3.3	Support in your decision-making processes in complex business situations.	○	○	○	○
2.3.4	Guidance on particular courses of action.	○	○	○	○

3. Demographic Details

Please take a few minutes to tell me about yourself. The information you provide is solely for academic research purposes, as such, it will be treated in strict confidence.

3.1. What is your sex?

◯ Male ◯ Female

3.2. What is your age group?

◯ 26 - 30 ◯ 31 - 35 ◯ 36 - 40 ◯ 41 - 45 ◯ 46 - 50 ◯ 51+

3.3. What is your highest academic qualification?

◯ Masters Degree ◯ Doctral Degree ◯ Post Graduate Diploma ◯ Other

3.4. From which business school did you graduate with your highest qualification?

◯ Unisa School of Business Leadership ◯ Gordon Institute of Business Science

◯ Stellenbosch University Business School ◯ UCT Grauduate School of Business

◉ Wits Business School ◯ UKZN School of Busines & Leadership

3.5. In which year did you graduate with your highest Business School qualification?

◯ 2006 ◯ 2007 ◯ 2008 ◯ 2009 ◯ 2010

◯ 2011 ◯ 2012 ◯ 2013 ◯ 2014 ◯ 2015

3.6. In which department or function do you currently work?

◯ General Management ◯ Finance & Accounting ◯ Information Technology ◯ Operations

◯ Human Resources ◯ Marketing & Sales ◯ Supply Chain ◯ Other

3.7. How many years of management or professional experience do you have?

◯ 1 - 3 ◯ 4 - 6 ◯ 7 - 9 ◯ 10+

Appendix 3: Copy of the Interview Guide

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Interview Guide: Academic Rigour and Practical Relevance of an MBA Qualification

Study Topic: **Strategy Practices and Praxis: A Case of Selected South African Business School Alumni**

Research Question: How academically sound and practically relevant is the strategy body of knowledge and skills obtained from an MBA programme in South Africa?

Research objective: To investigate academic soundness and practical relevance of the strategy body of knowledge and skills obtained from an MBA programme in South Africa.

Interview Question	Probes
1. To begin with, how does the content of your MBA programme compare with the practical demands of your job?	1.1. From your personal experience, how such content is connected to the practical demands of business? 1.2. May you briefly describe any instances where you used some content from your MBA programme to address work-related issues and the outcomes of your actions.
2. When you had already been gainfully employed, what motived you to enroll for an MBA programme?	2.1. What are some of the practices or new ways of doing things that you adopted after graduating with your MBA? 2.2. How do you imagine yourself performing in your current role without your MBA qualification?
3. How have your work patterns and behaviours changed as a result of the knowledge and skills you gained from your MBA programme?	3.1. Kindly describe for me a few examples of such changes. 3.2. What were the effects of such changes?
4. May you kindly describe for me a situation where you applied management theory to a practical, work-related problem.	4.1. How did you do it and what were the outcomes of your actions? 4.2. How was the theory relevant to the situation?
5. In your strategising activities, what are your experiences with the use of such tools as the SWOT Analysis, the Balanced Scorecard, or any other strategy tool?	5.1. Kindly describe for me how are the strategy tools you are using providing you with the capabilities to cope with today's dynamic and volatile business environment? 5.2. How are such tools allowing you to maintain a balanced focus on routinised and innovative strategising activities?
6. Against the background of some claims that much of business school produced knowledge is not actionable in practice, what is your overall experience with the knowledge and skills you obtained from your MBA in relation to the practical demands of your job.	6.1. How do you find your academic knowledge and skills to be practicable in the workplace? 6.2. In your personal experience, how does strategy theory inform or impact strategy practice?
7. **Do you know any other MBA degree holder who graduated between 2006 and 2015 who may be interested in the study?**	

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Appendix 4: Ethics Clearance Certificate

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UNISA DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

10 November 2017

ERC Reference #: 2017_CEMS_BM_065
Name: Mr Amkela Ngwenya
Student #: 43974341
Staff #: 90058372

Dear Mr Amkela Ngwenya,

Decision: Ethics Approval from 10 November 2017 to 9 November 2020

Researcher(s): Mr Amkela Ngwenya
E-mail address: amkelab.ngwenya@gmail.com
Telephone #: 082 052 6511

Supervisor (s): Prof Annemarie Davis
E-mail address: davisa@unisa.ac.za
Telephone #: (012) 429 8357

Working title of research:

Strategy Practices and Praxis of Selected South African Business School Alumni in a Financial Services Organisation

Qualification: MCom 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 3 years, from 10 November 2017 to 9 November 2020.

*The **low risk application** was **reviewed** by the Department of Business Management Ethics Review Committee on 18 October 2017 in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.*

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.

