

A Risk Culture Maturity Framework for the South African Public Higher Education Sector

by

Sikhuthali T.T. Nyangintsimbi
(Student Number: 0776-651-3)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

in the College of Accounting Sciences

at the

University of South Africa

Supervisor: Prof Philna Coetzee

June 2024

Declaration

Name : Sikhuthali T.T. Nyangintsimbi

Student Number : 0776-651-3

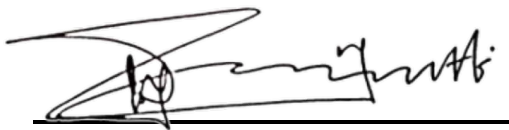
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Dedication

To my late parents, Kholisile and Nonyangala Nyangintsimbi, whose persistent rallying of us as their children around education, imploring on us to study further. Their tagline, “*Imfuno ayikhulelwa*”, echoed through this research journey, serving to sustain my energy levels.

Their intestinal fortitude in successfully seeing all of us - as their children - through our basic post-school education and training phase, yet relying merely on their meagre earnings, is perhaps illustrative of their other tagline, “*Akukho nto igqitha ukuthembela kuYehova*”.

For them to have seen yonder, and realised the value of further education, despite both having progressed to no further than primary school education, is perhaps a pointer to parents with clarity of Vision.

Acknowledgements

Exemplar study leader, my supervisor in this research journey has proven to be, and I am deeper-appreciative of the stellar navigator that she has been in my academic space. Going back to July 2012, not only was she instrumental in the choice I made, when pondering on an alternative to take, in pursuit of Master's degree, and my ultimate gravitation towards the MPhil (Internal Auditing), she remained an influence. Responding to her softer nudge, her keen persuasion, I finally stepped onto this PhD research territory too. Demonstrating her distinctive doyenne status – doyenne in the sense of being prominent study leader, a uniquely expertise-infused supervisor, and an undisputed professional – Prof Philna Coetzee elevated her study leader role onto a higher purpose. Specifically, as the complexity of forces at play continually took a different shape, posing a threat to my research journey, the Life Coach in her emerged, taking centre stage momentarily, and she would steer me towards solid ground, through her empowering, thoughtful insights.

Enlightening, at times to a frightening point, were the insightful views expressed by the various participants who dedicated time to engage in in-depth interviews during the fieldwork. Frankly expressed, neatly mounted on illustrative scenarios and facts, premised on lived experiences, and intently positioned in the context of this study, their gyroscopic perspectives certainly were instrumental in how I trudged through the fieldwork phase. Depictive of the value they place on our higher education sector, these participants graciously set aside time, amid their hectic schedules, and convened for our respective in-depth interviews. Of course, none of this could have been possible had the Research Support teams, in the respective six Higher Education Institutions that served as the case studies, not granted me the permission to use those as case studies – and to access their staff as participants for this study.

Entrepreneurial-flair-infused have the working conditions largely been within the university that I have had the honour to serve during the bulk of my research journey. Immensely contributing towards sustaining my appetite to explore, and strengthening my childish urge to question, such an environment has been inextricably reflective of the astute stewardship posture, which distinctively defines the executive leadership of our Vice Chancellor and Principal, Prof Thandwa Mthembu. Punctuating his discipline to sustain creativity and fuel innovation is the consistency of his sponsorship for exploratory initiatives – undertaken through bringing his enriching perspective where necessary, whilst being fully supportive where the direct linkage to institutional strategy is clear.

Exceptional by design in that, as a submarine that operates in the deep seas, with intentional underwater invisibility, her name should not be mentioned. The secret to Prof Elza Odendaal's effective weaponry, during the course of this PhD battle, continued to hinge on remaining unknown – operating behind the scenes. The meaningful strides I have made, particularly at mission-critical administrative phases, were as a result of her quiet coordinative interventions which include, early on, the allocation of my Study Leader. Striking one last time, and once again fortifying my efforts, she ensured that regardless of my slip-ups in preparation for submitting this thesis did not delay the actual submission.

Engulfing thoughtfulness that has continued over our nearly three-decades long marital relationship, continued shining through in how my wife, uNontsapho (*uGadula, uNcomase, iSbhoboza-ndlebe*), supported this stretch of my academic pursuit too. Instrumental, yet spontaneous, her prowess in successfully sprinkling onto our four children (Namhla, Simbongile, Lehakoe, and Chulumanco), now all young adults, that instinct to embrace an academic journey, is a distinctive feature I remain in treasure of about her. Demonstrated with consistency, over the years, she in fact is the fulcrum facilitating the dynamic inspired interaction of our aspirations, explorations and a humility-centred work ethic that continually takes a more deliberate posture with each project.

How opportune it then turned out to have been, when our grandson (uYamihle, uKgabiso) landed, as the final clean-up efforts in preparation to submit this PhD dissertation were in overdrive mode. As such, once again in our life as a family, *Yamihle imisebenzi kaThixo ngokuthi agaleleke naye uKgabiso, eze kungqina le mpumelelo yethu silikhaya, abe Lusiba loMkholwane ngokuthi ayi hombise le nyhweba khon' ukuze iqhakaze ngokuqaqambe nangakumbi intsikelelo yethu silu sapho luka Kholisile noNonyangala.* Perhaps, uYamihle, being our first grandchild as a couple, landed at such point in time so to inspire my on-the-verge-of-ailing energy levels. Thus, further deepening our collective sense of family optimism as we trudge on through life, in the years ahead.

Abstract

Timely, perhaps, this study is completed as the country inches closer to the threshold of marking 30 years of democracy. Expectedly, whilst celebrating the milestones achieved over the last three decades, South Africans' reflections will also focus on challenges engulfing the higher education sector. Specific, amongst those challenges, is how to elevate this critical sector, which serves as a reservoir of innovative thinking and undeterrable explorative co-solution-seeking, onto a more competitive plane. Hence, the theory of transitions served as a point of departure for this research study.

The purpose of this study was to contribute towards deepening risk culture within public HEIs, and doing so through developing a risk culture maturity framework that incorporates key phases of a typical higher education institution value chain. Broader than enterprise risk management, the framework incorporates strategic management, institutional culture, external environmental scanning, and touches on both management and oversight structures. Significant about the study is the fact that it recognises the crucial role played by HEIs in relation to the socioeconomic transformation of societies that such HEIs serve. Necessarily, enhanced organisational agility, in the midst of a highly competitive landscape, enables these HEIs have to strengthen their sense of relevance to the market. Tapping on a mixed-research methodology, both a quantitative content analysis and in-depth interviews were conducted on six case studies. Thus, serving as a basis for the research results, and leading to the development of the risk culture maturity framework.

In terms of main findings emanating from the study, it's a paradox. Despite higher education institutions being centres of learning, hosting experts in the fields of enterprise risk management and organisational strategy, including institutional culture, leadership dynamics, and organisational agility, charity does not begin at home. Despite public HEIs' keen interest in initiatives such as international university rankings, collaborations at both local and global platforms, their learning organisation posture seems inadequate. Despite priding themselves of expert analysts and/or the finest researchers who are amid their staff complement, public higher education institutions remain largely oblivious to some of the key emerging trends shaping the competitive external environment.

Finally, informed by the literature review and reflective perspectives of research participants, the last chapter touches on some of the contributions the study brings, viz. to the body of knowledge, to practice, and to the transitions theory which is the lens through which the study was conducted. The study then points to 4 areas of future research, viz. the possibility of private HEIs turning out to be Black Elephants, in terms of risk; the feasibility of Councils elevating their bar; the influence of HEIs on the ERM landscape; and how the notion of continuous improvement plays itself out.

Key Terms

Black Elephant Event; Competitive External Environment; Distal Thinking; Enterprise Risk Management; Higher Education Institutions; Institutional Culture; Risk Culture; Risk Maturity; Strategic Management Process.

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List of Abbreviations

4-IR	Fourth Industrial Revolution
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ARWU	Academic Ranking
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CAE	Chief Audit Executive
CCMA	Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CFO	Chief Financial Officer
COO	Chief Operation Officer
COSO	Committee of Sponsoring Organisations
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease
CRO	Chief Risk Officer
CWUR	Center for World University Rankings
DVC	Deputy-Vice Chancellor
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
ED	Executive Dean/Direct
EGP	External Group of Practitioners
EMC	Executive Management Committee
ERM	Enterprise Risk Management
FTEN	First Time Entering Students
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDU	Historically Disadvantaged Universities
HEI	Higher Education Institution(s)
HR	Human Resources
IIA	Institute of Internal Auditors
IAF	Internal Audit Function
ICT	Information and Communications Technology

IRMSA	Institute of Risk Management South Africa
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LGBTQIA+	Lesbians, Gay, Bi-Sexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MOOCs	Massive Open Online Courses
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
NACI	National Advisory Council on Innovation
NDP	National Development Plan
NSFAS	National Students Financial Aid Scheme
NPM	New Public Management
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PSET	Post-School Education and Training
PESTEL	Politically, Economically, Socially, Technologically, Environmentally, and Legally
QS	QS World University Ranking
R&D	Research and Development
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SASSA	South African Social Security Agency
SAQA	South African Qualification Authority
SET	Science, Engineering, and Technology
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timely
SMP	Strategic Management Process
SRC	Student Representative Council
SRO	Secondary Research Objective
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
THE	Times Higher Education World University Rankings
TIA	Technology Innovation Agency
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UK	United Kingdom

UNSDGs	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
USA	United States of America
USAf	Universities South Africa
VC	Vice Chancellor
VP	Vice Principal
VUCA	Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity

List of Definitions

Terminology	Definition	Source
Academic Risk	A risk driven by factors that include competitive factors such as changing market expectations of graduates, changing preferences in the broader Society, technological advances, the war for scarce academics' talent, poor research outputs/impact, and ineffective course delivery.	Open University of Tanzania, 2016:5
Black Elephant	An inherently complex and challenging devastating event which, though known, tends to be ignored; or it's known, but not yet acknowledged. For instance, COVID-19 fell under this category.	Lin, Metav-Sarica, Chua, Jenkins, Switzer, Woo & Lallemand, (2021:1-2)
Black Swan	A risk that arises in the form of an 'unknown unknown'. Its existence can neither be recognised nor predicted; thus, making the mitigation of such risk impossible to plan for – or how to look for such risks.	Manning, Birchmore & Morris, (2020:289)
Co-Curricula Activities	Activities undertaken by HEIs' students and aimed at enhancing their employability once they become graduates. Examples of such activities include volunteering, leadership roles in clubs/societies, mentee roles within industry, and engaging in incubator/start-up initiatives.	Jackson & Rowe, (2023:495)
COSO Framework	A framework whose constituent elements are governance and culture, strategy and objective-setting, review and revision, as well as information, communication and reporting	Burger (2024:29)

Terminology	Definition	Source
Coopetition	An element of organisational strategy whereby competitors, within an industry, adopt an open mind towards working together in a collegial manner. They cooperate on specific pre-identified initiatives, based on mutual benefit, e.g. the exchange of know-how, experiences and information, or even joint development of new products.	Kraus, Klimas, Gast & Stephan, (2019:61)
Degendering	An organisational effort at dismantling any gender-inclination in its approach to delivery of strategy. The effort brings both certitude or certainty, and flexibility, in strengthening organisational resilience.	Witmer, (2019:512)
Distal Thinking	Involves imagining things as very different from the present to a point where the creative genius who is imagining as such could be characterized as someone who envisioned a radically new future that the rest of us initially couldn't see. They tend to think so far ahead that the market isn't ready for their ideas.	Kellerman & Seligman, 2023.
Emerging Technologies	Emerging technologies are an integral part of the broader concept of technology. They refer to aspects such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Blockchain, Data Analytics, and Robotics.	Polimeni & Burke, (2021:162)
Enterprise Risk Management	A more integrated, holistic, and strategic approach to risk management, with greater emphasis placed on coordination and cooperation across functions and organizational units, thereby allowing the enterprise to better manage its full portfolio of risks and their interdependencies.	Ittner & Oyon, (2020:161)

Terminology	Definition	Source
Executive Management Committee	The highest management decision-making structure that runs the operational activities of the university. It is chaired by the Vice Chancellor, who in turn, is accountable to the Council of the university. The use of a term in a generic form across all the case studies is aimed at concealing the identity of these case studies.	Own [In an effort to conceal the identity of the case studies, a 'generic term' has been used]
Institutional Culture	A shared frame of reference within an organisation, with constituent elements thereof being values, ideas and attitudes, behavioural patterns – serving as the organisation's vessel of memory.	Kleindl, Kleindl, & Kleindl, (2023:3)
ISO 31000: 2018 Framework	A framework which, in comparison to its 2009 edition, places added emphasis on the imperative for top management to be involved in ERM and other strategic processes of an organisation. It is also strong on adequate resourcing of an ERM Function, as well as clarity of roles and responsibilities.	Ratter, Kalbarczyk & Pietrzyk-Wiszowaty, (2024:67)
New Public Management	The socialisation of private sector management philosophies into public sector organisations, with the aim of enhancing operational efficiencies, strengthening effectiveness, and improving organisational performance.	Lapiente & Van de Walle, (2020:470)
Risk Culture	A soft factor that contributes towards enhancing communication, improving awareness, and elevating perception and sensitivity of staff, about risk, within an organisation. It aligns with organisational policy and improves decision-making too.	Grieser & Pedell, (2022:753)

Terminology	Definition	Source
Strategic Management Process	A process that depicts the translation of how management intends to sustain the competitiveness of an organisation, including resource allocation, in pursuit of such organisation's goals and objectives.	Sinnaiah, Adam & Mahadi, (2023:38)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The terms 'Higher Education Institution' and 'University' are used interchangeably. ▪ The terms 'Organisation' and 'Institution' are used as per the norm in the industry, e.g., 'Institutional Culture'. 		

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Chapter 1

Introduction to the Study

“The world has changed from the relatively stable and predictable 1945-1990 period where managerial skills were in demand. In the contemporary setting, business is confronted by an increasingly volatile and uncertain global market in which adaptability and responsiveness are valued highly. In essence, we have moved from traditional managerial functions to those associated with change leadership, such as inspiring, communicating a vision and drafting strategic plans.” – (Stoten, 2018:400)

1.1 Background and Introduction

The landscape of the external environment in which organisations operate is continually changing at a rapid pace. It therefore requires strategic agility and operational nimbleness on the part of such organisations to remain competitive and sustainable – what [Palm and Lilja \(2017:2\)](#) refers to as organisational ambidexterity. This is also the case with institutions of higher learning. The study investigated the integration of risk culture with the strategic management process and institutional culture within public higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa.

Previous studies that sought to find the balance between academic excellence and relevance to market realities, which includes the need for enhanced organisational learning, ([Narayan & Kommunuri, 2022:415](#); [Leisyte, Vilkas, Staniskiene & Zostautiene, 2017:328](#); [Cohen, 2015:355](#)) asserted that universities tend to be risk averse. [Hempsall \(2014:389\)](#) zooms into the Vice Chancellors, asserting that they, personally, become more risk averse as a result of the lucrative remuneration packages they earn. That is, they become overly cautious and try not to ‘rock the boat’. Perhaps, this talks to the political behaviour, which - according to ([Elbanna, Thanos & Papadakis, 2014:226](#)) – comes into play. That is, that strategic decision-making becomes of significant impact to an organisation; leaders tend to adopt a political posture, in an effort to protect their own interests, to the detriment of the organisation. Thus, according to [Hoover and Harder \(2015:179\)](#), causing conflict. Similar reflections by [Hommel, Li and Pastwa \(2016:617\)](#), focused on business schools, also pointed to enterprise risk management (ERM) that is relatively immature – in comparison to the corporate sector.

However, citing various authors, [Agarwal and Ansell \(2016:427\)](#) believed it is still evolving even within the insurance sector. The outcomes of studies concur in pointing to ERM being under-developed. This was evidenced by *inter alia* poorly integrated ERM processes ([Smidt, Pretorius & Van der Nest, 2022:167](#); [Moloi, 2016:68](#)), and the decision to outsource an ERM function ([Christopher & Sarens,](#)

2015:9). The notion that the time has come for the higher education sector to emerge from its ERM conservatism is based on the view that its institutions need to enhance their global competitiveness (Ariff, Zakuan, Tajudin, Ahmad, Ishak & Ismail, 2014:430) – which can be enhanced, in part, through an improved risk culture.

Although such reluctance towards fully embracing ERM practices mirrors some of the other sectors as well (Beasley, Branson & Hancock, 2009:31), the education sector is facing some unique challenges. A sense of entrepreneurial spirit (Amirkhanova, Bikmotev, Zinnurov & Kharisova, 2017:43), together with a sustained deepening of the institutional risk culture, are no longer a matter of pioneering initiative, but a basic requirement in order to survive the increasingly competitive external environment in which the HEIs find themselves (Ntim, Soobaroyen & Broad, 2017:107; Parakhina, Godina, Boris & Ushvitsky, 2017:62; Uslu, 2017:483). Such competitiveness plays itself out in various ways in the external environment.

First, the deteriorating global economic climate, compounded by geopolitical volatilities, implies a shrinkage in terms of funding (Elena- Pérez, Saritas, Pook & Warden, 2011:33, Tucker & Gentry, 2009:43); difficulties in terms of government subsidy (Voolaid & Ehrlich, 2017:340; Barth, 2012:635; King, 1995:14); the attraction of third stream income (Khvatova & Dushina, 2017:252; Christopher & Sarens, 2015:6; Jackson, 2015:23); the rapid growth in international competition; as well as increased pressure to innovate (Parakhina *et al*, 2017:62).

Second, the gigantic strides in terms of technological advancement, accompanied by the lowering cost of access to both mobile devices and the Internet, effectively dismantles the entry barriers into higher education (Beyrouiti, 2017:392; Breaux, 2017:176; Hiltz & Turoff, 2005:62). This results in an increasing number of students who are now entering through distance learning. Thus, the proportion of international students within most HEIs is not only increasing but – according to (Mutongoza and Olawale, 2023:117; Kumar & Thakur, 2019:774) - serves as a

critical source of revenue for these institutions. As such, with geographic distance shrinking, competition (Leisyte *et al*, 2017; Nazir & Islam, 2017:1; de Haan, 2015:46; Elena-Pérez *et al*, 2011:42) amongst the HEIs continues to be increasingly intensified and throat cutting. With this comes unique challenges that are specific to distance learning (Pretorius, Lombard & Khotoo, 2016:184), most of which could be better mitigated through, *inter alia*, a mature institutional risk culture.

Thirdly, the spreading calls for free education (Earwalker, 2020:29; Correa, Lu, Parro & Villena, 2019:974) are becoming more audible across both the developed and developing economies. Compounding such calls is also the fact that, in some countries, higher education has already been fee-free (Bhayani, 2020:11; Earwalker, 2020:29; Gamlath, 2013:34;) – in one way or the other – for quite some time. This implies that strategic planning conversations on how to sustain HEIs must factor an ERM component to an increasingly larger degree. For instance, the call on Russian HEIs to enhance their competitiveness through embracing advanced marketing initiatives that include social media, and the revamping of their institutional websites to make them more modern, (Amirkhanova *et al*, 2017:46) is a typical example.

Similarly, their counterpart institutions in the United Kingdom (UK) found themselves under pressure to enhance their competitiveness, particularly following significant reductions in government funding, which dropped by approximately 29% in the year 2010 (Ntim *et al*, 2017:66), due to the global banking crisis and other factors. Characterising such external environment is the convergence of a myriad of factors that collectively threaten to paralyse these institutions of learning unless they respond proactively and demonstrate a deeper sense of risk culture.

Further, conversations that discourage the move towards managerialism and/or corporatisation, seeking to instead entrench collegiality, are likely to lose relevance (Atkinson, 2019; Taatila, 2017:104). This is considering the HEIs' sub-optimal performance against pre-set goals (Angiola, Bianchi & Damato, 2018:748;

Valmorbida, Ensslin, Ensslin, & Ripoll-Feliu, 2015:63). Emerging discussions are exploring how best to enhance operational efficiencies (Ntim *et al*, 2017:102), and improve the coordination of interdependencies within usually large institutions. This enhancement and coordination will only be possible if the culture, including the risk culture of the institution, is mature.

Therefore, this study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge by enhancing the understanding of what it is that constitutes an optimal risk culture within the HEIs. In addition, this study seeks to determine how best to develop and sustain a dynamic integration of such a risk culture with the strategic management process of the HEIs. Thus, illustrating how the transitions theory applies in the context of the higher education sector, whereby HEIs find themselves responding to internal and external pressures in ways that deepen risk culture.

1.2 Literature Review

The literature review providing a brief introduction to the scholarly foundation of this study focuses on five aspects. These are the complexity of the external environment within which the HEIs operate, narrowing down into complexities within the sector itself in relation to risk culture. Thereafter, linkages between the risk culture and the broader concept of institutional culture are investigated, as well as the challenges often encountered in journeying towards a mature risk culture. Finally, the desired destination in terms of a mature risk culture, as articulated by various thought leadership practitioners, is painted in Chapter 3 and Chapter 6.

1.2.1 Complexity of the External Environment

The complexity of the external environment affects all industries (Narayan & Kommunuri, 2022:415; Apostolopoulos, Halikias, Maroukian, & Tsaramiris, 2016:698; Kachaner, King, & Stewart, 2016:31). It thus requires of organisations, including HEIs, to embrace a risk culture that is conducive to enhanced agility (Narayan & Kommunuri, 2022:415; Cheese, 2016:9; Taylor, 2016:46), something

that could perhaps be pursued through revisiting and/or reviewing the HEIs operating model with the aim of developing new ones (Lombardi, Massaro, Dumay & Nappo, 2019:3387). Such an environment refers to aspects that include the legal and regulatory landscape, the information technology issues, competitive factors such as customer and supplier preferences, to name a few. (Ivančić, Mencer, Jelenc, & Dulčić, 2017:52; Adeola, 2016:159). This means, amongst other things, leveraging on strategic management process, in responding proactively to emerging changes across the external environment and seizing opportunities (Yureva & Yureva, 2016:39; Shah & Nair, 2014:153). There is also consensus on the need to recognise uncertainty and unpredictability as a new norm (McMillan & Overall, 2016:34). Some are taking a view that the higher education has entered an era of transition (Gilbert, Crow, & Anderson, 2018:36). These aspects will be further debated in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

1.2.2 Complexity of Risk Culture

Despite some authors asserting that the higher education sector should be at the forefront of ERM related matters, including pioneering the state-of-the-art solutions, this still is not necessarily the case (Ariff *et al*, 2014:430; Hommel & King, 2013:544). That is, ERM as a governance tool remains largely immature within these institutions (Araújo & Gomes, 2021:253; Ariff *et al*, 2014:430; Tufano, 2011:57). Such weakness, in terms of ERM maturity, is ‘magnified’ by several factors, which also intensify competition within this sector.

Firstly, there is a considerable shift in terms of the student demographic profile (Essop, 2020:69; Gilbert *et al*, 2018:36; Chernikova & Varonis, 2016:132), which also illustrated the need for agility. That is, entry-level programme enrolments are increasingly tilting towards the more matured (working) students rather than the straight-from-school candidates. Sustaining this strata, of the student population, is the fact that employers tend to place added emphasis on lifelong learning amongst their employees, in an effort to enhance employee productivity (Barak, 2012:124).

Universities whose programmes were geared towards the traditional students may find themselves losing ground to the entrepreneurial university. Some (Bamber, 2023:276; Mathooko & Ogutu, 2015:350) have urged universities to adopt more of a business approach rather than the traditional collegial one, citing the risk of constrained public funding as one of the drivers for preferring such a business approach. This view was expressed in the context of HEIs competing for transnational students, viz. students who are based in another country that is different from the university's one. Specifically, the focus was on growing those HEIs' revenue stream through increased enrolment of such students – particularly in Australia, the UK, and the United States of America (USA). Such competitive forces are, of course, broader (Sarkane & Sloka, 2015:79; Stukalina, 2014:85; Jala-Karim, 2013:73; Morrissey, 2012:121; Adcroft, Teckman & Willis, 2010:585; Daniell, 2000:28) and beyond transnational students.

Secondly, in addition to the insurmountable task of identifying all risks pertinent to an institution (Bogodistov & Wohlgemuth, 2017:234), there is the constant possibility of a 'black swan' materialising and affecting the HEIs. That is, the occurrence of a rare risk that has an extreme impact (Ashta, 2016:625; Perera, 2016:29; Reynolds, 2020:8), or one that would have been difficult to predict and is prohibitively costly to prevent (Mattice, 2017:18). In this regard, others (Hommel & King, 2013:543; Calandro, 2015:33; Posner, 2013:21) assert that even though 'black swans' are difficult to predict, ERM must deal with them – a point initially stated by Kendrick (2004:75) who asserted, "*An organization cannot wait for risk to be fully understood before attempting to manage risks*". Broadening that perspective, Paté-Cornell (2012:1830) suggests that one-way ERM could respond is by regarding near-misses as precursors to a Black Swan. That is, doing so through immediate reaction, including quick gathering of further data in relation to the precursor.

Thirdly, there is a steady emergence of private HEIs that intensify competition for the public counterparts – across the African continent and beyond (Garwe, 2016:233; Ma & Abbott, 2016:27). Within South Africa, the growth of such private

HEIs is premised on their responsiveness to market needs, viz. their organisational agility, and the commitment to rendering enhanced quality of customer service (Ramlachan, 2019:10). Their market share, as of 2015 was 13%, with the remainder of students being catered for by public HEIs (van Schalkwyk & Krüger, 2019:49). Such market share has, according to some (Clark, 2024; Sithole, 2024:1654), risen to about 18% as of February 2024.

Fourthly, the changing business model of contact learning institutions, who are now integrating distance learning (Wright & Holmberg-Wright, 2018:152) as well as open access education, means that strategic planning deliberations must be more innovative, deeper, and explorative (Beyrouti, 2017:392). Pointing to the imperative to shape rather than predict the future, Blatstein (2012:38) advises that strategic planning should be undertaken by the leadership of the organisation – rather than be led by an external service provider. The benefit of such an approach is that it deepens the sense of shared vision and understanding as to why specific risks should and/or should not be taken, in pursuit of the strategy. For this to be sustainable, again, an improved ERM culture is essential. These elements are discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.2.3 Linkages Between Risk Culture and Institutional Culture

To begin with, across sectors or industries, the establishment of an appropriate and supportive risk culture within an organisation is not so simple, and it takes several years to have it sufficiently embedded (Lee, 2023:141; Birkinshaw & Jenkins, 2010:45). Concurring on this view, Redmond (2015:10) describes the task of changing a risk culture as substantial and dramatic, emphasising that it is a Board matter. Thus, it is a top-down driven governance initiative (Saia, 2016:72; Xin & Haijie, 2011:130) that requires not only a tone-at-the-top focus (Meyer, Mikes & Kaplan, 2021:4; Torrance, 2016:28; Beasley, 2013:25), but the tone in the middle must also receive attention (Flickinger, 2015:154). In other words, there needs to be coordination across various spheres within an organisation for risk culture to be sufficiently embedded.

In undertaking a study on risk culture, the researcher would have to keep in mind that this is part of a broader institutional culture (Gatzert & Schmit, 2016:38; Gorzen-Mitka, 2015:60; McGing & Brown, 2014:7). To have a better insight into institutional culture, one would have to investigate its key components, which have a linkage with risk culture. These entail the tone-at-the-top, which includes decision-making and non-written rules, as well as how such tone impacts on the middle and bottom layers of the organisation (Groysberg, Lee, Price & Cheng, 2018:46; Susca, 2018:42; Whalen, 2018: 44; Arnaboldi & Lapsley, 2014:374). A strong positive institutional culture tends to have the desired impact in terms of staff motivation as well as organisational performance (Chaudhry, Yuan, Hu & Cooke, 2016:584; Croitoru, 2016:98). Institutional culture is often regarded as one of the central pillars to the competitive edge of an entity, with various authors describing it in different ways. Some (Naqshbandi, Kaur, Sehgal, & Subramaniam, 2015:15) believe there are five critical dimensions of institutional culture. These are employee development, harmony, customer orientation, social responsibility, and innovation.

Some call it the unique 'DNA' of an organisation (Kleindl, Kleindl, & Kleindl, 2023:9; Simon, Fischbach & Schoder, 2014:27; Calfee, 2006:230), others refer to it as the personality of an organisation (Chourey, 2015:10), whereas others view it as the immune system of an organisation (Kannan, 2016:1). Still, Nold and Michel (2016:345) view it as the invisible force of gravity that shapes across the universe wherein the organisation exists or operates, whilst others (Kleindl, Kleindl, & Kleindl (2023:2) view it as a share frame of reference within the organisation. Defined by various authors as the way 'things are done' within an organisation, institutional culture is a top-down driven governance initiative (Chaudhry, Yuan, Hu & Cooke, 2016:582; Saia, 2016:72). The same can be said for risk culture, specifically, viz. it is top-down driven, with senior management as best placed to create the required tone (Torrance, 2016:28).

The way core values of an organisation are communicated, practiced, and socialised by senior leadership is essential to setting the tone-at-the-top in terms of risk culture (Tuveson & Ralph, 2016:13). For instance, the admittance by Mitsubishi Motors to having tampered with their fuel economy testing methods and thus contravening Japanese government regulations (Dawson & McDonald, 2016:28) does not bode well from a tone-at-the-top perspective. It also constitutes a breach of trust, which Arnold, Benford, Hampton and Sutton (2014:280) point to as important in interorganisational relationships.

In terms of the linkage between risk culture and the broader institutional culture this entails, in part, the extent to which the higher education sector embraces the concept of integrity, in the context of challenging the *status quo*. That is, the extent to which the leadership team is open to the contrarian view, during deliberations around risks (Baškarada, Watson & Cromarty, 2016:783; Taylor, 2016:56; Kimbrough & Compton, 2009:25) – and this is fundamental for institutional innovation. The above elements are discussed further in Chapter 3.

1.2.4 The Journey Towards a Mature Risk Culture

Deliberations on the important journey to improve the risk maturity of an organisation would constitute an integral part of the organisation's strategic planning sessions. According to the McGing and Brown (2014:4) study, which was focused across industries, two of the critical steps that should be considered by HEIs include the development of a risk maturity model as well as a rollout strategy. Both these deliverables would have to be tailored to the unique context of the institution they are being developed for. Concurring, Walker & Shenkir (2018:32) assert that in other sectors, ERM maturity models are used as one of the indicators which rating agencies, such as Standard & Poor, use for determining an organisation's rating. Thus, impacting on such organisation's cost of capital. In planning to embark on the journey, various challenges need to be anticipated and mitigating interventions considered.

Firstly, the intangible nature of ERM benefits and related difficulty in selling them to stakeholders (Beasley *et al*, 2009) implies that the impact thereof may not be felt 'instantly'.

Secondly, the tendency by ERM stakeholders to be overly confident about how they are doing, from an ERM perspective, when running their activities (Amankwah-Amoah & Zhang, 2015:537; Kaplan & Mikes, 2012:51; Ciocirclan, Chung & McLarney, 2011:996) could hamper their listening to ERM advice.

Thirdly, change management – which is an integral part of this journey – revolves around behavioural issues (Kazmi, 2008:1571), yet this area is often not the strength of ERM practitioners. The complex fast paced changes that occur, even within an organisation, require more agility in terms of managerial response (Nold & Michel, 2016:352; Dominguez, Galán González & Barroso, 2015:411) and this poses a challenge for ERM practitioners. The fact that the success of a change initiative depends also to a large degree on the response of stakeholders, makes it more complicated. Thus, calling for stronger stakeholder-centricity, one of the key priorities for an organisation, and particularly the ERM function.

Fourthly, the silo approach that tends to be adopted by organisations (Trudell, 2014:374) together with risk fatigue that commonly engulfs them (Loosemore, 2010:309; Beasley *et al*, 2009:30), constitute additional challenges.

Fifthly, an adaptive posture on the part of universities is not a matter of choice but an imperative to embrace, in the face of environmental complexity (Muluneh & Gedifew, 2018:1263). The mergers and/or close downs which affected some HEIs, including the open universities, have often been attributed (in part) to failure to withstand competitive challenges emanating from the external environment (June, 2023:1; Leslie, Abu-Rahma, & Jaleel, 2018:382; Tait, 2018:20). Hence, the need for this study, with its two-dimensional focus, viz.:

- Seeking to determine the interlinkages between risk culture, institutional culture, and the strategic management process of an organisation.
- Seeking to develop a risk culture maturity framework in the context of such interlinkages.

These elements are further debated in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3.

1.3 Research Gap

On reviewing the focal areas of other research studies that have been undertaken on risk culture, a high-level outcome is depicted in the table per Annexure 1. As can be noted from Annexure 1, these research studies were conducted at Masters and Doctoral levels and are only part of a broader pool reviewed by the researcher. Of all such research studies sighted, only two turned out to have focused on the HEIs.

On considering the research objectives and related research questions of these studies and other scholarly research, the research gap was identified for purposes of this study. Such research gap is two-dimensional. First, none of these studies developed a risk culture maturity framework for the HEIs – more specifically for such organisations on the African continent and South Africa. Secondly, these studies excluded how risk culture links with the three main phases of a strategic management process of HEIs, viz. planning phase, implementation phase as well as the monitoring and reporting phase.

In terms of the other research studies, a high-level view on their focal points, which thus informed this current study's research gap, the following scenario emerged:

- a. Dr. Viljoen van der Walt's thesis is titled *An Integrated Strategy and Risk Management Approach for Public Universities in South Africa*. Awarded by the University of Stellenbosch in 2017, its focus was more on the process to be followed in terms of embedding ERM into an institution's strategy formulation (or planning) phase. Its contribution is on the mapping of ERM's key activities

with the strategic planning phase of an institution, as well as how the ideal risk management structure should look. The ERM frameworks and the third King Code of Corporate Governance seem to have been used as a point of departure.

- b.** Dr. Anne Lundquist's thesis is entitled *Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) at US Colleges and Universities: Administration Process Regarding the Adoption, Implementation, and Integration of ERM*. Whilst it is about the higher education, its focus is exclusively on the USA. Further, it focuses on the rationale for introducing ERM in these institutions, the key activities involved in its rollout, value-adding, and how it relates with institutional goal-setting. That is, the study seeks "to understand the decision-making and administration processes regarding the adoption, implementation and integration of ERM at colleges and universities in the U.S. with explicitly stated ERM programs...".
- c.** Dr. Angela Z. Röschmann's thesis is entitled *Towards an Ideal Risk Culture for (re)Insurance Companies* and was published in 2016. Its focus is not on the HEIs, and was aimed at establishing how the ideal risk culture relates to the risk management frameworks – rather than the strategic management process.
- d.** Dr. Denise Schoenfield's doctoral research thesis, as awarded by the University of Gloucestershire in 2013, focuses on the real estate industry within Germany. It was entitled *Organisational Risk Culture: Differences Between Managerial Expectations and Employees' Expectations*. Although her research does focus on developing a framework that depicts key components of risk culture, it does not cover a maturity framework, nor does it seek to relate risk culture to the strategic management process in any way.

To address the research gap in the body of knowledge as discussed above, this research study sought to explore how best to enhance not only the ERM initiatives but elevate the risk culture itself within the HEIs. It is premised on the understanding that foundational to organisational strategic resilience, [\(Cheese,](#)

2016:9; Neves & Eisenberger, 2014:201; Elahi, 2013:120), which is essential to surviving competition, is a sustainable quality of its decision-making capabilities (Zhao, Hwang & Low, 2015:353; Chileshe & Kikwasi, 2014:309; Stan-Maduka, 2010:214; Williams, Bertsch, Dale, Van der Wiele, Van Iwaarden, Smith & Visser, 2006:68). In so doing, ERM is leveraged as a central governance tool (Soltanizadeh, Rasid, Golshan & Ismail, 2016:1027; Brewer & Walker, 2011:171; Kendrick, 2004:71). Such ERM leveraging tends to enhance the performance of organisations (Arnesen & Foster, 2016:48; Soltanizadeh *et al*, 2016:1026; Shad & Lai, 2015:4; Subramaniam, Collier, Phang & Burke, 2011:151; Belton, 2000:33), including the potential to achieve strategic objectives (Lai & Lau, 2012:667; Nocco & Stulz, 2022:81).

This study, amongst others, seek to develop a maturity framework so that it can be used as a measure for deepening such risk culture. In so doing, the risk culture through its dynamic integration with both the institutional culture and strategic management of an organisation, is deepened. There is a debate as to whether strategy precedes culture, or if it is rather the other way. However, the norm is for strategy to precede, with culture to be realigned to deliver on that strategy (Kaul, 2018:130).

Should the South African public HEIs respond positively to some of the recommendations emanating from this study, the transitions theory will have been invoked. Willson (2019:838) believes that both complexity and disorderliness tend to punctuate periods of transition. Both of those features are possible in the context of this study, given that HEIs are believed to be inward-looking, risk-averse and not so embracive of change. Thus, this study seeks to infuse new knowledge and encourage behavioural change amongst the HEIs community, which - according to Karataş and Dalgıç (2022:251) - is an opportunity that tends to come with a transitioning period.

1.4 Research Problem

In the context of the South African public HEIs, which is the focus of this study, the risk culture remains largely immature (Ariff *et al*, 2014:430; Helsloot & Jong, 2006:157). In also illustrating this point, Tufano (2011:56) points to a study whereby a HEI's leadership team admitted to evaluating major risks only on an 'as-needed-basis' rather than regularly. Institutions tend to be (overly) risk averse (Jabbour & Abdel-Kader, 2016:501) rather than entrepreneurial, and often remain trapped in the collegiality mode instead of, as proposed by Mathooko and Ogutu, (2015:350), embracing the business approach to conducting its activities. As a result, there is a strong possibility of these HEIs losing their competitiveness and/or relevance – given the generic view, by (Jalal-Karim, 2013:73) that ERM enhances competitiveness. That is, such a posture, in terms of risk culture, constitutes a problem for the sector given factors that include the following:

- The emergence of private sector HEIs within the sector, some of which are of international origin. They enter the sector with vast global experience, a stronger financial muscle, advanced physical infrastructure (Spencer, 2019:47; Guravaiah, 2017:52) and enhanced operational efficiencies, which thus make them more competitive (Spencer, 2019:44).
- The declining trend in terms of government funding for the higher education sector (Pitsoe & Letseka, 2018:116), which thus presses HEIs into a fundraising mode. Given that there are often conditions attached to funding, some of which revolve around ERM, an institution that is lacking in risk culture may struggle in attracting funding. Commonly, fund raising is a competence which academics often do not have as their strength (Ibrahim, Mahmood & Bakar, 2018:213).
- The seemingly growing trend of managerialism (McNaughton, Rao & Mansingh, 2017:702; O'Bryne & Bond, 2014:580; Chan & Richardson, 2012:32), seeking to take precedence over collegiality. The relevance of this factor is that it places

more emphasis, for instance, on institutional performance management – including key performance indicators (KPIs) – something which the sector tends to view as mutually exclusive with the spirit of collegiality. In this context, perhaps another key consideration is whether such collegiality poses a dilemma that is like one expressed by Warren Buffet in 2002 when he stated:

“My own behaviour ... frequently fell short as well; too often I was silent when management made proposals that I judged to be counter to the interests of shareholders. In those cases, collegiality trumped independence.” – Redmond (2015:11).

1.4.1 The increasing calls for fee-free higher education imply that the cost of running HEIs may soon become unsustainable in the face of declining revenues (Tewe, Ismaila, Beneke & Siewe, 2024:7). This is compounded by a view expressed by (Breux, 2017:176; Amir, Auzair, Maelah & Ahmad, 2016:937), who assert that the value proposition of HEIs will be challenged more and more by students who will be questioning escalation in tuition fees. Similarly, the *#FeesMustFall* campaign that gripped South Africa in the year 2015 onwards seemed to have placed institutions in a strategic dilemma (Blackmur, 2021:42; Nomvete & Mashayamombe, 2019:87), as if it was a black swan – in the sense of being an unexpected risk. Yet, as pointed out by Calandro (2015:33), some of the extreme events are not necessarily black swans. For instance, despite its accompanying estimated R460 million damage on HEIs’ physical infrastructure (Yende & Mthombeni, 2023:1380), the *#FeesMustFall* campaign was not a black swan. Instead, the *#FeesMustFall* was rather more of a Black Elephant Event, viz. which refers to the kind of risk that is complex and with devastating impact - yet gets ignored even though known.