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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 (9 November 2020). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

*The reference number **2017_CEMS_BM_065** should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Yours sincerely,

Chair: Prof Sharon Rudansky-Kloppers
Department of Business Management
E-mail: radans@unisa.ac.za
Tel: (012) 429-4370

Executive Dean: Prof Thomas Mogale
Economic and Management Sciences
E-mail: mogalmt@unisa.ac.za
Tel: (012) 429- 4805

Appendix 5: Copy of Survey Respondent Letter of Informed Consent

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Respondent Information Sheet

Dear Valued Respondent

My name is Amkela Ngwenya, I am doing research towards a Master of Commerce degree at the University of South Africa with Annemarie Davis an Associate Professor in the Department of Business Management and Dr. Douglas Ncube an Academic Consultant in the Department of Business Management. We are cordially inviting you to participate in a study on "Academic Rigour and Practical Relevance of Strategy Body of Knowledge and Skills produced by South African Business Schools".

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to explore business school alumni's experiences with the rigour of their academic preparation and the practical relevance of their strategy body of knowledge and skills in professional practice.

Your Valued Participation

You have been selected to participate in this study because you are a business school graduate whose professional responsibilities and day-to-day functions involve strategising. As such, you a better placed to provide data on how rigorous your academic preparation was and how practically relevant your strategy body of knowledge and skills is to your day-to-day strategising activities.

The Nature of Your Participation

The survey is organised around two primary themes of *academic preparation* and *professional practice*. In addition, you are required to provide some demographic details. Completing the questionnaire should not take more than 30 minutes of your valuable time. In answering each question, kindly choose an option that best reflects your experiences and perceptions as closely as possible. The questionnaire comprises a total of 44 question items.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to take part. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to accept the below conditions. If you so wish, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving reasons for such withdrawal and without any adverse consequences for your decision.

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Confidential and Anonymity

This study involves an anonymous survey, as such; your name will not appear in your responses. You therefore, cannot be identified in person based on your responses. However, your responses may be reviewed by people responsible for the credibility of the study: the statistician and the Research Ethics Review Committee members.

Storage and Destruction of Information

Electronic files containing your responses will be stored on a password protected computer for a period of 5 years. After the expiration of a 5-year period, all files will be deleted from the computer hard drive.

Ethical Approval

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the College of Economic and Management Sciences, Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if required.

Informed Consent

I hereby confirm that I have read and understood the information provided on the respondent information sheet detailing the nature, purpose of the study, and my rights as a study participant. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that, if I so wish, I am free to withdraw from further participation at any time without giving reasons for my withdrawal and that I will not suffer any adverse consequences for my withdrawal.

I am aware that the findings of this survey will be anonymously processed into a research report.

To access the survey and complete the questionnaire, click *accept*.
To exit the survey click *decline*.

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Appendix 6: Copy of Interview Participant Letter of Informed Consent

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Informed Consent to Participate in an Academic Study

Interview date and time: ………………………….. Interview venue: ……………………………………

Participant number ……………………………….. Participant's position: ……………………………..

Participant's alma mater: ………………………….. Year MBA obtained: ………………………………

Dear Valued Participant

Thank you very much for your interest and willingness to participate in an academic study the objective of which is to gain a better understanding of the academic rigour and practical value of the strategy body of knowledge and skills you obtained from your MBA qualification. Your insights into the practical applicability and value of such knowledge and skills will be greatly appreciated as they will assist me in successfully completing my dissertation and adding to the knowledge base on management education in South Africa. The study is being conducted against the background of some criticism that much of the knowledge and skills produced by Business Schools is not actionable in practice.

Ethical Considerations:

a) This study involves anonymous in-depth interviews. Your name will not appear in the interview guide and your responses will be treated in strict confidence. You cannot be identified in person based on your responses.

b) Your responses may be reviewed by people responsible for the credibility of the study: the transcriber, an external coder and the Research Ethics Committee members. That is, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study.

c) Your participation in this study is voluntary and you may, if you so wish, withdraw from the study at any stage without giving reasons or suffering any negative consequences.

d) The interview should take an average of an hour of your valuable time.

e) With your consent, the interview will be audiotaped with the proviso that if you so wish, without giving reasons, you may ask that the audiotape be switched off at any stage of the interview.

f) The results of the study will be used for academic purposes only and may be published in an academic journal. A summary of the study findings will be provided upon request.

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g) Files containing interview responses will be kept by the researcher on a password protected computer for a period of 5 years after which such files will be deleted from the computer system.

For any queries regarding the study, kindly contact my supervisor, Prof. Annemarie Davis on (012) 429 8357 or davisa@unisa.ac.za, she will gladly assist.

To indicate that you have read and understood the information provided above, and that you voluntarily consent to participate in the study kindly sign below.