1.4.2 The proportion of international students continues to grow and is being used as a key source of revenue by many HEIs (Da Costa & Soncinin-Pelisari, 2017:109; Guimon, 2016:217). However, there is a view that such trend is

likely to start declining in the years ahead (Bound, Braga, Khanna & Turner, 2021:182; Brodeur, 2016:22). When that point is reached, perhaps institutions that remain competitive will be those that have strategically repositioned their brand (Curtis, Abratt & Minor, 2009:410). This will require, amongst others, a smart risk culture within HEIs.

1.4.3 Given the significance of higher education in the context of a country's socio-economic growth (Ramjeawon & Rowley, 2020:745; Tsvetkova & Lomer, 2019:127), governments tend to take more interest in the activities of this sector. This often comes with more regulation, something that makes the HEI uncomfortable, yet it may be linked to failure rate of strategy implementation within HEIs, which Cândido & Santos, (2019:39) estimate at up to 70%. Reflecting on an earlier study, Atkinson (2006:1444) cites some of the underlying causes to the high failure rate, viz. timely effective response to unforeseen disruptions, uncontrollable external factors, the poor coordination of competing priorities, and poorly defined tasks.

Olivier and Schwella (2018:10) elaborate by identifying 7 factors that contribute to the high failure rate. These are poor leadership, poor strategic planning, poor project management skills, poor alignment of strategy with the rest of the organisational elements, poor performance management, low personal drive, and poor engagement. However, an alternative response, which this research seeks to investigate the feasibility of, is that of embracing regulation and proactively keeping abreast of changes in the regulatory landscape (Ludwig, 2015:31).

1.4.4 The strongly hierarchical and/or centralised nature of HEIs (Leisyte *et al*, 2017:328) often implies that they have an inherent challenge when it comes to the coordination of interdependencies. Related to this inherent challenge is the problem of lower levels of productivity or performance within HEIs (Rathee & Rajain, 2013:1).

From the above, the following problem statement, that forms the basis of the study, is provided:

There is a lack of risk culture maturity in the higher education sector, with no specific guidance on the matter that incorporates institutional culture, and strategic management, which then hampers the South African public higher education sector's ability to strengthen its competitiveness, seize strategic opportunities, and enhance its value proposition to society.

1.5 Research Objectives

The main research objective of this study, in addressing the research problem, is to develop a risk culture maturity framework, including an illustration of how it integrates with strategic management and institutional culture in the public higher education sector within South Africa. To deliver on this objective, the research also seeks to achieve the following secondary research objectives (SRO):

- SRO-1 To determine the factors that impact on the institutional culture and, more specifically the risk culture within HEIs.
- SRO-2 To determine the elements of a sound strategic management process within HEIs.
- SRO-3 To determine the extent of linkages, if there are any, between the risk culture, the institutional culture, and the strategic management process of HEIs.
- SRO-4 To explore how risk culture, within the sector, influences institutional response to strategic challenges and opportunities.
- SRO-5 To determine, if HEIs trail behind other sectors in terms of ERM broadly and the risk culture in particular, what would bring such institutions on par in so far as prioritising ERM and integrating it into their strategic conversations – and thus further enhance institutional risk culture.

1.6 Research Design

The emerging nature of the ERM concept itself, which is a focus of this study, is deemed immature within the higher education sector ([Jabbour & Abdel-Kader, 2016:501](#); [Tufano, 2011:57](#); [Helsloot & Jong, 2006:157](#)). As such, to be value-adding, the research approach followed was structured in such a manner that in-depth views on the topic could be obtained, following an interpretivism paradigm. Taking this complexity further is the nature of the objectives that the study sought to achieve. For instance, culture is by nature a complex matter, and focusing on a specific element of it, viz. ERM, makes it even more complex. Similarly, the second objective, which relates to linkages between ERM culture and another complex subject, viz. strategic management process complicates the study further. Furthermore, this subject too seems to be an elusive subject within public HEIs. Finally, the main research objective and last secondary research objective (SRO-5) are forward-looking and exploratory, viz. how to enhance the stature of an ERM function and deepen the ERM culture.

A mixed method approach was followed, viz. combining both the qualitative and quantitative methods, to address the research objectives. Such a mixed method approach, in the context of this research study, and as elaborated on in Section 4.3, entails the following:

1.6.1 First, a quantitative content analysis, which mainly refers to the observation of documented information, in the form of text or images, in a systematic and objective manner ([Shea & Parayitam, 2019:1047](#)) – refer Section 4.3.1. This method was chosen to obtain an overview of the standing of risk culture maturity of the 26 public HEIs in South Africa, by analysing the content of the 2019 annual reports in terms of risk and related words. The use of content analyses usage in the market is on the rise, viz. more researchers are finding it valuable and thus applying it in their studies ([Vourvachis & Woodward, 2015:166](#)). Believed by some researchers to be playing a vital role in theory development ([Carliner, Castonguay, Sheepy, Ribeiro, Sabri,](#)

Saylor & Valle, 2015:467), content analysis utilisation/popularity has increased by over 590% over the 15-year time horizon ending in 2017 (Lee, Dabirian, McCarthy & Kietzmann, 2020:617).

1.6.2 Second, a qualitative survey using in-depth interviews to gather data, given that the subject of the research is emergent, and exploration thereon becomes more relevant (Refer to Section 4.3.2). What sets the qualitative approach apart is the fact that it has a broader contribution in terms of expanding the pool of theory and exploring innovative (research) solutions to real life societal problems (Holmlund, Witell & Gustafsson, 2020:114).

According to Wisdom and Creswell (2013:1), the utilisation of rigorous instruments for collection and analysis of data strikes a balance between sample size and cost; it balances efficiencies with quality in terms of the depth of information gathered and the size of the sample from which it is gathered (refer Section 4.3.2.2). Further, the value-add that emanates from the integration of two methods that could otherwise sustain on their own, is that they are now being taken to the next level through the combination of their strengths whilst simultaneously mitigating their shortcomings.

The value of a qualitative research method is informed by the emergent nature of the topic and its need for an in-depth understanding of the subject matter. Such insight is something that could best be achieved through a variety of enriched perspectives. Various authors have referred to the qualitative approach as being most suitable in a study where the unique perspectives of participants are pertinent to the development of deeper insights into the real-life situation being studied, or where enriched information is needed (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017:8; Leedy & Ormrod, 2013:139; Blumberg, Cooper & Schindler, 2008:201).

Within the context of a qualitative approach to this planned research, a multiple case study method was selected as this method allows for in-depth investigation that leads to the desired greater understanding (Yin, 2016). With this being a case

study, the limited number of units (organisations and/or individuals) being studied intensely (Creswell, 2014:14; Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2012), necessitated the performance of a literature review to provide background to the investigated questions. Six HEIs were used as case studies. The choice of which institutions to review was informed by outcomes of the quantitative content analysis on all the HEIs' annual reports that are available in the public domain for 2019. In addition, considerations pertaining to the geographic spread, in relation to the country's provinces played a role, through avoiding concentration in only one or two provinces. There was also a deliberate effort to include one of the newly established universities. Through this approach, greater universality to the perspectives was achieved or obtained, within the limits imposed by qualitative research. Further, in terms of selecting the research participants, within these HEIs, the broad guideline noted below was followed:

- The three core focal areas of a HEI, viz. Teaching and Learning, Research and Innovation, as well as Community Engagement.
- Institutional planning, which includes the strategic management and performance management activities.
- Finance function, whose relevance is informed by the reality that the implementation of strategy, including response to pertinent risks, requires funding.
- Information and communications technology (ICT) practitioners, who are instrumental to the digitisation agenda of any organisation. Besides, this is another area that higher education sector has tended to be found wanting on.
- Assurance service providers, within the institution, e.g. internal auditing as well as ERM, given the direct role they play in strengthening the governance texture and risk culture. This purposive selection was aimed at enhancing the quality of responses in terms of their authoritative and insightful aspect.

The comprehensive research plan is presented in Chapter 4.

1.7 Relevance of the Research Study

The continual significant changes in the external environmental landscape (Yang, Yen & Balmer, 2020:878; Amirkhanova *et al*, 2017:40) have had an immense impact on the HEIs, particularly considering the historical cushion (Tewe *et al*, 2024:3; Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016:312) they have enjoyed through measures such as sufficient public funding. Such external environmental changes seem to suggest that institutional strategic management should be more of an imperative than merely a luxury or an option, especially for African universities (Popescu, 2015:413). The reason being to strengthen coordination of interdependencies and enhancement of a HEI's performance. This becomes important given the notion that HEIs appear to have not yet matured in terms of their strategic management process (Parakhina, 2017:65). Yet, Shah and Nair (2014:154) believe that despite strategy implementation having a low success rate of about ten percent across sectors there is risk that a Vice Chancellor could be the first to lose her/his job when the institution fails to deliver on expected outcomes.

1.7.1.Potential Beneficiaries

This research study will benefit the various stakeholders of HEIs who include government, industry or employers, students, the leadership team of these institutions, to name a few. Through its contribution to the body of knowledge, this study could enable the HEIs to respond better to the threat posed by further emergence of competitor HEIs (Tautila, 2017:104; Guimon, 2016:224), including foreign universities (Nazir & Islam, 2017:1), and the opportunity presented by the international students market (Da Costa & Soncinin-Pelisari, 2017:109; Guimon, 2016:217). The Australian counterpart HEIs, for instance, have not only tapped onto the international students' opportunity for revenue generation purposes, but went on to view students more as customers than merely students (Cameron & Farivar, 2019; Miles, Verreyne, McAuley & Hammond, 2017:410; Zimmermann, 2017:541).

Further, the added benefit for HEIs' leadership teams could be in the form of being better equipped to respond to a risk similar to the *#FeesMustFall* campaign. This could be in the context of improving their environmental scanning capabilities. That is, the *#FeesMustFall* campaign that gripped South African HEIs in 2015-2016 might have been identified, given that in both the developed (Taatila, 2017:104) and developing economies (van Deuren, Kahsu, Mohammed, & Woldie, 2016:160) the exploration of HEIs' funding options has long been going on.

1.7.2. Contribution to the Body of Knowledge

Part of the current body of knowledge includes the assertion by Perera (2016:31) viz., "...a large fraction of real-world risk management challenges fall in the domain of known unknowns and unknown unknowns", thus, referring to Black Elephant and the Black Swan events, respectively. Similarly, the view has been expressed by (Dillard & Reynolds, 2010:393) to the effect that HEIs must be better attuned to situations that are outside the norm, including those that constitute unforeseen dilemmas. Other aspects within the body of knowledge include assertions, for instance, that:

- More research is still required to determine the linkages between ERM implementation (capabilities) on the one hand and institutional culture on the other (Sheedy, 2016:22; Fraser & Simkins, 2016:2). This is especially so when viewed in light of the fact that even some other private sector organisations are believed to be implementing ERM largely for compliance purposes (Rasedi & Sibindi, 2023:59).
- The sustenance of an institution's strategic management process is dependent largely on its ability to coordinate its various components (Dandagi, Bhushi, Bagodi & Sinha, 2016:76);
- Given the intangible nature of risk culture, this study aimed at uprooting the HEIs from the quagmire that is similarly referred to by (Moon, Ruona &

Valentine, 2017:235). In their cross-sector focused survey they (Moon *et al*, 2017:235) refer to it thus, “Organizations...are much more challenged to unlearn what is deeply embedded as organizational cognitive structures”.

- Compounding this lack of agility is the strongly hierarchical nature of HEIs (Leisyte *et al*, 2017:328).
- HEIs need to revisit their business models to enhance their value proposition, as failure to do so could discourage students from acquiring university education (Tian & Martin, 2014:944). Focusing on a Venezuelan context, Flannery (2021:2) underscore the need for HEIs to emphasise their distinctiveness in order to sustain competition, fend-off declining public support and dwindling student enrolments. Similarly, in their recent publication, in an American context, Kaufman and Stukenberg (2024:151) point to a progressive decline in the confidence of the American population to their HEIs. Specifically, from a social value perspective, that such confidence dwindled from 57% in 2015 to 48% in 2018, before tumbling to its current 36% level. Lombardi *et al* (2019:3387) make the following statement regarding universities in western countries:

“...[they] are facing a general reduction in the number of national students, and as a consequence, many are experiencing increasing pressure to attract international students. Hence, universities are facing more competition in their main activities and a need to develop new operating models supported by strategies to attract more students and more research funding to achieve broader social and economic development goals. The broader goals are forcing universities to move from simply being higher education centres to become entrepreneurial.”,

This is also true for South African HEIs, particularly the aspect of attracting sufficient international students, which was compounded by the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, for the Science, Technology, Engineering and

Mathematics (STEM) fields, enrolment targets in some HEIs remain a common challenge (Sikhosana, Malatji & Munyoro, 2023:14).

- Trapped in the traditionalist space of collegiality, the HEIs have been reluctant to embrace the business approach to operating their activities (Rathee & Rajain, 2013:1). Despite the increasing need for agility (Conz, Denicolai & Zucchella, 2017:187) that is fuelled also by escalating operating costs and declining profitability, which is compounded by the volume and complexity of risks (Mishra, Rolland, Satpathy & Moore, 2019:163), the higher education sector remains largely static or less agile.
- The decades long challenge of funding within the higher education sector in various countries, which is punctuated by a unique dimension in the case of South Africa, viz. administrative challenges on the part of the National Students Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), contribute to increased student debt (de Villiers, 2023:10).

Given the significant role that the higher education sector plays in society (Fleacă, Marin & Fleacă, 2016:1127), outcomes of this research study could be of pivotal significance. Such significance could be in terms of strengthening the understanding into the dynamics of the sector itself, including providing insights on how to improve risk culture therein.

1.8. Summary and Chapters Layout

It is without doubt that our higher education sector is at a tipping point, and the ERM function, through successfully embedding the right risk culture could emerge as a kingmaker. Such risk culture should, amongst other things, bring to the fore an environment whereby the siloed approach and hierarchical tendencies are replaced with open sharing of wisdom which also enhances institutional agility.

Perhaps those who continue to be optimistic about this sector realise that it can in fact emerge from its bureaucracy and embrace the sense of agility that is required to be more competitive.

Finally, this study is also mindful of the significance of strategic management initiative within organisations, including the reality that strategic change is generally difficult within the higher education sector itself. As such, this study aimed to illuminate the contribution that can be brought about by a deeper risk culture. Outcomes of this research are specific and customised to the higher education sector. To address the primary research objective, this research study comprises six chapters whose respective focus is depicted below:

- Chapter 1 – Introduction to the Study
This Chapter contains the background information pertinent to the research study and introduction. A glimpse into the literature review, accompanied by the research gap that is framed against completed research studies, is articulated. Thus, paving the way for identifying the research gap and then formulating the research problem, which is the ‘Why’ and thus relevance of the study.
- Chapter 2 – The Higher Education Landscape – Opportunities and Challenges
This Chapter recognizes the seeming contradiction that punctuates the higher education sector. That is, whilst there are similarities amongst the various countries’ HEIs, which thus presents an opportunity for meaningful comparison, there are also distinct peculiarities about the South African HEIs which call for context in terms of analysis. Hence, this Chapter seeks to provide a broad overview of the higher education sector landscape, with its HEIs that operate in a unique manner. In this regard, it contains some of the key factors uniquely defining the sector, to lay a foundation to provide a better appreciation of the risk culture’s relevance within the sector (which is discussed in Chapter 3).

- **Chapter 3 – Enterprise Risk Management and Risk Culture: a Literature Review**
The point of departure for this Chapter is to lay the foundation for this research study, founded in the field of ERM broadly, but with specific focus on risk culture. This Chapter articulates the key phases of a typical strategic management process in an organisation. It further attempts to map out the main features of a risk culture to each of these phases, whilst also highlighting the related challenges pertinent to each of these key stages. In this context, the Chapter contrasts and compares the higher education sector with other sectors, given that sector boundaries have been collapsing – and continue to do so. The theoretical lens is elaborated upon and a practical illustration of how theory relates to the study is portrayed.

- **Chapter 4 – Research Design**
In this Chapter, the research design that is used to address the main and the SROs of the study, is described. Delving into the research methods, an elaboration of both quantitative content analysis and the qualitative survey are unpacked - including insights into how participants were selected, and data collection and analysis undertaken. In an effort to preserve the research integrity of the study, this Chapter rounds-off with ethical considerations and the limitations of the study.

- **Chapter 5 – Research Findings**
The findings of the case studies are presented and are used to develop the risk culture maturity framework, which is the primary research objective of this study. Structured around each Case Study, the results are framed along the four key focal areas, viz. the competitive external environment, the strategic management process, the institutional culture, and the risk culture. Intent on strengthening the external-inward perspective, the Chapter continues along those 4 focal areas in narrating the views of those participants who operate outside the South African HEIs. Concluding with a triangulation of the Case Studies' findings, this Chapter also includes the proposed Risk Culture Maturity Framework.

- Chapter 6 – Conclusion and Recommendations

This Chapter reflects on the research findings and draws a conclusion regarding the linkages that a risk culture has with the strategic management process of an organisation. Thus, presenting an opportunity for the various HEI stakeholders such as government, Council, students, staff, and industry to benefit. Contributions of this study are categorised in terms of its impact on the body of knowledge as well as on the practice of risk culture. Recommendations are formulated on how an ideal risk culture maturity framework should look, including aspects to be considered to make it more sustainable.

Chapter 2

The Higher Education Landscape – Opportunities and Challenges

“Increasingly, educational leaders have realised that they live in a messy world where complex and paradoxical problems cannot be isolated from their contexts. Many system and school leaders have progressed far beyond leadership philosophies and management practices that were developed for past conditions and circumstances. There is increasing recognition and appreciation that leadership in complex systems and organisations requires the energy, commitment, and contributions of all who work there.” (Brown & Duignan, 2021:13).

2.1 Background and Introduction

Given the high-level context of this study, as provided in Chapter 1, it is important to build onto it by gathering insights into some of the pertinent dynamics of the higher-education sector. Therefore, this Chapter seeks to provide a broad overview of the higher education sector landscape. In this regard, it contains some of the key factors uniquely defining the sector, in an effort towards laying a foundation to provide a better appreciation of the risk culture's relevance within the sector (which is discussed in Chapter 3). HEIs are organisations that operate in a unique manner. On the one hand, these HEIs operate independently, managing their own funds and operations, with some freedom of speech being enjoyed, and undertaking some activities that are similar to those of a private sector organisation. On the other hand, these HEIs are partially funded by government, have a social mandate to address the skills need of the country, and an ethical responsibility towards stakeholders to provide quality outputs for the benefit of society (similar to a public sector organisation). These two worlds in which HEIs operate, bring unique risks to the fore.

Significantly instrumental in both the socio-economic development of any country (Jain & Gupta, 2019:115; Pouratashi & Zamani, 2019) and such country's international competitiveness (Tsvetkova & Lomer, 2019; Wafa, 2015:599), the higher education sector contributes through, *inter alia*, providing suitable graduates resulting in employees for the workplace, as well as conducting relevant research. In so doing, the sector thus plays a vital role in co-seeking innovative solutions to national problems, and hence contributing to socioeconomic growth (Zhao, 2019:1). The sector is expected to not only deliver an increased number of graduates and research outputs, but to also concentrate on enhancing the employability of such graduates – making them better aligned to the needs of the job market (Cheng, Adekola, Albia & Cai, 2022:25; Pouratashi & Zamani, 2019:299) and produce relevant research, addressing the problems of the specific country (National Planning Commission, 2012:318; World Economic Forum, 2019).

Necessarily, the quality of education becomes one of the factors that play a vital role towards making graduates employable through the knowledge they acquire and skills development. In this regard, citing a Tanzanian context, [Mgaiwa, \(2021:8\)](#) points to a multi-pronged approach, viz. the alignment of academic offerings to the country's national development priorities, the strengthening of university-industry partnerships – which [Pârvu and Ipate \(2016:125\)](#) believe to have endurance challenges - and enhancing quality assurance processes. Quality research is measured on its impact, both locally and internationally, seeking solutions to various challenges ([Chatterjee, Cordery, Loo & Letiche, 2020:1220](#)). Concurring, [Liu and Yang \(2019:3\)](#) caution against any urge to assess such impact very early after the results thereof have been released; that such impact could take up to 50 years to be realised.

For HEIs, improving the operational efficiencies in terms of their core activities, in pursuit of their institutional strategic intent and the overall role they play in terms of their countries' socioeconomic agenda, is of vital importance ([Petrusch & Vaccaro, 2019:862](#); [Villano & Tran, 2019:1075](#)). In some countries there is added emphasis on participation in the university world rankings, i.e. the government would encourage HEIs to participate in such rankings, given that the criteria necessarily leads to improvement in how the university operates ([Villano & Tran, 2019:1059](#)). As these ratings' criteria are extremely complex, the argument is that for HEI to improve their rating, they will have to improve their activities, resulting in addressing the need for delivering quality graduates and relevant research – all needed to contribute to the socioeconomic agenda of the country.

Furthermore, apart from the deliverables expected from HEIs, the higher education sector operates in a dynamic, complex and competitive environment ([Lombardi et al, 2019:3387](#); [Mahat, 2019:1091](#); [Mathooko & Ogutu, 2015:347](#)) that presents both opportunities and challenges. Its dynamism is underpinned by factors such as free education, the questioning of the quality or relevance of even value proposition of the sector, as well as changes in the environment such as opening its boundaries to international students.

To address the main purpose of the Chapter, which is to place the higher education landscape into context, this Chapter first focuses on South Africa’s higher education sector in an international arena context. Thus, providing an understanding of the scope, functioning and challenges of the South African sector. Thereafter, unique aspects within the sector are identified and debated, including current challenges faced by the sector, not necessarily unique to the sector, but which have a potential influence on the standing and even survival of HEIs.

2.2 South African Context

To understand the South African higher education sector, it needs to be placed into the context of the international domain, including a comparison of the developing versus developed countries. Although South Africa is seen as a developing country (Luna, 2020:199), its higher education sector is quite developed. To illustrate this, a comparison is presented in Table 2.1, followed by a rigorous discussion, focused on five aspects. These are the number of universities, the number of universities per population, the number of students per lecturer, the percentage of staff holding Doctoral qualifications, as well as the percentage of research output per academic staff. The comparison is done between South Africa, the UK, an example of a developed country, Russia, an example of a developing country and part of the BRICS countries, viz. Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

Table 2.1: Comparison of Global Higher Education Sector – 2019

Aspects	South Africa	United Kingdom	Russia
No of universities per country	26	164	742
No of country’s people per university	2 181 538	405 121	195 418
No of students per lecturer	21.30	15.56	9.86
% academic staff holding Doctorates	48%	54%	15%
% research output per academic staff member	0.97	Not Available	Not Available

Note: Only government universities are included in the comparison (Refer to sources in the below discussion)

From the above table, it seems that the higher education sector in South Africa is somewhat unique. For instance, despite having a relatively lower number of universities in relation to the size of its population, it remains amongst the top three destinations for intra-Africa international students (Jowi, 2024). Each of the components in Table 2.1 is discussed below.

2.2.1. Number of Universities per Country

Informing the relevance of the number of universities in a country is the evidence that an increase in that number tends to have a positive spin-off on a country's economic growth, which potentially impacts the neighbouring countries as well (Valero & van Reenen, 2019:53). This is particularly so, given that with more HEIs in a country comes an opportunity to deliver additional numbers onto the skilled labour force, as well as an added platform for research-based innovation for the country. Essentially, these are some of the factors which, according to a Global Competitiveness Report (World Economic Forum, 2019:14), contribute towards making a country more competitive. However, this argument needs context, viz. not all higher learning institutions are the same in terms of value proposition, which includes size and quality (Valero & van Reenen, 2019:60). Based on Table 2.1, it is evident that South Africa is - based on the number universities - the least competitive of the three countries. Further evidence to this lies in Table 2.2 below, in terms of research and development (R&D) spend as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP).

Table 2.2: Measure of Global Competitiveness

Measure of Global Competitiveness	South Africa	United Kingdom	Russia
Global Country Ranking	160 th	09 th	43 rd
R&D as % of GDP	² 0.8%	1.7%	1.1%
Global Ranking of R&D as % of GDP	³ 45 th	21 st	34 th

Source: WEF (2019)

¹ WEF, 2019:518

² WEF, 2019:521

³ WEF, 20198:521

As depicted in this table, South Africa ranks 60th out of a pool of 141 countries, whereas Russia and the UK occupy the 43rd and 9th spots, respectively (WEF, 2019). Perhaps there is a linkage between this measure and the one relating to Percentage Research Output per Academic Staff (refer Section 2.2.5). That is, the higher the number of universities within a country, the stronger the opportunity for research outputs. There remains a potential constraint in the sense that not all academic staff members are strong or active in research – but still the higher the number of HEIs, the better the possibility of an increased number of academics and thus research outputs.

2.2.2. Number of Universities per Population

An added perspective in interpreting the number of universities is to map this against the population size of the country, viz. how many people – in a sense – are served by each university within the country. According to Table 2.1 Russia has one public university for every 195 418 people within the population, whereas in the UK this number rises to 405 121 per university. For South Africa, the number increases to 2 181 538. This points, perhaps, to a scenario where Russia is better positioned for a more accelerated socioeconomic transformation than the UK and South Africa. Secondly, maybe the South African Government's drive for the massive access to higher education is not sustainable given this ratio of one university for every 2.1m people within the country. According to the National Development Plan (NDP) (2011:317), there is a shortage of academics within South Africa. This could mean that an increase in the number of universities – in seeking to positively impact the current ratio – could be hampered by our inability to generate an optimal number of academics. As is the case in several other countries across the globe (Tamrat, 2017:33; Dzandza, 2018:489), the role of private HEIs becomes relevant in terms of alleviating the load on the public HEIs – Matadi and Uleanya (2022:17) make such a point in the context of South Africa, specifically.

For instance, [Bingab, Forson, Abotsi & Baah-Enumh \(2018:619\)](#) point out that these private HEIs enrolling a significant proportion of students in countries such as the Philippines (80%), Korea (75%), and Cote d'Ivoire (30%).

2.2.3. Number of Students per Lecturer

It is imperative for HEIs to monitor the staff-student ratio and strive to correct it ([Khalifa & Mahmoud, 2016:51](#)). As to whether academic staff employed by universities, and as measured through the staff-student ratio, are enough to deliver quality education remains a question hard to ignore in analysing the higher education landscape. It perhaps points to the seriousness of HEIs with respect to addressing the need for quality education and research. The South African ratio of students per staff (21.30) is significantly higher compared to both the UK (15.56) and Russia (9.86), as depicted in Table 2.1. This perhaps poses a potential challenge for South Africa when viewed through the lens of student employability, particularly so when viewed in the context of unemployment rates as depicted in the table below:

Table 2.3: A Country Comparative Analysis of Unemployment Rate: 2017-2024

Country	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
Russia	5.2	4.8	4.6	5.783	4.825	3.942	3.167	3.117
South Africa	27.45	27.125	28.7	29.175	34.3	33.5	32.8	33.465
United Kingdom	4.45	4.175	3.925	4.650	4.625	3.875	4.025	4.15

Source: Ventura, 2024

For instance, [Pitan and Muller \(2020:467\)](#), in describing the student employability development skills, point to work placements and internships as integral to this priority. They also find a linkage between students' employability skills and those students' HEI of study. It is perhaps in this context that student-staff ratio becomes pertinent, viz. the higher this ratio is the more difficult it becomes for staff to enhance the student experience and strengthen employability skills.

Concurring, [Zighan and El-Qasem, \(2020:694\)](#) take the employability view a step further by asserting that HEIs must respond to changes in the workplace landscape, particularly considering emerging skills required. An added perspective includes the emerging trend of edutainment within the HEIs, where the academics are expected to infuse an element of entertainment in their academic teaching and learning experience, so as not to just delight the students – as customers – but enhance their employability skills too ([Vos & Page, 2020:75](#)). Perhaps this too requires a better ratio, in terms of staff-to-student within a HEI. This is likely to pose a challenge in a country where government funding is constrained ([Pitsoe & Letseka, 2018:116](#)), and engulfed in fierce competition ([Ramjeawon & Rowley, 2020:754](#)). Relatedly, the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has led to the national fiscal budget reprioritisation ([Mestry, 2022:74](#)), which could adversely impact the HEIs for some time to come.

In the context of Russia, a positive picture of an improving trend when comparing the year 2017 to the year 2012. That is, the ratio of 9.86 is an improvement from 14.41 as of year 2012 ([Elagina, 2019](#)). A possible explanation for this improvement is the impact of the Project 5-100 which the Russian government launched in 2013 ([Tsvetkova & Lomer, 2019:129](#)). It is aimed at encouraging Russian HEIs to pursue favourable spot world university rankings. Another possibility is that the trend of continual decline in the number of students, which has been plaguing other parts of the world, especially the USA, has in fact engulfed the Russian higher education sector ([Jukova, Vetrova & Kabanova, 2019:627](#)).

Despite this decline, the Russian context has also experienced a decline in the number of academics within that country, which was punctuated by a drop of about 34% between 2010 and 2018. However, there has been a reversal of this trend effective 2016 and hence the perception that staff workload increased ([Jukova et al, 2019:630](#)). This reversal in the trend could be the outcome of the Project 5-100, including HEIs' efforts to attract international or foreign-based academics into the Russian market. Accompanying these, in addition, was also the drop in the number of HEIs – both the public and the private sector.

In the context of the UK, this relatively higher proportion of students to academic staff (viz. 15.56) could be a result of the UK being one of the countries that have continued to attract international students. For instance, according to [Gbolle and Gong \(2020:18\)](#), the UK is the second largest country in terms of being a preferred destination for international students – with the USA being in the lead. In so doing, the UK has also leveraged on the opportunities for post-study employment for those international students who come to the UK for furthering their studies ([Wu & Chan, 2019:45](#)).

2.2.4. Proportion of Academic Staff Holding Doctoral Qualifications

In terms of academic qualifications, and specifically the proportion of academic staff with Doctoral qualifications, the South African government aspires to have the country’s HEIs achieving a target of 75% by 2030 ([Ramjeawon & Rowley, 2020:753](#); [DHET, 2020:38](#)). However, currently, the previously advantaged HEIs dominate in this regard and seem better positioned to achieve this 2030 aspiration.

Table 2.4: A Comparison of Proportion of Academics Holding a Doctoral Degree in 2022 and 2018

Name of Higher Education Institution	⁴ 2022	⁵ 2018
University of Pretoria	71.9%	69.6%
Stellenbosch University	66.1%	57.2%
University of Witwatersrand	67.9%	65.9%
University of Cape Town	61.5%	64.0%
Rhodes University	61.7%	58.4%
Cape Peninsula University of Technology	33.9%	30%
Durban University of Technology	35.4%	29.6%
Vaal University of Technology	22.6%	20.3%
Mangosuthu University of Technology	24.9%	16.7%
Walter Sisulu University	27.0%	13.2%

⁴ Source: DHET (2024)

⁵ Source: DHET (2020)

A few factors could be at play, thus underpinning this scenario. For instance, the brand image of the institution, which in turn plays a role in so far as its ability to attract the higher-calibre scholars when recruiting, as well as the extent to which the HEI's working environment is enabling, may be key contributory factors. Interesting to note is how this scenario positively correlates with the extent to which these same HEIs feature in the world university rankings (refer to tables 2.5 and 2.6). That is, the universities with more staff holding Doctoral qualifications are the very same ones who claim the representative leader role for the country at the global rankings. Important to note though is that, according to [NACI \(2023:14\)](#), that aspiration of 75% of academics holding a doctoral degree is no longer achievable by the target 2030.

In the context of Russia, although there has been an overall decline in academic staff numbers, this has been much lower amongst those academics (staff) holding Doctoral qualification ([Jukova et al, 2019:630](#)). Perhaps the Russian HEIs' talent management strategy includes attractive remuneration packages enjoyed by those who obtain doctoral degrees ([Kuznetsova, Dianov, Ovezova, Suslov & Markova, 2021](#)). This would make sense for institutions that are competing for a spot in the Top 100 in the world university rankings.

In the context of the UK, the 54% proportion of staff with Doctoral qualifications was in anticipation of a policy made in that country in 2012, requiring new academics to have a Doctoral degree as a minimum academic qualification. Such a requirement was made to improve research quality ([Morgan, 2011:6](#)). As a result, over the six-year period (2012-2018) there was a 34% increase in this stratum ([Times Higher Education, 2018](#)). This was a strategic decision, likely to have a positive spin-off on a few other areas, e.g. increase in research outputs for the country, an increase in innovation-inspired competitiveness for the UK, and boost in the brand image of the respective HEIs.

2.2.5. Percentage Research Output per (Academic) Staff Member

Research is one of the primary focal areas prioritised by a HEI (Swartz, Ivancheva, Czerniewicz, & Morris, 2019:574). According to the Universities UK International Report (Stern, 2019), the UK is the third largest country in terms of research outputs, after both the USA and China. One of the factors that contribute towards the UK's strength on the research front is perhaps a recent initiative that the country has embarked upon, which Burton, Gruber and Gustafsson (2021:736) refers to as academic-practitioner workshops. These are about organisations or companies articulating a problem they are battling with and presenting it to a HEI for academics to grapple with and seek to untangle. This approach differs slightly from the ordinary university-industry partnerships, which are more about generating third-stream income. Yet, these academic-practitioner workshops are mainly about co-creation of solutions than monetising the problem. On the other hand, commendable as the third spot is in terms of world research outputs, when viewed in the context of how wide the gap is between the UK's performance and that of China, the view might change a bit. That is, both in terms of actual research outputs, where UK's volume is half the volume delivered by China, and the UK's 1.8% year-on-year increase on those research outputs is somehow incomparable to China's 10% (Stern, 2019:25).

The UK is trailing behind with such a wide gap even though research outputs serve as one of the tools that governments often utilise for determining the funding of HEIs. Perhaps, the existence of a performance-based research assessment tends to become one of the basic features of an academic (Chatterjee *et al*, 2020:1231), although dreaded by some for its links with the New Public Management (NPM) movement it might boost UK's performance. Perhaps, such assessment brings us back to a conversation about the NPM. For instance, does government not have a right to put in place some form of performance measures for HEIs in relation to research funding granted, so that this serves as a form of HEIs' accountability for taxpayer resources? Does resentment of such assessments, by some within HEIs, not point towards oblivion to the direct linkage that tends to exist between

performance and risk culture? Would such resentment sustain even in relation to industry sourced funding as well as philanthropic funding, given that those stakeholders would have conditions attached to their funding support?

In the context of Russia, higher education-driven research is still meagre, due to several factors. These include a relatively smaller number of researchers within the country, most of whom are ageing, an even smaller number of younger incoming researchers, the brain-drain that has gripped the country's academic field, the lack of data within the country, and the constrained interaction which the higher education sector tends to have with the external world (Smolentseva, 2019:6). Other factors such as the increase in the proportion of students in relation to academics, as well as the closure of several HEIs within the country, implies an increase in the workload of academics in Russia (Jukova *et al*, 2019:630).

Necessarily, given the importance of both research as well as teaching and learning within a HEI, this would inevitably have an adverse impact on research. Equally important, is the concern expressed by Chawla (2020). It relates to Russian journals that recently retracted 800 papers, on ground of plagiarism, self-plagiarism and gift-authorship. Yet, the view expressed by Calof, Meissner and Vishnevskiy (2020:21), viz. that the Russian government has taken a formal stance, requiring state owned enterprises to be more innovation-driven, points towards a positive direction. Perhaps, it presents an opportunity for university-industry partnerships. However, there might be some way to go before the country's research appetite deepens enough, to a point of the country embracing internationalisation and the external world. Until then, and before the impact of Project 5-100 as mentioned before, the proportion of research undertaken by academic staff is likely to remain relatively lower.

In terms of research, the launch of Project 5-100 by the Russian government in July 2015 has had a positive impact on the country. Aimed at tapping on research as one of the levers for springing at least five HEIs amongst the Top 100 universities on the world university rankings, this has also intensified the

competitive spirit within the HEIs (Moed, Markusova, & Akoev, 2018:1154). As part of that competitiveness, some of these institutions have increased their efforts in attracting international researchers or academics (Lai & Vonortas, 2020:9). This points to the fact that government, as one of the key stakeholders of HEIs, can have a positive impact in terms of how the HEIs perform.

Another key message, perhaps, could be that with an increase in relevant research comes deeper focus on innovation; relatedly, the question of risk culture inevitably arises within these HEIs. That is, any innovation initiative is inherently a project, and as part of planning and delivery thereof, the project risk profile would need to be undertaken. Expectedly, with each project undertaken, the 'way of doing things around here' (viz. risk culture) improves, especially if lessons learned become an area of emphasis within the sector itself.

Regarding the South African context, the percentage research per staff member remains lower than expected, according to the latest report from the [Department of Higher Education and Training \(DHET\) \(2020\)](#). This means that despite concerted effort through performance measures and regular reporting, as well as research-related funding by government, the research outputs are overall not at expected levels. However, worth noting is the fact that, during the same 2018 year, eight of the South African HEIs performed above the average, viz. 0.97.

In terms of broad academic fields, the science, engineering, and technology (SET) fields tend to have the most publications compared to the other fields within the country (DHET, 2020). Perhaps this points to the concerted efforts towards higher-prioritisation of this broad field by the Higher education sector within our country. That is, given the realisation that the SET field is critical to a country's socioeconomic development, HEIs may have placed an added emphasis on encouraging researchers within SET to publish. In addition, a related factor could be the one highlighted by DHET (2019:12), viz. the higher proportion of students in this field, which could be serving to inspire academics into more publishing. This same DHET report points towards research productivity that has improved across

all universities in the country over the 11-year time horizon through to 2017. Underpinning the increase is the strengthened ability to attract funding, by both the academics and the institutions themselves. This perhaps points to an opportunity that some institutions are beginning to seize, viz. of including entrepreneurial activities as part of the academic staff's personal training and development. Thus, ensuring that this key activity – of fundraising – does not remain with only a small proportion of administrative staff within the respective HEIs.

2.3. Unique Environment – Some Key Trends

Although the challenges faced by the sector include those that cut-across various sectors and thus are not unique to HEIs (Ruben & Gigliotti, 2019:26), the context and the way these challenges can be addressed are unique for the sector. Contained below are some of the key trends that punctuate the higher education sector landscape. Although this list is not complete, it does address the most prominent trends influencing the sector (addressed in sections 2.3.1 to 2.3.9).

2.3.1. International Rankings

Following its conception and/or launching in the USA during the early 1870s, the ranking of HEIs has mushroomed in various countries. The initiative has graduated from a national realm to an international one, with institutions of higher learning seeking to enhance their stature globally. For instance, in South Africa, such jostling as depicted in the Table 2.5 below includes 11 of the public HEIs in the country, with these institutions competing to improve their rating annually. Higher rated institutions ride on these ratings for marketing purposes. For example, in 2018 the University of Pretoria had the highest research output rate (DHET, 2019:34) of all universities in the country, yet, its international rating was below other institutions due to other factors that come into play. As the public does not always understand research output, higher-ranking universities are perceived as 'better' HEIs and are chosen by top scholars as their university of choice – resulting in a higher throughput rate that again leads to higher revenue.

In the table below, three rating bodies are compared, viz. the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), the Times Higher Education (THE) and the Quacquerelli Symonds (QS). The decision to limit the analysis for South African universities' standing to these three, is informed by the fact that these three tend to be regarded as the trendsetters, amongst the ranking bodies (Wilkins, 2020:151; Sheeja, Mathew & Cherukodan 2018:154). They have even had an influence in the decision of some governments which made it policy for universities in their respective countries to pursue world rankings (Villano & Tran, 2019:1059; Belov, Chernova, Khalin & Kuznetsova, 2018:156; Moosa, 2018:50; Sheeja *et al*, 2018:155).