______________________ ________________

Participant's signature **Date**

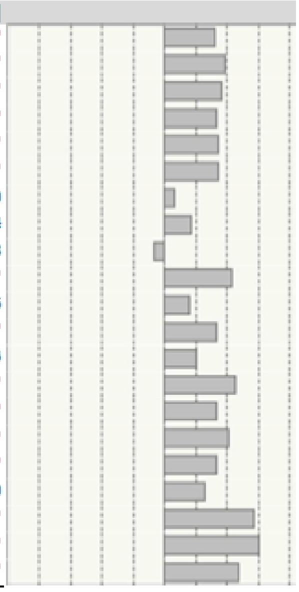
Yours Sincerely,

Amkela Ngwenya
☎ **Cell:** +2782 052-6511
✉ **E-mail:** ngwena2@unisa.ac.za

Appendix 7: Extract of Multivariate Correlations Generated in JMP®

Nonparametric: Spearman's ρ

Variable	by Variable	Spearman ρ	Prob>|ρ|
Reflective & Integrative Learning	Higher-Order Learning	0.3214	0.0148*
Quantitative Reasoning	Higher-Order Learning	0.3925	0.0025*
Quantitative Reasoning	Reflective & Integrative Learning	0.3666	0.0050*
Strategy Theoretical Knowledge Application	Higher-Order Learning	0.3333	0.0113*
Strategy Theoretical Knowledge Application	Reflective & Integrative Learning	0.3491	0.0078*
Strategy Theoretical Knowledge Application	Quantitative Reasoning	0.3456	0.0085*
Strategy Practice Skills Application	Higher-Order Learning	0.0678	0.6160
Strategy Practice Skills Application	Reflective & Integrative Learning	0.1681	0.2114
Strategy Practice Skills Application	Quantitative Reasoning	-0.0643	0.6348
Strategy Practice Skills Application	Strategy Theoretical Knowledge Application	0.4298	0.0008*
Strategy Tools Adoption	Higher-Order Learning	0.1623	0.2276
Strategy Tools Adoption	Reflective & Integrative Learning	0.3303	0.0121*
Strategy Tools Adoption	Quantitative Reasoning	0.2060	0.1243
Strategy Tools Adoption	Strategy Theoretical Knowledge Application	0.4580	0.0003*
Strategy Tools Adoption	Strategy Practice Skills Application	0.3305	0.0120*
Strategy Tools Affordance	Higher-Order Learning	0.4143	0.0014*
Strategy Tools Affordance	Reflective & Integrative Learning	0.3354	0.0108*
Strategy Tools Affordance	Quantitative Reasoning	0.2566	0.0540
Strategy Tools Affordance	Strategy Theoretical Knowledge Application	0.5778	<.0001*
Strategy Tools Affordance	Strategy Practice Skills Application	0.6041	<.0001*
Strategy Tools Affordance	Strategy Tools Adoption	0.4767	0.0002*



Appendix 8: Extract of Quotations Generated in ALTAS.ti®

Project: Strategy Practices and Praxis: A Case of Selected South African Business School Alumni

Report created by user on 18-Mar-19

Quotation Report

1:24 Our balance scorecard: we've got our own balance scorecard that we'v...... (5:1269 [5:1552]) - D 1: Participant 1

Our balance scorecard: we've got our own balance scorecard that we've developed specifically for our sales representatives and the balance scorecard allows us to - our modified balance scorecard allows us to be able to measure our reps on our set of key performance indicators

---

1:28 So we've got to be innovative in the campaigns that we're running to...... (7:42 [7:175]) - D 1: Participant 1

So we've got to be innovative in the campaigns that we're running to change it up and keep the doctors interested in our products.

2:1 but what it has given me, my MBA qualification, is an ability to hav......: Participant 2

… but what it has given me, my MBA qualification, is an ability to have a big picture perspective with regards to all the aspects of the business and how they work together, **D2-** (1:1089 [1:1264]).

2:4 one is sensitised to the fact that before you step into a certain te...... (1:2477 [1:2692]) - D 2: Participant 2

one is sensitised to the fact that before you step into a certain terrain to conduct business, one has to do their homework to ensure that one has maximised the chances of successfully executing the activities.

2:10 I think working in syndicates and having to gain consensus of a team b...... (3:1127 [3:1381]) - D 2: Participant 2

I think working in syndicates and having to gain consensus of a team before one is able to start to do the work I think has given me a lot of understanding about influence and being able to work cross-functionally where there are many stakeholders

1

Marianne Kapp Language Services – *marscaro@gmail.com*

Cape Town
22 November 2019

To whom it may concern,

This letter confirms that the manuscript detailed below was edited for proper English language grammar, punctuation, spelling, and overall style by a qualified and highly experienced native English-speaking editor:

Manuscript title: **STRATEGY PRACTICES AND PRAXIS: A CASE OF SELECTED SOUTH AFRICAN BUSINESS SCHOOL ALUMNI**

Author: **AMKELA NGWENYA**

Neither the research content nor the author's intentions were altered in any way during the editing process. The editor makes no claim as to the accuracy of the research content or objectives of the author. The document above as edited is grammatically correct and ready for publication; however, the author has the ability to accept or reject the editor's suggestions and changes after the editing process is complete, and prior to submission to any journal or examining body.

Marianne Kapp
0824813300