Table 2.5: South African Universities' International Rankings (2018-2020)

Year 2020					
ARWU		THE		QS	
101-200		101-200	University of Cape Town (136) University of the Witwatersrand (194)	101-200	University of Cape Town (198)
201-300	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of Cape Town University of the Witwatersrand 	201-300	Stellenbosch University	201-300	
301-400		301-400		301-400	Witwatersrand University (400)
401-500	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stellenbosch University University of Pretoria 	401-500	University of KwaZulu-Natal	401-500	Stellenbosch University (427)
501-600	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of KwaZulu-Natal 	501-600	North-West University	501-600	University of Johannesburg University of Pretoria
601-700	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North-West University University of Johannesburg 	601-800	University of Johannesburg University of Pretoria	601-700	
701-800			University of the Western Cape	701-800	
801-1000		801-1000	Tshwane University of Technology	801-1000	Rhodes University
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rhodes University University of South Africa 				University of KwaZulu-Natal University of the Western Cape

Year 2019

ARWU		THE		QS	
101-200		101-200	University of Cape Town (156)	101-200	University of Cape Town (200)
201-300	University of Cape Town University of the Witwatersrand	201-300	University of the Witwatersrand	201-300	
301-400		301-400	Stellenbosch University	301-400	Witwatersrand University (381)
401-500	Stellenbosch University University of KwaZulu-Natal University of Pretoria	401-500	University of KwaZulu Natal	401-500	Stellenbosch University (405)
501-600		501-600		501-600	University of Johannesburg University of Pretoria
601-700	North-West University University of Johannesburg	601-800	University of Johannesburg University of Pretoria	601-700	
701-800			University of the Western Cape	701-800	University of KwaZulu Natal
801-1000	University of South Africa	801-1000	Tshwane University of Technology	801-1000	North-West University Rhodes University University of the Western Cape
1001+		1001+	University of South Africa	1001+	

Year 2018

ARWU		THE		QS	
101-200		101-200	University of Cape Town (171)	101-200	University of Cape Town (191)
201-300	University of the Witwatersrand	201-300	University of the Witwatersrand	201-300	
301-400	University of Cape Town	301-400	Stellenbosch University	301-400	Stellenbosch University (361) University of the Witwatersrand (364)
401-500	Stellenbosch University University of Pretoria	401-500	University of KwaZulu Natal	401-500	
501-600	University of KwaZulu Natal	501-600		501-600	University of Pretoria
601-700	University of Johannesburg	601-800	University of Johannesburg University of Pretoria	601-700	University of Johannesburg
701-800	North-West University University of South Africa		University of the Western Cape	701-800	Rhodes University University of KwaZulu Natal
801-1000		801-1000	University of South Africa	801-1000	North-West University University of the Western Cape

ARWU = Academic Ranking of World Universities
 THE = Times Higher Education
 QS = Quacquerelli Symonds

From the analysis above, although the rankings differ for the three ranking bodies, certain trends occur, for example, all rate the University of Cape Town as the highest-ranking university in South Africa. This is something that the University is proud of and uses it in their marketing material. For instance, on its institutional webpage there is an article dated 20 August 2019, with a boastful heading, viz. “UCT Tops in Africa in All Five Major Rankings” (Shabalala, 2019). Further, the top three universities remain the same for the three-year period and on all the lists, namely University of Cape Town, The Witwatersrand University and Stellenbosch University, although there may be slight differences on who is first, second and third.

Some thought leadership practitioners, such as Moosa (2018:56) believe that within the last decade, these rankings have blossomed, despite reservations from some quarters in so far as the fairness of such rankings. In other words, more and more institutions are participating, and additional ranking bodies are emerging. In this regard, they have sought to achieve various objectives such as attracting the best students (locally and internationally), attracting top calibre academic staff, and deepening their research capabilities (Doğan, 2019:20). As such, the competitive rivalry amongst institutions of higher learning tends to intensify (Kumar & Thakur, 2019:775; Block & Khvatova, 2017:762), with the quest for an improved spot in the international rankings being the underpinning factor (Ghiasi, Fountas, Anastasopoulos & Mannering, 2019). Despite the significance of such rankings though, and although quality has often been an important consideration within the sector (Kumar & Thakur, 2019:793), there remains a challenge in that the professional bodies, or agencies, involved in determining the rankings still battle to clearly define quality (Kumar & Thakur, 2019:793). In other instances, rankings have tended to enjoy overly-focused attention from within universities, to a point that some higher learning institutions compromise on their other priorities (Doğan, 2019:32). Given numerous ranking bodies, producing reports that measure different criteria, the summary in Table 2.6 below seeks to provide an overview. In the third column the criteria that each rating agency is focusing on is presented. In the fourth column the criteria are linked to the key indicators.

Table 2.6: Higher Education Institutions' Ranking Agencies

Source	Head-quartered	Year Launched	Criteria Focusing on	Key Indicators ⁶
1. ARWU	China	2003	1.1 Quality of education (10%) 1.2 Quality of Faculty (40%) 1.3 Research Output (40%) 1.4 Per Capita Performance (10%)	a. Alumni – Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals b. Staff – Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals c. Highly-cited Researchers d. Papers Published in Nature and Sciences e. Papers Indexed in Science and Social Science Citation Indexes f. Per Capita Performance
2. Centre for World University Rankings (CWUR)	United Arab Emirates	2012	2.1 Quality of Education 2.2 Alumni Employment 2.3 Research Outputs 2.4 Quality of Faculty	2.1.1 Number of Alumni Winning Major International Awards 2.2.1 Number of Alumni Holding CEO Positions in World's Top Companies 2.2.2 Total Number of Research Papers 2.2.3 Number of Research Papers Appearing in Top-tier Journals 2.3.1 Number of Research Papers Appearing in Highly Influential Journals 2.3.2 Number of highly-cited Research Papers 2.4.1 Number of Academics Winning Major International Awards
3. QS	UK	2010	3.1 Teaching 3.2 Employability 3.3 Internationalization 3.4 Research or Academic Development	a. Academic Reputation (40%) b. Employer Reputation (10%) c. Citations per Faculty (20%) d. Faculty/Student Ratio (20%) e. International Faculty Ratio (5%) f. International Student Ratio (5%)
4. THE	UK	2004	4.1 Teaching 4.2 Research 4.3 Citations 4.4 International Outlook 4.5 Industry Income	Learning Environment (30%) 4.1.1 Reputation Survey (15%) 4.1.2 Staff/Student Ratio (4.5%) 4.1.3 Doctorate/Bachelor's Ratio (2.25%) 4.1.4 Doctorate Awarded/Academic Staff Ratio (6%) Volume, Income, and Reputation (30%) 4.2.1 Reputation Survey (18%) 4.2.2 Research Income (6%) 4.2.3 Research Productivity (6%) Research Influence (20%) 4.3.1 Field Weighted Citation Impact Staff, Students, Research (7.5%) 4.4.1 International-Domestic Student Ratio (2.5%) 4.4.2 International-Domestic Staff Ratio (2.5%)

⁶ In situations where there is no direct correlation between the Criteria Focusing on elements and the Key Indicators, respectively the alphabetic numbering has been used.

				4.4.3 International Collaboration (2.5%) Knowledge Transfer (2.5%) 4.5.1 Research Income from Industry/Academic Staff
5. University Multi-dimensional Ranking (U-Multirank)	Germany	2014	5.1 Teaching and Learning 5.2 Research 5.3 International Orientation 5.4 Regional Engagement 5.5 Knowledge Transfer 5.6 Genera	Supported by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), this ranking system prioritises a multi-dimensional approach that enables users to rank institutions according to their unique information needs. That is, it does not rely on a monolithic basis (Soho, 2017:105). 5.1.1 Proportion (%) of Expenditure on Teaching Activities 5.1.2 Percentage of Masters and Doctoral Degrees Awarded 5.1.3 Number of Fields Educational Programmes are Awarded in 5.1.4 Highest Degree Qualifications the Institution has Awarded. 5.2.1 Proportion (%) of Expenditure on Research Activities 5.2.2 Number of Publications – bibliometric data - per Student 5.2.3 Number of Professional Publications per Full-time Employed Academic Staff 5.3.1 Percentage of Foreign Sources-generated Revenue 5.3.2 Percentage of Foreign Degree-seeking Students. 5.4.1 Proportion (%) of Revenue from Regional Activities 5.4.2 Proportion of First Year Bachelor’s Degree from the Region 5.5.1 Proportion (%) of Revenue Generated from Private Sources 5.5.2 Number of Patent Publications per Fulltime Academic Staff. 5.6.1 Number of Students (Head Count) 5.6.2 Proportion (%) of Online Degree Programmes 5.6.3 Legal Status (Private vs. Legal) 5.6.4 Age of the Institution, based on Foundation Year

Source: Bugaj & Rybkowski (2018:46); Sheeja *et al* (2018:159); Soh (2017:11)2; Hazelkorn (2014:18)

Although each ranking body has different criteria, aspects such as teaching and learning as well as research and publications, are included in all. However, each body also brings a new dimension to the ranking process. For example, ARWU also includes the per capita performance (Bugaj & Rybkowski, 2018:47) that is unique, whereas THE adds the industry income or third-stream income (Bugaj & Rybkowski, 2018:47; Jajo & Harrison, 2014:473) whilst the QS brings in employability as well as the academic reputation aspects (Sheeja *et al*, 2018:158). It is not in the scope of this study to debate whether the ranking factors as depicted in Table 2.6 are correct, should be excluded or changed, but rather to explain the unique circumstances that HEIs operate in.

In terms of criticism against and potential benefits of the university world rankings, Moosa (2018:51) suggests that the tendency to overly prioritise research, which is one of the core aspects highlighted by all rating bodies, could lead to the relegation of teaching and learning from some of the HEIs' key deliverables. This could result in poor quality tuition, resulting in sub-standard graduates – stakeholders such as employees would have to carry the burden. It therefore seems that research should hold its importance in the ranking system, but caution should be given to not over-emphasise it at the cost of quality training and education.

Second, transparency of the ranking formula and how relevant it is to the enhancement of quality within the universities' core activities, remains a concern for some institutions (Vucetic, Chanda, Zhang, Bai & Maiti, 2018:70). Perhaps, compounding this aspect is the fact that there are essentially three dominating ranking bodies, which potentially places them in an 'oligopolistic' position whereby they would ignore concerns raised by their stakeholders such as HEIs.

Third, the data being used is neither updated and sanitised nor objective in the sense of being based on measurable attributes. Such integrity of data sometimes takes the form of an over-reliance on journal publications to the exclusion of conference proceedings, despite the latter serving as a platform that is also being

relied upon by of the most influential publications (Berger, Blackburn, Brodley, Jagadish, McKinley, Nascimento, Shin, Wang & Xie, 2019:30).

Fourth, reputation surveys, which tend to be another key factor for rankings, are premised on a lag-effect element that essentially excludes institutions until the impact of their initiatives would have kicked-in and impacted positively on their reputation. In other words, reputation is determined through surveys, and the latter is a tool that is informed by the 'past' – and hence the point about a time lag (Berger *et al*, 2019:29).

Fifth, a concern is emerging with regards to the extent to which such rankings address the performance of HEIs in relation to United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) (Hazelkorn, 2021).

Despite these concerns, world university rankings remain a force to reckon with, in terms of influencing the landscape of the higher education sector (Vucetic *et al*, 2018:70). It may serve as an instrument around which to develop institutional strategy, formulate strategic priorities and performance targets, as well as rallying the academic and administrative staff activities around the pursuit of such rankings (Bugaj & Rybkowski, 2018:52). This brings up the conversation on whether ERM, which has been deemed immature within the sector itself, should not play a more prominent role in matters pertaining to strategy. Further, these rankings also serve to influence the critical decisions by academics and students on which institution to render their professional services to and undertake their studies with, respectively. Essentially, the rankings place those participating HEIs in a stronger position to attract high-calibre academics and, as Chinta Kebritchi and Ellias (2016:989) points out, students. Similarly, the government funding tends to favour the higher-ranked institutions (Vucetic *et al*, 2018:70; Sheeja *et al*, 2018:155). The fact that a significant portion of the approximately 90 000 (MacGregor, 2022) HEIs operating across the globe, the majority of which occupy the Top 100 spots, come from influential countries, perhaps also contributes to their being a force to reckon with.

These countries are mainly based in North America, Europe, and Asia – with Australia, New Zealand and Argentina being the country exceptions also featuring, according to the 2019 university rankings reports. There is also a trend by the Middle East and Far East Asia regions, wherein HEIs are focused on strengthening their academic staff through international recruitment – whilst also enhancing their rankings posture too (Larbi, Zaoming, Xianzhe & Yating, 2020:193; Lai & Vonortas, 2020:9). Such recruitment aligns with the view expressed in relation to the UK context (Neale, Spark & Carter, 2018:179), viz. that the questioning posture of a university could be further strengthened by a diversified portfolio of foreign nationalities.

Finally, Tang (2019:278) points to the continued constraint in terms of financial resources, especially, as having been one of the driving factors behind enhanced focus on international rankings by HEIs. For instance, in the case of Taiwan, policymakers introduced funding for HEIs specifically targeted at encouraging those aspects which are closely linked to these rankings. Such aspects included improved teaching and learning, better quality research, enhanced internationalisation, and deepened collaboration with industry. All these aspects are aimed at encouraging the HEIs to strive for being categorised as world class universities. According to others (Swartz, Ivancheva, Czerniewicz & Morris, 2019:575), with the internationalisation of students, the ranking of universities become even more important, as universities market these rankings to attract more quality students. For South African HEIs, this relates mainly to attracting students from Africa and Asia (higher tuition fees) and top local students (higher throughput rate leads to higher subsidy).

2.3.2. Marketisation of Higher Education

The competitive external environment which organisations globally operate in, including HEIs, has perhaps contributed to the conception of internationalisation and marketisation of the higher education sector (Yang, Yen & Balmer, 2020:878; Steinþórsdóttir, Heijstra & Einarsdóttir, 2017:557). In other words, it is because of

such competitiveness that the essence of efficiencies within public sector organisations – including HEIs – became more prominent. For instance, [Odhiambo \(2014:185\)](#) asserts that in Kenya, public HEIs are required to operate along commercial lines with profitability as one of those HEIs' focal priorities.

These two concepts – of internationalisation and marketisation – are at the centre of the NPM initiative, which was introduced in the 1980s ([Duan, 2019:1161](#); [Christopher & Leung, 2015:171](#); [Yong, 2015:4](#)). Intended for public entities broadly, its constituent pillars include intensified competitiveness ([Yong, 2015:2](#)), the implementation of private sector management practices, and the adoption of measurable standards of performance, to name some of the relevant aspects for this study ([Svärd, 2019:138](#)). For the higher education sector, these two interrelated concepts imply that, first, internationalisation will lead to students and staff exchanges between and among HEIs ([Howes, 2019:527](#)). In so doing, the research opportunities will also be better enriched, and their global mobility further strengthened. With this, not only will their outlook on work be more innovation-inspired but they are likely to deliver better research solutions and enhanced teaching and learning outcomes.

Furthermore, regarding marketisation, the impact will be a situation where the running of HEIs unfolds along business principles, whereby value for money, operational efficiencies, customer service orientation, et cetera become primary focus areas. That is, the delivery of the core mandate, viz. Teaching and Learning as well as Research and Innovation, is pursued through those business principles. An added benefit of such an approach will be to nudge HEIs towards being less internally focused and thus informed by market trends.

The understanding depicted above seems to be winning the debate. That is, despite the divided views on the merits attached to the marketisation of entities of the higher education sector globally ([Miles, Peterson, Miles, & Bement, 2018:543](#)), the notion of marketisation continues to take root. Those academics who are against marketisation believe it to be a constraining measure ([Zhang, Zhao & Lei,](#)

2012:271) that has also led to the silencing of the academic voice, and thus making the working environment more stressful (Taberner, 2018:146). Its features are believed to include:

- An overly focus on economic efficiencies rather than the effectiveness of the academic effort as well (Vos & Page, 2020).
- A tilt towards autocratic tendencies, whereby the academic voice is no longer sufficiently solicited and involved in key decisions taken about the institutions of higher learning (Du & Lapsley, 2019:477).
- The surging of instrumentalism over intellectualism, which they define as inordinate emphasis on performance measures by administrators, at the expense of the academic agenda (Argento Dobija & Grossi, 2020:13; Martin-Sardesai, Guthrie, Tooley & Chaplin, 2019:54; Choon-Yin, 2016:55). This includes dampening of creativity and new knowledge generation (Kairuz, Andriés, Nickloes & Truter, 2016:889).
- The emergence of bullying and intimidation within the working environment of higher learning institutions (Badenhorst & Botha, 2022:11), compounded by the fierce competition for shrinking resources (Argento *et al*, 2020:8). Perhaps concurring in this regard, Yong (2015:12) points to the view that NPM has brought longer working hours and stress to the academic work life - whilst also instilling a teacher-researcher-administrator profile of the academic. An added dimension, according to other researchers (Pop-Vasileva, Baird & Blair, 2011:427), is that of an increase in the frequency of deadlines to be met and an inordinate amount of paperwork to be completed.

Yet, Yureva and Yureva (2016:41) assert that HEIs should prioritise the welfare of staff and society, as part of the strategic management process.

- The general lack of a sense of accountability, accompanied by distrust in those who hold leadership positions (Belluigi, Dhawan, & Idahosa, 2023:38). Perhaps, the broader university community tends to doubt if consequence management could be fairly implemented by those in positions of authority (Christopher & Leung, 2015:184). Concurring, still in the South African context, Mzimba, Smidt and Motubatse (2022:137) believe that such lacking consequence management contributes to weakening of the control environment. For instance, when staff are not punished for repeat incidents of unethical practices led to a situation where improper management overrides were prevalent. Davis (2017:325) cites the example of quality assurance that gets compromised as a result of managerialism.
- Increase disparities between the higher-rated HEIs and those less-rated ones (Jubénot, 2018:448). Although this particular study is focused on the French HEIs, it might be playing out in the South African context too?

Those in favour of the NPM believe that it has brought improvement in terms of efficiencies and effectiveness of public sector organisations, enhanced their competitiveness, and essentially sought to blur the dividing line between such public and private sectors (Lapuente & Van de Walle, 2020:470; Williamson & Carson, 2020:241; Martin-Sardesai et al, 2019:43). Similarly, Chmutova and Andriichenko (2017:54) look at NPM through the institutional autonomy lens in the context of improved funding approach and points to lump-sum funding rather than being itemised. That is, that governments in Europe have begun prioritising 4 aspects of institutional autonomy, viz. financial, academic, organisational and staffing (Chmutova & Andriichenko (2017:52). The Thailand government has also begun adopting the same trend, with sixteen of that country's HEIs having been granted institutional autonomy (Jarernsiripornkul & Pandey, 2018:301). Concurring, in favour of the NPM, others use the following arguments to support their view:

- NPM tend to place more emphasis on its impact in terms of the trend towards a positive linkage between performance management affinity and success in attracting external funding. That is, those HEIs, or units within them, that are more successful in attracting external funding are believed to be more embracive of performance measures that come with the NPM initiative ([Martin-Sardesai et al, 2019:48](#); [Chatelain-Ponroy, Mignot-Gérard, Musselin & Sponem, 2018:1387](#)). Similarly, it has a positive correlation with the deepening of research culture within a HEI, particularly if a clear measurement tool is utilised ([Olvido, 2021:29](#); [Inayatullah & Milojevic, 2016:440](#)).

- There is a belief that the increasingly competitive environment ([Hall, 2018:34](#)), requiring enhanced efficiencies as well as a higher-impact value proposition, has contributed to the marketisation of the higher education sector. That is, the declining government funding ([Ho, 2019:376](#); [van Schalkwyk & Krüger, 2019:49](#)) implied the need for diversification of revenue generation and added emphasis on third-stream revenue that comes through research activities on the one hand ([Fantauzzi, Frondizi, Colasanti & Fiorani, 2019:10](#)).

- NPM places emphasis on improved prioritisation of strategic orientation of the HEIs, including better articulation of the value proposition of the institution, particularly how the institution seeks to enhance student experience whilst also bettering their employability ([Shah & Pabel, 2020:204](#); [Wilkins, 2020:150](#)). An added perspective informing such relevance, is the broadened choice of potential institutions of higher learning that became available for students to choose from, for purposes of pursuing their studies. As such, courses being developed have had to be more enticing to students ([Garnjost & Lawter, 2019:268](#)).

- Leading to a higher-profile of the marketing activities of the institution, including usage of the social media continues to emerge as well, as part of the marketisation of higher education ([Hall, 2018:38](#)) – as it does to other organisations broadly ([Eckert, 2017:145](#)).

Closely linked with the added emphasis on marketing, is the imperative of glocal responsiveness of HEIs, which do so as part of a broader related initiative of internationalisation. That is, in seeking to make themselves attractive to foreign markets where they establish an international campus, these HEIs must strategically position their websites, infusing the local content into their 'standard' portfolio. For instance, in the context of the United Arab Emirates, which is a growing region for internationalisation, those institutions that have established a presence therein are being urged to re-look at their websites (Vadakepat & Menon, 2019:1083). The HEIs embark on a drive to deepen their students' cross-cultural literacy and global posture through policies that promote international research, and foreign exchange programmes for staff and students (Lantz-Deaton, 2017:537).

2.3.3. Financial sustainability

Linked to the debate of marketisation of HEIs as discussed above, declining government subsidy is threatening the financial sustainability of HEIs. For instance, in the USA the proportion of government subsidies has dropped from 34% in 1993 to less than 18% in 2014 (Zhao, 2019:1). Similarly, in South Africa, although it has increased in monetary terms (from R7,790 billion allocated in 2018/2019 to R8, 150 billion in 2019/2020), but when viewed as a proportion of the country's GDP, the investment in HEIs is lagging in comparison to other countries (Tewe *et al*, 2024:3), especially those in the developed economies (WEF, 2019). As a result, the HEIs have been struggling to address the gap in their finances, for example practically embracing the strategic initiative of partnering with industry in undertaking their research projects (Ezeuduji, Nzama, Nkosi, Kheswa, & Shokane, 2023:348; Jogunola & Varis, 2019:59).

The funding model of HEIs in various countries remains, in broad terms, largely similar when compared against one another. This is the case in both the developed as well as the developing economies, with unique peculiarities of one way or the

other. For instance, there is a mix of government funding, student fees or tuition fees, and the third-stream income (Musundire & Mumanyi, 2020:110). According to various researchers (Pranevičienė, Pūraitė, Vasiliauskienė & Simanavičienė, 2017), government funding, which is decreasing steadily in real terms, remains the major proportion of the revenue for HEIs. In this regard, government tends to leverage on its funding to drive some of the key initiatives that constitute a priority for their country, sometimes doing so to a point of attracting criticism that it threatens the autonomy of HEIs (Moody & Skae, 2022:132; Han & Xu, 2019:942; Ngo & Meek, 2019:24; Toma, Alexa & Sarpe, 2014:345).

Another element, viz. fee-free education, which assumes a varying complexion in some instances, but nonetheless remains rooted in the respective countries. For instance, such complexion in European states such as Austria, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Germany are such that students pay only the registration fees but the rest of the basics are funded by the state (Yende & Mthombeni, 2023:1381; Pranevičienė *et al*, 2017). In the case of Egypt, fees requirement was dropped from year 1952 onwards (Kamel, 2020:42) as the country sought to recalibrate its socioeconomic landscape. A unique aspect within the South African context is the fact that the decision to implement fee-free education for the designated strata of the student population was taken somehow haphazardly and/or in a rush (Mlambo, Hlongwa & Mubecua, 2017:59; Badat, 2015:2).

And, some believe it is not sustainable, with (Bitzer & de Jager, 2018:31) concluding that much as the idea itself sounds revolutionary but it remains financially unsustainable and morally unjustifiable. For instance, with South Africa being still a developing country and broader socioeconomic transformation still a challenge, it is hard to justify the current model. A student loan model where repayments kick-in only when the graduate starts generating income could have been a more viable option (Blackmur, 2023:53; Nkohla, Munacinga & Marwa, 2022:273; Wangenge-Ouma, 2021:2). Consultations with some of the key stakeholders, especially the HEIs themselves, did not occur sufficiently (Yende & Mthombeni, 2023:1387), something that perhaps continues proving to have been a strategic misstep.

For instance, (Whitelaw, Branson & Leibbrandt, 2022:3) indicate that the very sector of the population targeted for fee-free education had already accumulated a student debt of about R16.5 billion as of March 2022. A question to ponder on therefore, is whether this does not indicate the need for a more prominent role for ERM within the higher echelons in government generally and within DHET specifically? Could it be that strategic planning, within the governance platforms of our government, does not sufficiently incorporate ERM?

Within the system of HEIs, to what extent does Council, which is equivalent to the Board of Directors for a private sector organisation, ignite deliberations that factor some of the market trends, including the state of the economy, a forward outlook on employability trends? If this is done, then have these HEIs taken outcomes of such deliberations, on fee-free education, into account in their interactions with government?

There is also the aspect of HEIs being encouraged to source third-stream income to supplement whatever they receive through government subsidy and tuition fees, and this is viewed as a solution to the progressive decline in public funding (Tewe *et al*, 2024:7; Rapini, Chiarini, Bittencourt & Caliari, 2019:177; Squire, 2018:53). Stretching this narrative, Swartz *et al* (2019:580) believe that such third-stream income generation is likely to be soon one of the primary focal areas of HEIs, viz. becoming the public HEIs fourth pillar. In the case of Nigeria, government went a step further by requiring of HEIs to raise at least 10% through the third-stream income route (Shitandi, Njogu, Monayo & Maina, 2018:46). Furthermore, inclusivity in the sense of accommodating people living with disabilities tends to be constrained. That is, despite physical infrastructure being essential in the delivery against UNSDG Goal 4 (Ebekozen, Aigbavboa, Samsurijan, Firdaus & Rohayati, 2023; Singh & Kshirsagar, 2023:12), it tends to fall short in accommodating needs of people with disabilities.

One of the underlying reasons for such shortfalls is poor communication between students and the university, especially by not informing the HEI upfront about the nature of their disability, prior to commencing with campus activities (Taylor, Baskett & Wren, 2010:173). The decreasing public funding necessarily implies that less is available to finance projects aimed at making the learning environment more friendly to people living with disabilities. This could lead to a situation where their enrolments in HEIs could decline (Chiwandire & Vincent, 2019:11).

Pointing to some of the challenges related to funding constraints, Shitandi *et al* (2018:46) cite the shortage of academic staff and related brain drain, inadequacy of budget allocations for capital projects, and increase in the number of strikes. Perhaps the latter is more an impact of the actualisation of the other two, viz. brain drain and poor infrastructure. When one brings the reality of under-funding to the South African context, Universities South Africa (USAf) illustrate the point more succinctly. That is, despite an increase from R11 billion in 2006 to an amount of about R26 billion in 2013, this equates to about 0.75% of the country's GDP, which lower than the USA, where this proportion is 0.9%, and Germany where it is 1.1%. How does the South African higher education sector then hope to achieve the target of 1.6 million enrolments by 2030 as espoused by the NDP?

2.3.3.1 Graduate Employability

The concept of graduate employability becomes relevant to financial sustainability when viewed from the perspective of university-industry partnerships. Specifically, this talks to the context of universities' third mission, viz. their attempt to attract more third-stream income, and doing so through innovative research solutions that are developed by university students in conjunction with industry.

It is against this background that graduate employability continues to be one of the factors which underpin the value proposition of the HEIs (Hair, Wood & Sharland, 2019:645). Further, the extent to which graduates are prepared for, not only the current jobs in the market, but also careers of the future (Nauffal & Skulte-Ouaiss,

2018:1059) as shaped by, for example, technology, becomes an important factor in terms of that value proposition and/or relevance of HEIs. The link between this aspect and financial stability of the HEI, is based on the argument that if a specific institution delivers high quality graduates, as perceived by the market, its graduates are sought after by the market and students tend to choose those institutions – increasing the funding from both the students' fees and the government subsidy.

Apart from the normal technical knowledge presented by an institution, other critical competencies are lacking. For instance, soft skills such as leadership competencies remain the bedrock (O'Regan, Carthy, McGuinness & Owende, 2023:5; Pearson, 2020:55; Naufall & Skulte-Ouaiss, 2018:1065) on which other skills the industry-university partnerships together with other initiatives develop, must be based. This makes sense given the increasingly critical nature of teamwork in the market. However, most HEIs seem to be missing out on the opportunity of making their graduates more ready for the job market in this regard (Okolie *et al*, 2020:229). Instead, some of them neglect the emerging knowledge and skills required by the market and aimed at making organisations more competitive – particularly when it comes to the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), who are expected to also have skills such as problem-solving, teamwork and communication (McGunagle & Zizka, 2020:601). As a result, there are organisations that have begun dropping the requirement of a university degree on their recruitment criteria (Abeles, 2017:209; Van Deuren *et al*, 2016:169).

There are institutions such as the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) and Stanford University that have seized this opportunity. They have sought to set their value proposition apart by claiming or demonstrating that their graduate placement rate is higher (Hair, Wood & Sharland, 2019:645). Due to a rapidly changing world and the need for graduates to be market ready, as well as the declining government subsidies, HEIs need to ensure that they address the graduate employability needs. For instance, the need for graduates to be immersed with intellectual curiosity, the exploratory mindset, and an appetite for horizons-broadening (Wood

& Su, 2019:106). Reflecting in a South African context, MacGinty (2024:43) illuminates the imperative for policy to prioritise the quality of education, especially in relation to historically disadvantaged HEIs.

2.3.3.2 Retention and Dropout Rate

Government authorities regard the higher education sector as an important role player in any country's socioeconomic agenda (Singh & Kshirsagar, 2023:10; King, 1995:17). In this regard, Von Hippel and Hofflinger (2021:5) assert that government authorities tend to place prime significance to HEIs' challenge of high student dropout rates. Informing this government stance is the realisation that graduates or those who hold higher education qualifications tend to earn relatively higher salaries (Maharana & Chaudhury, 2022:194; Ezaki, 2021:40), which in turn enables the state to generate more tax revenues (Van Duser, Lucas & Cohen, 2020:421). In addition, such graduates are also more likely to lead a healthier lifestyle, and thus become less costly on the state's healthcare resources. In this regard, the implementation of various interventions continues within HEIs (Su *et al*, 2019:432). This implies the allocation of significant resources, both financially and in terms of human capacity, to implement such interventions, particularly since progress has either been stagnant, too slow or regressive (Su *et al*, 2019:446).

However, there is a view that HEIs do not necessarily have a long-term intervention strategy aimed at mitigating the student dropout rate (Gupta *et al*, 2018). This perhaps explains one of the key reasons why South African HEIs have the lowest graduation rate, which sits at about 15%, despite a considerable investment by the government (Styger, van Vuuren & Heymans, 2015:1). Contributory factors include socioeconomic transformation challenges and the lack of role models for students (Naude, 2018:246). Alternatively, as pointed out in the context of a Saudi university context, academics may not be sufficiently responsive to learners' learning styles (Ghobain & Zughaibi, 2024:1002). This then implies that the progressive decline in government subsidy, as has been witnessed over the years (Jacobs, Moolman & De Beer, 2019:130), is likely to continue in this declining trajectory.

Another common thread punctuating the higher education landscape relates to the STEM faculties, whereby for instance up to 40% of students take about two more years, beyond regulated time, to graduate (Paideya & Bengesai, 2021:1256). Despite job opportunities being in abundance in the sense of demand exceeding supply in some fields, there does not seem to be meaningful progress by HEIs (Albert & Davia, 2023:41). That is, HEIs are still unable to deliver enough graduates in this regard, leading to a situation where organisations seek to attract these skills from foreign markets (Rezayat & Sheu, 2020:112). Various reasons emerge for this challenge. First, female students tend to not follow on in their interest and capability in STEM Fields – something that is said to be similar in the Indian context as well, according to Prakasam, Mukesh and Gopinathan (2019:277). Influencing this trend, in some instances, are societal factors and stereotypic perceptions, which frame women as somehow less capable in comparison to their male counterparts (Mkhize, 2022:9).

Compounding the dilemma itself, is the tendency to have insufficient female role models in society whose specialty lies in the STEM fields (Kelly, McGarr, Lehane & Erduran, 2019:779). The fact that females generally constitute the majority gender within any society, necessarily magnifies the impact of this factor (Mkhize, 2022:4). Secondly, socioeconomic factors, in the sense of students coming from poor households, with the English language being a barrier as well (Mkhize, Malatji & Munyoro, 2023:14) make these students prefer alternative fields of study other than the STEM ones (Akpey-Mensah & Muchie, 2021:18284). Compounding this situation is the fact that there tends to be insufficient career guidance and career counselling provided by the education system prior to their entering the HEI system (Akpey-Mensah & Muchie, 2021:18285). In other words, schools are not specifically equipped with infrastructure aimed at supporting those students who come from poor communities or households (Sovansophal, 2020:61). Perhaps, this provides a logical conclusion that in a country such as South Africa, which is ridden with poverty and unemployment, the HEIs would fall far lower than their

expected enrolment targets, given that most of the population comes from poor backgrounds.

2.3.3.3 International Students

There is a considerable increase in the international student mobility, leading to an expected increase to about 15 million (students) by year 2025 (Gbollie & Gong, 2020:18). Relatedly, this presents another opportunity, which according to (Cameron & Farivar, 2019; Naik, Wawrzynski & Brown, 2017:991) is interconnected with financial sustainability, viz. international students. Whilst some HEIs, particularly those in the western world, have shown a positive trend towards tapping on this pool (Buchanan, 2019), there tends to be a common mistake made.

That is, the tendency to regard these as one homogenous group, without taking into cognisance their varying socioeconomic and cultural background – as a basis of repositioning their expectations of an academic institution (Jogunola & Varis, 2019:72). For instance, what underpins the exponential increase in the outflow of Chinese students, from a mere 179 800 in 2008 to 608 400 in 2017 (Zhu & Reeves, 2019:999), is a factor worth exploring by receiving HEIs. In so doing, HEIs would be better positioned to mitigate the competition for the same pool that is coming from non-English speaking countries, who are beginning to introduce English-medium lectures within their institutions of higher learning to attract students who do not have English as their primary language of teaching and learning (Zhu & Reeves, 2019:1008).

It would also be worth understanding what factors have led to China being the fourth largest destination of international students, after the USA, the UK, and Australia (Gbollie & Gong, 2020:18). In other words, identifying the factors that underpinned China's aspiration to have international students constituting 5%-15% of that country's HEIs (Wen, 2018:180). That is, there could be lessons learned for especially South African HEIs, as to how best to expand their international student contingent. At this stage, for South African HEIs, the notion of international

students refers largely to students from mainly other African countries, especially the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries (Lee & Sehoole, 2020:306; Chinyamurindi, 2018:209).

In other words, despite South Africa being the second largest economy on the African continent, most students who seek to pursue their studies in a foreign country tend to look towards the western world and China. The critical benefit in attracting these students is that they are not a financial burden to the state (Carnegie, Martin-Sardesai, Marini & Am, 2023:1803). That is, their enrolment with South African HEIs does not imply any form of subsidy from the South African government (Lee & Sehoole, 2020:309).

Similarly, South African HEIs usually charge an increased amount of fees which contributes positively towards the financial sustainability of the HEIs (Raghuram, Breines & Gunter, 2020:101; Snodin, 2019:1661). Furthermore, a risk factor that dampens the prospect of attracting international students is that of xenophobia which continues to engulf South Africa (Lee & Sehoole, 2020:308; Herman & Kombe, 2019:518). As such, some potential students who could have opted for South Africa as a study destination might be ending up elsewhere in another country.

2.3.4. Technology and the Massification of Online Courses

(Picciano, 2024:3; Mellow and Woolis, 2010:317) believe that technology and the related massification of online courses will continue to be the single most influential factor on HEIs globally. This view aligns with that of (Barzekar, Salehi, Karimian & Mehrabi, 2024:42; Weinhardt and Sitzmann, 2019:218), viz. that the explosion of the massification of online courses (MOOCs) has been one of the outcomes of technologically oriented advancements. MOOCs essentially refer to an approach whereby a broader pool of people globally, hundreds of thousands of them, gain access to online learning material (Marhoon Al-Mamari, Kumar & Bervell, 2024:1).

Encouraging it, [Neel \(2015:97\)](#) points to the fact that the corporate world has moved into online selling, much as online learning has been increasing as the years go by. According to [Pates & Sumner, \(2016:160\)](#) such MOOCs are essentially challenging the HEIs as exclusive knowledge providers. This type of learning opportunity is often available at no cost to those who access the MOOCs ([Barzekar et al, 2024:34](#); [Weinhardt & Sitzmann, 2019:218](#)) and is also commonly referred to as e-learning. It can be used in a face-to-face class environment but is frequently incorporated in online-learning or distance learning environments ([Ersoy & Dogan, 2023](#); [Wang, 2021:10](#)).

These are believed to have benefitted at least 58 million learners and 700 HEIs worldwide ([Sarker et al, 2019:211](#)) and contribute towards quality improvement and internationalization of higher education ([Barzekar et al, 2024:35](#); [Altinay, Altinay, Dagli & Altinay, 2019:314](#)). Necessarily, this could play into the strategic opportunity of tapping into international students and thus expanding the geographic footprint of a specific HEI. However, there are parts of the world where the quality of technology and MOOCs are compromised by basic factors such as the noise level emanating from, either the infrastructure or in-class students or poor data availability ([Barzekar et al, 2024:34](#); [Raghuvanshi, 2021:112](#)).

The extent to which various HEIs have embraced e-learning varies, with some having embarked on blended learning for a broader suite of academic offerings, whereas others have started off with specific degrees. For instance, the University of Milan has taken advantage of the evident benefit of video lessons that effectively take approximately 25% of the online learners' time compared to the same for face-to-face tuition ([Malik & Hooda, 2023:65](#); [Scarabottolo, 2019:38](#)). A further benefit is that students become better prepared for the professional or working world where video-conferencing is a tool used for virtual meetings ([Milovic & Dingus, 2021:320](#)). Other e-learning related examples include distance learning, which could take on the form of blended learning ([Zubkov, 2023:9](#); [Goradia, 2019:75](#); [Teixeira, Bates & Mota, 2019:112](#); [Boşcor, 2015:383](#)) or only online classes ([Zubkov, 2023:13](#); [Songca, Ndebele & Mbodila, 2021:57](#)).

Most of these options are driven by the need of the community (e.g. Thomsons River University due to the vastness of the area servicing students), country (e.g. the University of South Africa that inter alia addresses the need of students in rural areas or poor students - [Songca et al, 2021:46](#)) or financial sustainability of the institution, e.g. where the choice faced was to either increase the student enrolments or close the university/faculty ([June 2023:1](#); [Tajuana, 2012:2](#)). There are concerns from some stakeholders ([Malik & Hooda, 2023:63](#); [Teixeira et al, 2019:111](#)) on the quality of academic qualifications obtained through online learning – and this brings up the need for more emphasis on quality assurance measures within academic departments of the HEIs (which is discussed in Section 2.3.8).

The speed with which technology, broadly, continues to advance essentially revolutionises the higher education landscape, as the world moves towards Industry 4.0 (refer to Section 2.3.6). This is anticipated to further blur the dividing line between human learning and machine learning ([Bekmurzaeva & Kovalev, 2023:1](#); [Jain & Gupta, 2019:142](#)). Robots, Artificial Intelligence (AI), and virtual learning are now becoming a stronger integral force within the higher education landscape. To ensure sustainability of such e-learning, there is a drive towards more investment in terms of technological infrastructure. Hence, in countries such as Thailand it is the government's expectation for HEIs to invest some of the funding received from government in technological infrastructure ([Watchaton & Krairit, 2019:91](#)). Broadening the perspective, [Olubiyo and Olubiyo \(2023\)](#) assert that there should be government policy that serves to steer HEIs' approach to ICT infrastructure implementation for both the private and public sectors. It is, however, important to ensure that e-learning incorporates the need for technological advancement, and that it not only focusses on enrolling more students but servicing those students with less effort too. This again also addresses the workplace readiness of graduates (refer to Section 2.3.3.1).

2.3.5. Workplace Bullying

An academic institution, as a learning centre, places more emphasis on intellectual competence than physical strength or capabilities. Therefore, the need for emotional well-being is more pronounced in such an environment. Hence, the relevance of what [Baran \(2016:38\)](#) refers to as hi-reliability HR in the context of a HEI. One of the key success factors of such a human resources team include a commitment to prioritise prevention and response to occupational health and safety incidents – including mental wellness. However, there has been an increased trend of workplace bullying within HEIs in various parts of the globe ([Miller, Miller, Marchel, Moro, Kaplan, Clark & Musilli, 2019:47](#)). Some researchers attribute this to the fierce competitiveness that is further intensified by diminishing financial resources and increasing demand for outputs within the HEIs ([Taberner, 2018:147](#)). Unfortunately, the phenomenon of workplace bullying has not been sufficiently researched on in the context of the academia despite the adverse impact that it has on the lives of academics, their careers, as well as the institutions themselves ([Miller et al, 2019:48](#)). Further, research has tended to focus largely on the western world context ([Salin, Cowan, Adewumi, Apospori, Bochantin, D’Cruz, Dhurkovic, Durniat, Escartin, Guo, Isik, Koeszegi, McCormack, Monserrat & Zedlacher, 2019:205](#); [Ahmad, Kalim & Kaleem, 2017:205](#)), although there is emerging research focused on the African context and in a Moslem setup ([Lekchiri, Crowder, Schnerre & Eversole, 2019:340](#)).

Workplace bullying has taken various forms, including public humiliation of staff by colleagues or superiors within the working environment ([Miller et al, 2019:53](#)), excessive monitoring of the victim’s work or failing to provide them with critical information that is essential for their job ([Ahmad et al, 2017:211](#)), and lack of recognition for their work, especially in the case with women ([Lekchiri et al, 2019:349](#)). Perhaps what compounds its impact on service delivery, is the fact that it could occur over several years with the individual targeted remaining silent about it ([Miller et al, 2019:53](#)). Sadly, it also curtails the spirit of collegiality ([Ahmad et al, 2017:215](#)), which academics often claim as central to HEIs. In their publication,

[Bhana and Suknunan \(2020:412\)](#) point to poor ethics-embrace on the part of the South African HEI they focused on, which arises through breach of values such as fairness and transparency. As a recommendation, they propose ongoing training and development at all levels, including executive levels.

Results of such bullying include the loss of competent staff, especially in an environment where an expert (scholar that is well-known for his/her knowledge or research) takes years or even decades to form. Also, the attraction of new staff members becomes difficult when a specific HEI is known for allowing workplace bullying. These all result in potential lowering of standards or quality output, which again results in students unwilling to study at the institution – leading to pressure on financial sustainability. Focusing on potential solutions, [Sheridan, Dimond, Klumpanyan, Daniels, Bernard-Donals, Kutz and Wendt, \(2023:239\)](#) propose that there be volunteers from various faculties and campuses who will serve as facilitators/trainers of the university community on the policy and procedures pertaining to bullying and intimidation policy and procedures. Perhaps not necessarily a bullying and intimidation element, [Rajput and Kochhar \(2014:61\)](#) highlight the importance of human resource departments to be flexible. Specifically, that they should adopt innovative measures with the aim of making the academia more attractive to the younger generation, e.g. through strategies that accommodate flexi-time.

2.3.6. Impact of Industry 4.0

The focus on further modernisation of the economy, in the context of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4-IR) or so-called 'Industry 4.0', tends to be on current skills being rendered obsolete ([Low, Gao & Ng, 2020](#)) – including academics who have to not only equip themselves, but prepare their students accordingly ([Neelam, Sheorey, Bhattacharya & Kunte, 2020:584](#)). (This aspect also links with graduate employability as discussed in Section 2.3.3.1.) There is, however, a related opportunity in the form of government support for investments in technology, particularly in relation to embracing AI within the higher education sector.

Undertaken with circumspect, such an effort would curtail the unemployment risk within university staff, especially the academics ([Bogoviz, Lobova, Karp, Vologdin & Alekseev, 2019:211](#)).

However, within developing or emerging economies, the uptake of technology has been comparatively lower. Some of the pertinent barriers to full-scale implementation within the Indonesian higher education sector could be categorized into 4 aspects, viz. contextual barriers, social barriers, technical barriers, and cultural barriers ([Aditya, Ferdiana & Kusumawardani, 2022:449](#)). Hence, some governments – such as the one of Thailand – have pronounced their expectation for the public HEIs to embrace technology, including the rollout of an information systems infrastructure ([Watchaton & Krairit, 2019:91](#)). In this same study, a challenge noted relates to the fact that the service provider of a technology infrastructure expertise tends to be in an advanced economy, far afield, and thus creating a misalignment with the realities on the ground. Furthermore, whilst the United Arab Emirates – through the British University in Dubai - have launched a bachelor's degree in AI effective September 2018 academic year ([Holland, 2018](#)), the broader emerging economies' HEIs have not adequately embraced this opportunity. In other words, they have not yet taken onto the trend set by (for instance) the University of Oregon, which offers classes in blockchain ([Diehl, 2019](#)).

Such late-comers include the South African HEIs, which resultantly are unlikely to proactively turn the corner in so far as graduate employability is concerned. As pointed out by some of the thought leadership practitioners ([Mukwawaya, Emwanu & Mdakane, 2018:1598](#)), the South African government needs a multi-dimensional intervention, premised on policy, and aimed at progressing the country's readiness for Industry 4.0. Initiatives relating to this intervention should include the development of a strategic roadmap to guide the rollout of Industry 4.0 initiatives, the coordination of activities by the three core Departments – Basic Education, Employment and Labour, and Trade and Industry – under the auspices of the National Advisory Council on Innovation (NACI) serving as their adviser.

In addition, it is proposed (viz. [Mukwawaya et al, 2018:1598](#)) that the Technology Innovation Agency (TIA) plays a prominent role in terms of both research as well as driving the awareness campaigns on Industry 4.0. Furthermore, they call on the HEIs to consider the feasibility of a field-specific focus within the STEM area, as opposed to viewing it as a collective as is currently the case.

Concurring, [Ndung' u and Signé \(2020\)](#) investigated the Industry 4.0 challenge on a broader African continent scale. They believe that part of the challenge is that governments are reluctant to embrace it because it could threaten employment opportunities for those who are poorly skilled. Unfortunately, this also implies that the respective countries within the African continent end up being left behind when it comes to innovation, as the latter is inherently at the centre of Industry 4.0.

2.3.7. Mergers and Closures

In an effort towards enhanced efficiencies, the sector has witnessed a trend of mergers between two or more HEIs ([Sułkowski, Fijałkowska & Dzimińska, 2019:1470](#)). These arise either involuntarily as driven by external forces (e.g. government) or voluntary factors as inspired by the merging institutions themselves ([Johnes & Tsionas, 2019:298](#)). Unlike the private sector, whereon extensive research has been undertaken, pointing to a failure rate of 50-75% of mergers ([Johnes & Tsionas, 2019:298](#)), there has been only limited research focusing on the higher education sector ([Johnes & Tsionas, 2019:298](#)). As such, whilst the trend of mergers has been ongoing within the higher education sector, the success or failure rate thereof has not been formally determined, nor has there been sufficient focus on frameworks that could guide such mergers.

Suffice it to state that organisational change, which a merger brings with, constitutes a significant impact on the lives of staff. This includes an impairment of *inter alia* personal relationships, workplace harassment, and excessive workload, which effectively compromises the overall performance of an institution ([Palumbo & Manna, 2019:748](#)).

On the positive side, when undertaken with due diligence, such mergers could bring positive aspects to HEIs, including increased effectiveness in conducting research, enhanced positioning in terms of world university rankings, and/or improvement of operational efficiencies (Sulkowski *et al*, 2019:1484).

In the context of South Africa, a range of mergers occurred in the early 2000's, as depicted in Table 2.5. The main reason for these mergers was the government, and specifically the (then) Minister of Education, Mr Kadar Asmal, who believed that efficiencies, in the context of constrained resources, would be derived through the mergers. In this regard, he held a view that challenges such as high dropout rates, low throughput and graduate rates, low research outputs, to name a few would be addressed through the mergers (Karodia, Shaikh & Soni, 2015).

Table 2.7: Merging of South African universities

Currently Existing University	Institutions that Merged or Consolidated
a. Cape Peninsula University of Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Cape Technikon ▪ Peninsula Technikon
b. Durban University of Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ML Sultan Technikon ▪ Natal Technikon
c. Nelson Mandela University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Technikon Port Elizabeth ▪ University of Port Elizabeth
d. North-West University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Potchefstroom University ▪ University of Bophuthatswana
e. Tshwane University of Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ North-West Technikon ▪ Pretoria Technikon ▪ Technikon Northern Gauteng
f. University of Fort Hare	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rhodes University (a Campus only)
g. University of Johannesburg	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Rand Afrikaans Universiteit ▪ Technikon Witwatersrand ▪ Vista University (Soweto Campus)
h. University of Kwa-Zulu-Natal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ University of Durban Westville ▪ University of Natal
i. University of Limpopo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ University of the North ▪ Medical University of South Africa
j. University of Pretoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Vista University (Mamelodi Campus)

Currently Existing University	Institutions that Merged or Consolidated
k. University of South Africa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ University of South Africa ▪ Technikon SA ▪ Vista University (the Education Campus only)
l. Walter Sisulu University	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Border Cape Technikon ▪ Eastern Cape Technikon ▪ University of Transkei

Source (Adapted): Curaj *et al* (2015)

Based on the above table, the mergers of 36 HEIs resulted in only 12 HEIs, with another 12 remaining as is, supplemented with two newly established HEIs, viz. Sol Plaatjie University and the University of Mpumalanga. Hence, the current total of 26 HEIs in South Africa.

In terms of success, as viewed from the perspective of institutional culture, the results seem widely varied. Interesting to note that two of the top three South African universities according to the ranking list (refer to Table 2.3), are not on the list of universities that had to merge or consolidate. Elsewhere in the world, there have been not only mergers taking place, but closure of some institutions as well (Papiashvili, 2024:9). For instance, in the Russian higher education sector, mergers have resulted in the workload increasing on the academic staff, due to the staff-student ratio that regressed (Jukova *et al*, 2019:631). In the UK, there have been instances where the merger resulted in efficiencies of the post-merger institution increasing by at least five percent (Papadimitriou & Johnes, 2019:1468). When it comes to closures though, the impact seems to be detrimental to the community (Fenwick, 2023:3). For instance, Vasistha (2019:29) asserts, “every time a single college closes, that’s an opportunity that goes away from a community and from individuals”. Therefore, whilst mergers may be deemed necessary, closures are likely to be detrimental. Perhaps this makes even more sense in the context of South Africa, where the concept of opening higher education access to the broader society is deemed a strategic priority. It would also be interesting to find out whether proper risk profiling did precede such mergers and closures in the context of the HEIs.

Expectedly, the outcome in the form of a risk report/register would include at least two risk issues. Firstly, poor curriculum response in relation to changing needs of the market and students. [Ogude, Nel and Oosthuizen \(Not dated:24\)](#) believe that such responsiveness is one of the survival strategies for HEIs. Secondly, as pointed out by [Assan \(2021:110\)](#) poor change management efforts, including inadequate communication, which leaves some of the university stakeholders feeling unduly excluded. Further, that as part of mitigating this risk, transformation-focused workshops should be continual rather than confined to a specific period, e.g. shortly after the merger. [Mellow and Woolis \(2010:314\)](#) point to what could also be a lesson to learn from some of the USA private HEIs, such as the University of Phoenix, where curriculum development is no longer undertaken by the lecturing staff, but rather a centralized team. Perhaps embracing such a lesson could mitigate the risk highlighted in the 2022 DHET Draft Policy, viz. to downgrade or close down HEIs that do not meet specific criteria.

2.3.8. Quality Assurance

Although the focus of this study is on public HEIs, it is hard to ignore the reality that private HEIs are mushrooming at a much faster rate than their public counterparts ([Bird & Mugobo, 2021:272](#); [Scott, 2020:293](#)). They are viewed as change agents in terms of their value proposition, in the long-term, within the higher education sector ([Bird & Mugobo, 2021:282](#)). In addition, they serve to alleviate the pressure on public HEIs given the massification of higher education in most countries ([Anis & Islam, 2019:466](#)). The private HEIs tend to put emphasis on quality assurance ([Ramlachan, 2019:6](#)) largely through the lens of enhancing institutional competitiveness and improving economic performance or returns ([Vnoučková et al, 2019:87](#)). In some countries, such as Lebanon, and regions such as the Middle East, the private HEIs have even gone to the extent of seeking accreditation with international bodies. Indicators considered by those accreditation bodies include time from enrollment to graduation, drop-out rates, graduation rates, as well as employment rates ([Nauffal & Skulte-Oauiss, 2018:1059](#)). In countries such as Malaysia, it is those private institutions that come from the international front that

compound the competitiveness further, through a more refined or improved institutional performance measurement system (Yakuub & Mohamed, 2019) – effectively, quality assurance.

Quality assurance has proven to be a key challenge for public HEIs in most countries. That is, how to have a common framework that will serve as a barometer for assessing quality, in the ultimate pursuit of academic excellence, including improved efficiencies, remains a steep hill to climb (Jogunola & Varis, 2019:60). As a result, public HEIs invest an inordinate number of resources trying to structure the quality assurance measures to track institutional performance in a more accurate and comprehensive manner (Welch & Wahidyar, 2019). Their keenness to implement quality assurance measures is informed by the realisation of how competitive the higher education sector has become, and this includes the quality of learning for the students (Makhoul, 2019:235). In this regard, the imperative of utilising accreditation agencies is hard to ignore (Makhoul, 2019:248). In fact, some believe that the accreditation process should elevate itself beyond the conformity mode and embrace an exploratory, innovative-driven and differentiation-tilt posture (Gilbert *et al*, 2018:38). But there is an opposing view (Darley & Luethge, 2019:107), focused on business schools, which asserts that international accreditations are in fact encouraging African business schools to copy-cat European and American standards rather than local African context.

In the South African landscape, various private HEIs have received accreditation by DHET. This refers to both those institutions originating from South Africa, as well as institutions from other countries that opened a branch in South Africa. Such external accreditation contributes to the enhancement of a HEI's brand equity (Kundu, 2020:550) as well as improving its standing within the higher education sector globally (Motova & Navodnov, 2020:48; Talib & Rahman, 2020:244). A distinguishing feature about these private HEIs, is the customisation of their value proposition to the needs of students (Nukunah, Bezuidenhout & Furtak, 2019:298; Ramlachan, 2019:7; Tamrat, 2017:33). Making this more feasible, is the fact that they can charge higher tuition fees (Miles *et al*, 2017:410), and some (Wilkins,

2020:147; Nukunah *et al*, 2019:289) believe that the student numbers they are servicing tend to be much smaller, and success/completion rate higher. Furthermore, those private HEIs that originate from developed economies tend to have a stronger financial muscle and can invest in latest technologies, which they leverage on in terms of attracting students and justifying the higher cost in terms of tuition fees (Badenhorst, 2019; Buckner, 2017:298).

From a student profile perspective, this robs most of the public HEIs of the top students, something that is further encouraged by a perception – as per (Fomunyam, 2018:56) – that the quality of education at these public HEIs is compromised. Factors such as regular strike action, inadequately qualified and/or trained academics, as well as constrained funding necessarily have a direct impact on the quality of education. Hence, those students who are from more affluent backgrounds as well as those that get scholarships tend to study at the previously advantaged institutions (e.g. Stellenbosch University, University of Cape Town, University of Witwatersrand) or the private HEIs.

2.3.9. Stakeholder Activism

The stakeholder theory arose in response to the complexity of the environment in which organisations were operating in. Such complexity required organisational strategic management process to create value for the organisations' stakeholders (Langrafe, Barakat, Stocker & Boaventura, 2020:298). Conceived by Edward Freeman in 1984, the stakeholder theory is also about infusing ethical considerations in that strategic management process when creating value. The various stakeholders, internally and externally, whose interests may somehow conflict with one another include customers, suppliers, shareholders, managers, and employees (Dao & Phan, 2023:1625; Zakhem & Palmer, 2017:56). Bringing this theory home to the HEIs, in a Brazilian context, (Langrafe, Barakat, Stocker & Boaventura, 2020:298) point to the competitiveness which HEIs must embrace. Specifically, in relation to the attraction and retention of critical skills for academics and researchers, whilst at the same time preserving institutional brand image.

Similar views were expressed by [Wood and Su \(2019:100\)](#), viz. that to survive the competitive environment, HEIs should know who their stakeholders are as well the needs of such stakeholders.

If the sector is viewed through the prism of stakeholder theory, then there are several components that would emerge as constituting the portfolio of stakeholders pertinent to the higher education sector. According to some researchers ([Nordberg & Andreassen, 2020:178](#); [Hair et al, 2019:644](#)), such stakeholders include students, academics, university Boards or Councils, government, employees, employers/industry, regulatory bodies, and society, to name a few of the most prominent stakeholders. The extent to which HEIs have leveraged on these stakeholders tends to vary. For instance, according to [Pecori et al \(2019\)](#), the preference for blended learning and distance learning by students – whose profile is changing – has seen a trend where institutions have responded by embracing more of these modes of teaching.

The profile of stakeholders includes characteristics such as students with disabilities of one form or another, and those students' distant physical location in relation to academic institutions. It is possible to further stratify disabilities into a sub-strata of students and employees, respectively ([Mays & Brevetti, 2020](#)). A similar sub-stratification could be done with regards to the lesbians, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, inter-sex, queer and asexual (LGBTQIA+) of university stakeholders ([O' Donnell, 2019:27](#)). In the context of South Africa, despite the country's globally admired Constitution, in terms of inclusivity, the actual practice within organisations points to poor embrace of people within the LGBTQIA+ strata of the population ([Ndzwayiba & Steyn, 2019:404](#)). Perhaps then, HEIs need, as part of their risk culture, to carefully consider these sub-strata, when formulating their stakeholder engagement strategies. Thus, incorporating the view by [Horne, Maroney, Nel, Chaparro and Manalastas \(2022:979\)](#), viz. that the transformation agenda within South Africa's HEIs should encourage a more prominent voice to the current nuances that seek to infuse 'degendering' and 'decisgendering' and, as others

(Shah, Zaman & Rashid, 2022:28) assert, organisations must avoid relegating this matter to sideline conversations.

The broad spectrum of stakeholders, with varied and seemingly contradictory expectations, is a challenge that cuts across sectors – although stakeholders may be different. What makes it different and complex, is that education can be seen as a social right of all citizens in a specific country (Do, 2020:41), bringing an ethical dilemma to the discussion when HEIs do not deliver on their promise of quality education (Kumar & Thakur, 2019:793). However, there are some aspects that are unique to the sector that influence the standing of HEIs as viewed by all stakeholders. For example, the institutions' positioning in the world university rankings and the debate over the marketisation or privatisation of education for economic reasons bear relevance. Such rankings involve, on the one hand, the attraction of the best students to ensure high throughput rates, which then results in higher subsidy from the government, leading to universities being able to take in more students or lower the cost for students.

On the other hand, the privatisation of education may lead to a situation where quality education is mainly for the elite within society. Despite this fear – of access being for the elite – there is an emerging view (World Bank, 2019), wherein there is forecast made of a scenario whereby governments might end up funding poor students who prefer to enroll with private HEIs. If this were to materialise, it would constitute an even worse business continuity risk for public HEIs. It could also influence the HEIs into higher prioritisation of their value proposition to stakeholders, particularly the students and alumni. As far as the latter is concerned, for instance, Nakavachara (2020:79) asserts that the Master of Business Administration (MBA) qualification seems to have lost impact on students' career prospects, to a point that Chief Executive Officers (CEO) with MBA qualifications tend to be outperformed by those that do not hold an MBA. This presents an opportunity for HEIs, viz. to stay in touch with their alumni, track their career progression, and leverage on the success stories to higher profile the brand image of the HEIs themselves.

Finally, at a time where HEIs compete for funding, HEIs need to truly become more sensitive to stakeholder activism and respond with more circumspect and in a sustainable manner. This is especially important given that stakeholder expectations management is becoming more crucial for financial sustainability (as addressed in Section 2.3.3). Whilst stakeholder activism has been on the rise in most sectors, in the context of the higher education sector, it seems to be informed by trust that is either lacking or declining – particularly from the public and policy makers (Vasistha, 2019:29).

2.3.10. Community Engagement

Saidi and Boti (2023:79) illuminate the fact that community engagement is the common focal point and/or term being used, in the context of the South African public higher education sector. Yet, some (Taieb, 2024:161; Spânu, Ulmeanu & Doicin, 2024:1) believe that it is in fact an integral part of a broader term called the third mission. They point to other elements thereof being technology transfer initiatives and applied research activities. In an earlier publication, focused on the Vietnamese context, (Nguyen, Le & Pham, 2021:8) pointed out that the various constituent elements of the third mission did arise at once, in a single study, but emerged over time. The benefit of community engagement is that it not only strengthens trust between a HEI and its communities, through demonstrating the relevance of its value-add, but community engagement also enables both students and academics to gain real-life experiences (Spânu, Ulmeanu & Doicin, 2024:2).

Reflecting earlier, in a Romanian context, Udrea, Costoiu and Semenescu (2022:22) pointed out that industry expects of HEIs to deliver market ready graduates, through curricular flexibility, innovation and the broader learning outcomes. Broadening the context, Saidi and Boti (2023:78) take the perspective that HEIs ought not to be ivory towers, or bystanders, when society finds itself in turmoil of one form or the other. Stretching the narrative, du Plooy and von Moellendorff (2024:115) illuminate the imperative of mutually beneficial influence

between HEIs and communities. Yet, in their earlier publication, [Nabaho, Turyasingura, Twinomuhwezi and Nabukenya \(2022:94\)](#) illuminate the imperative not to put profit and revenue as an initial priority.

There seems to be commonality in terms of who the key stakeholders of HEIs are, in relation to the third mission, viz. government, industry, and communities or society ([Taieb, 2024:161](#)). In their General Framework on Community Engagement, ([Spânu, Ulmeanu & Doicin, 2024:16](#)) articulate 8 key constituent steps. These are defining the purpose; identifying the stakeholders; building capacity; fostering collaborative partnerships; incorporating diversity, equity and inclusion; establishing metrics for monitoring and evaluation; sharing and disseminating results of community engagement; and tapping on transparent feedback.

Despite dating back to the 1860s, when it originated in the United States of America ([Nabaho, Turyasingura, Twinomuhwezi & Nabukenya, 2022:82](#)) the third mission seems not to enjoy adequate prioritisation within HEIs, whereby some even go an extent of regarding it as a waste of time ([Rubens, Spigarelli, Cavicchi & Rinaldi, 2017:364](#)). For instance, such assertion was made in a German context ([Stolze & Sailer, 2022:595](#)) where HEIs were urged to accord the third mission the same status as teach and learning as well as research and innovation. Similarly, zooming more particularly into community engagement and in a South African context, [Dube and Hendricks \(2023:148\)](#) had made that equality of prioritization call. However, they stretch the narrative a step further, by pointing to specific faculties, in particular, which are more likely to view community engagement as of remote essence, viz. those in science fields.

Taking a perspective that seems co-solution seeking, [du Plooy and von Moellendorff \(2024:112\)](#) point out the need to work around the bureaucratic tendencies within HEIs, e.g. through positioning the CE team as autonomous in relation to its accounting systems and processes.

2.4. Conclusion

The higher education sector landscape as depicted through this Chapter is to be viewed through the lens of risk culture. For instance, the seeming reluctance by some to fully embrace community engagement, despite its originating from over a century ago, could be another pointer towards HEIs being of an inward-looking posture and lacking in terms of the exploratory posture. Similarly, the HEIs' stakeholder-centricity seems to require some improvement when viewed through the lens of continued workplace bullying and intimidation, a stubbornly high student dropout rate, and the sustained questioning of graduate relevance to the market. Thus, heightening the relevance of whether it is time to embrace a new risk culture maturity framework.

Further, the Chapter recognises a sobering reality that some of the complexities within the higher education sector are of historic origin and impact other countries too – in both the developed and emerging economies. As such, in search of solutions, within the South African context, it is prudent to balance the commonalities, across regions and/or countries, with peculiarities that punctuate the uniqueness of South Africa and distinctiveness of each HEI.

Finally, with an elaborate coverage of the broader higher education landscape through this Chapter, the next priority is to delve into multi-sector peek into risk culture, institutional culture and strategy – in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3

Enterprise Risk Management and Risk Culture: A Literature Review

“Organizations don’t just prepare for the future. They make it. Moments of uncertainty hold great entrepreneurial potential.... It takes strength to stand up against the tyranny of the present and invest in imagination. Strategic foresight makes both possible – and offers leaders a chance for legacy. After all, they will be judged not only by the way they do today, but by how well they chart a course toward tomorrow.” – (Scoblic (2020:47))

3.1 Introduction

This Chapter serves to lay the foundation for the empirical research founded in the field of ERM, but with specific focus on risk culture. Given the extent to which various authors have attributed corporate scandals and collapses to risk culture (refer to Section 3.4.1), it was found prudent to explore how the concept of risk culture plays itself out in the higher education sector, having its own unique context and challenges (refer to Chapter 2), and more specifically within the context of public HEIs in South Africa. Although studies have been conducted in this regard (refer to Section 1.2) the research gap has been two-dimensional. First, no studies could be found that focused on developing a risk cultural maturity framework for public HEI. Second, studies on risk culture within the higher education sector excluded the integration between risk culture and the strategic management process.

Given that all organisations undertake their core activities in pursuit of strategy, and the link between risk culture and strategic management processes, these two aspects are limited within the scholarly body of knowledge. It became important for this research study to explore how these two links and play out within the higher education sector. Finally, in seeking to broaden the contribution to the body of knowledge, with risk culture as a sub-component of institutional culture, the latter component is also brought into the debate. Institutional culture is viewed as a critical pillar for sustaining the organisation through environmental complexity, and enhancing its prospects of achieving its goals (Pietersen, 2017:262). Thus, constituting a transition in the context of defined by Hicks, (2020:11), viz. that transition is complex, yet punctuated by a number of unexplored possibilities.

This is informed, partly by the reality that it tends to permeate across the organisation, viz. not just the tone-at-the-top but the behaviours and/or actions by the broader role players in other parts of the organisation (Whalen, 2018:44). Providing that the risk culture, strategy, and institutional culture are important to support a HEI to not only survive, but thrive, the question remains: How is this three-way dynamic relationship playing out in the higher education sector?

Informing this literature review is some specific factors.

First, the external environment through which organisations must navigate continues, through various changing factors, to be competitive and turbulent (Ribando, Slade & Fortner, 2020:289; Saiti *et al*, 2018:459; Weerasinghe & Fernando, 2018:877) – leaning on a mature risk culture. It will thus inform the discussion on risk culture.

Second, the literature review covers this three-way relationship across various sectors, rather than being restrictive to the higher education sector, which is the focus of this study. In adopting this broader approach, the researcher is mindful of the reality that all these three concepts tend to be characterised with interconnectedness. That is, strategic forces affecting an organisation are often market related and thus having an impact on other organisations too, in the various other sectors and/or industries (Denning, 2017:17).

The remainder of this Chapter is structured as follows, viewed through the lens of the transitions theory:

- Theoretical perspective, which serves to frame the study itself, through providing background as to what the transitions theory is (Section 3.2).
- External environment, including the elements of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), which serves as a basis for one organisation to thrive, whereas others may not be as successfully (Section 3.3).
- Risk Culture is being introduced, its key success factors outlined, and challenges provided, to provide context as to how it compares between HEIs and other sectors (Section 3.4).
- Institutional Culture, as the cusp nesting the risk culture, which serves to provide a broader perspective of the more concept across the higher education sector (Section 3.5).
- Strategic Management Process, which unpacks all the constituent phases and thus presenting an opportunity to consider the extent to which these apply in the HEIs (Section 3.6).

- Key stakeholders of risk culture, institutional culture, and the strategic management process, with the aim of further illuminating the relevance of this study, viz. through mapping it to some of the stakeholders (Section 3.7).
- Linkage of the elements: risk culture, the strategic management process and institutional culture, to further illustrate the complexity of a risk culture deepening journey within organisations (Section 3.8).
- Conclusion, which serves a final reflection on some of the key messages emerging from Chapter 3 (Section 3.9).

3.2 Theoretical Perspective

According to [Meleis \(2010:154\)](#), there are four dimensions of the transitions theory, viz. the nature of the transition, the condition of the transition, the therapeutics of the transition, and the patterns of response to the transition. Perhaps, the third dimension is informed by the fact that this theory emerged in the field of nursing. Specifically, [Davies \(2010:210\)](#), in citing [Meleis, Sawyer, Messias and Schumacher \(2000\)](#), points that people going through transitions in life tend to be vulnerable to risks that could be detrimental to their health and wellbeing. In the context of this study, the patients are the HEIs, whereas their health and wellbeing refer to improved organisational competitiveness and enhanced performance.

[Willson \(2019:838\)](#) asserts that transitions are periods engulfed in change that is mostly unordered and filled with complexity - and tend to pose a deep step challenge to the status quo. She further believes that transitions call for a redefined view of the reality at hand, and this is regardless of whether the transition is anticipated or not; positive or negative. It is imperative, as well, to note that transitions can have either a positive impact or a negative impact on the organisation. However, [Karataş and Dalgıç \(2022:251\)](#) take an optimist view, which is that transitions present an opportunity for individuals to acquire new knowledge and alter their behaviours. Thus, in the context of this study, it means the effective transitioning of public HEIs could be of benefit some of the stakeholders, including staff and students.

Demonstrating the replicability of this theory in other fields of study, [Meleis \(2010:623\)](#) points to challenges such as the economic meltdown as a driver of change. That is, by understanding the change in a process, with a beginning and an end, it is possible to navigate through such change. Bringing the relevance of the theory to the context of higher education, [Meleis \(2010:154\)](#) takes two perspectives on an operational level.

First, that the theory is about guiding academics on how to support students navigate through various phases of their student life and thus enhancing their learning experience.

Second, in terms of the university curriculum, [Meleis \(2010:154\)](#) believes that this theory is about enabling the students to navigate through an increasingly complex curriculum. [Ferreira \(2020:1845\)](#) illustrates how this theory applies in the context of entrepreneurship itself, viz. that entrepreneurship is changing in the sense that some individuals prefer to remain in salaried employment whilst at the same time exploring a business venture. In the context of this study such transitioning is in the sense of HEIs deepening their risk culture through aspects such as becoming more entrepreneurial, adopting a positive outlook on risk-taking, and being more aware of changes in the external environment and responding to those in relation to institutional strategy.

Further, [Ferreira \(2020:1856\)](#) points to four factors which HEIs need to be mindful of in trying to support their student's transition from hybrid entrepreneurship to being full-time entrepreneurs. Such factors include the extent to which a student has a fear-for-failure, the student's perception of risk in the venture, the extent to which the student's entrepreneurial flair is developed, as well as their self-efficacy. Bringing it closer to the study, this is about risk appetite and tolerance, the adequacy of policies and procedures in relation to benchmarking them against market trends, as well as the HEIs' commitment to continuous learning.

With the studies by [Meleis \(2010\)](#) and [Ferreira \(2020\)](#), that use the theory to investigate operational aspects within the higher educational sector, this study tends to investigate the use of the theory on a strategic level. In terms of driving factors behind transitions, [Meleis \(2010:40\)](#) points to changes within organisations

themselves or the broader society – be it social, political, or economic – and adoption of new policies and procedures, as well as changes in leadership roles.

Continuing, [Meleis \(2010:40\)](#) further highlights three factors:

First, the complexity embedded in transitions, which could affect efficiencies within the organisation, viz. in terms of how collaboration, teamwork, and collaboration occurs.

Second, [Meleis \(2010:44\)](#) believe that there is a possibility of such transitions occurring in multiple dimensions during a given period.

Third, transitions could arise without having been desired. Hence, it becomes imperative to view and/or understand a transition from the perspective of those being affected by it ([Meleis, 2010:42](#)).

The sense of uncertainty, brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, has made society's experiences, somehow irrelevant and thus presenting a transitions theory opportunity. Reflecting in a similar context, and through an article entitled "Learning from the Future", [Scoblic \(2020:47\)](#) asserts that organisations should 'not just prepare for the future but they should make it'. Thus, aligning with the common thread amongst South Africa's HEIs, viz. that of embracing creativity and innovation, which essentially incorporate the entrepreneurial flair, whereby opportunities are to be identified even within risks. [Sharifirad and Ataei \(2012:494\)](#) allude to the fact that institutional culture does influence the extent to which creativity and innovation occurs within an organisation. Hence, the relevance of the study, in terms of institutional culture, risk culture and strategy.

3.3 Competitive External Environment

This Section serves to add onto some of the perspectives expressed in Chapter 2, by elaborating on some of the factors influencing the external environment. These include how those factors contribute to the external environment's competitiveness, the challenges – often referred to as the VUCA – and opportunities for organisational

response. Citing various authors, [Vecchiato \(2015:257\)](#) refers to VUCA as increased industry turbulence and its underpinning drivers, including rapid technological changes, emerging customer needs, and innovative business models. Perhaps, this view builds onto what [Heller and Darling \(2011:4\)](#) had referred to when citing other publications, viz. that the world has become more interconnected, with barriers collapsing and boundaries becoming blurry.

[Gilbert et al \(2018:39\)](#) believe that the world is at a point where, because of rapid changes driven by technological developments, an estimated 65% of school going children will be doing jobs that currently do not exist in the market. They further believe that, for the first time in human history, a fundamental shift in how people live, and work, is happening within the duration of a single lifespan. In concurrence, [Konst and Scheinin \(2018:1\)](#) citing a 2016 published OECD research, go further, pointing that a job description of the younger generation is likely to change about 25 times during their lifetime. Thus, these three interrelated scenarios are demonstrative of the transitions theory, with specific emphasis on the redefined reality at hand ([Wilson, 2019:898](#)) as well as an opportunity to acquire new knowledge as envisaged by [Karataş and Dalgıç \(2022:251\)](#).

As if pointing to a linkage between two global events, the end of the second World War and Nelson Mandela's release from prison, [Stoten \(2018:400\)](#) views the period of between 1945 and 1990 as having been relatively stable and predictable. He believes that the VUCA began to increasingly gain momentum after 1990, resulting in a need for change management related competencies such as strategic planning and the communication of a vision. The notion of 'incomplete contracts', as pointed out by [Cummins, Kauffman and Choi \(2021:23\)](#), has come into being, presenting an opportunity for renegotiating a contract when a mutually beneficial need arises. For instance, that Honda Motor Company would enter a one-paragraph contract with its suppliers, basically stating 'We will work together'. Thus, providing more flexibility in the business relationship. Thus, challenging the status quo, in line with how the transitions theory is understood by [Wilson \(2019:838\)](#), whilst at the same time reflecting the changes within organisations that leads to policies and procedures – including contracts – being revisited to support such transition ([Meleis, 2010](#)).

According to [Lam \(2019:29\)](#) organisations grapple with disruptive risks, largely because of the features that punctuate such risks. First, the typical ERM processes or architecture is often not designed to capture such risks. Second, complexities and unique features of such risks, tend to place them in outlier scenario. Third, inclination towards cognitive bias by the Board and executives, respectively. Table 3.1 summarises these outliers in the context of risk management.

Table 3.1: Identification of, and Response to, Disruptive Risks

Identifying and Addressing Black Swans, Gray Rhinos, and White Elephants					
Risks	Probability	Challenge	Examples	Indicators	Strategies
Black Swans (“unknown unknowns”)	Low	Prediction	Invention of the Internet, 9/11 attack, 2008 economic crisis	Breakdowns in historical price correlations, sudden and unexpected shocks	Develop scenario analysis, early warning indicators, and contingency plans Goal: preparedness
Gray Rhinos (“known unknowns”)	Moderate to High	Inertia	Disruptive technologies, cybersecurity, climate change	Emerging megatrends, capital formation and value creation by start-ups	Establish processes for innovation, experimentation, and change management Goal: agility
White Elephants (“known knowns”)	Extant	Subjectivity	Irrational or unethical CEOs, dysfunctional culture, dangerous products, #MeToo movement	No-win situations, conflicts of interest, emotional meetings, unexpected and sharp declines in business performance	Invest in good governance, company culture and values, objective advice, and crisis management Goal: decisiveness

Source (Adapted): Lam (2019)

Writing in the context of start-ups, [Matos et al, 2022:293](#) highlight seven elements required for an organisation to be resilient, two of which are agility and flexibility. Both talk to organisational ability to quickly adapt its systems, processes, and its core tasks. For instance, in terms of organisational agility, a broad range of views is expressed by thought leadership practitioners. For instance, [Aliyev et al \(2020:716\)](#) cite the example of COVID-19 and believe that the USA responded proactively, by limiting air travel to China, whilst other governments and organisations were slower. In this context, they also believe that COVID-19 was a white swan in that it was predictable – after the outbreak in China. Such predictability could also be viewed in the context of a predecessor pandemic, viz. the H1N1 flu, as referred to by [Ekmekci and Bergstrand \(2010:25\)](#), which had led to some HEIs preparing themselves for online learning.

Concurring, [Shadnam \(2020:831\)](#) zooms into the HEI, asserting that HEIs have an even added responsibility to track changes in the external environment, comprehend and respond to those changes, particularly since their students are destined to shape the future. Highlighting the competitiveness of such external environment, [Gunsberg et al \(2018:1315\)](#) calls on HEIs to be agile, through strengthening their measures for responding to changes in the teaching and learning as well as research practices. Adding, in a multi-sector context, [Rahman and Jaleel \(2019:704\)](#) believe that the capacitation of managers through development programmes aimed, particularly so when the level of uncertainty about the external environment is viewed as increasing, becomes more important.

Perhaps, it is this context that some ([Walker & Ching, 2021:3](#); [Mishra et al, 2019:180](#)) assert that ERM leaders or Chief Risk Officers (CRO) should go beyond the mere searching of risks that could impact the organisation. Instead, CROs should have the capability to track and comprehend disruptive trends as well as including emerging risk processes in their ERM frameworks. Thus, transitioning through acquiring new knowledge and capabilities that will enable them to be add more value in their roles. [Cairns-Gallimore and Motion \(2019:58\)](#) seem to point towards the transitions theory in the context of collaboration, when asserting that there is a need to consider diversifying the team undertaking the risk profiling within an organisation. That is, in addition to changing the approach, there should be external role-players – what they refer to as outsider perspective – being included in such risk profiling process.

[Alexander and Manolchev \(2020:1149\)](#), challenge HEIs to transcend towards a platform university model, whereby the HEI's priorities include trans-disciplinary systems thinking, addressing wicked problems, as well as embracing technology and virtual business problems. Perhaps taking the narrative beyond university-industry partnerships, [Alexander and Manolchev \(2020:1149\)](#) also believe that the blurring of boundaries between industry and education should be pursued to better impact society. Perhaps this builds onto the complementarities which the Stanford University, in the USA, tends to prioritise in an effort to deriving more impact from university-industry partnerships ([Leih & Teece, 2016:206](#)).

At Board level, various authors ([Barnett, 2021:148](#); [Cossin, 2021:55](#)); [Steen, 2022:16](#)) look at transitions theory in the context of continual disruptions or changes, at times undesired. Specifically, that the Board must actively participate in that capacitation journey, through self-development, if it is to be ready for the 'next disruption' and adopt a more forward outlook. Their preparation for meetings should incorporate the tracking of market trends whilst at the same time deepening their insights about the organisation which they serve as Board members ([Steen, 2022:16](#)). There is a concern in some organisations that the Board's level of dedication is sub-optimal, with only a small minority of them being so diligent that they even consult with external experts, where necessary. That small minority distinguishes itself through the time they spend preparing for meetings, viz. dedicating more than 10 hours in preparation, for every hour that will be spent in a Board meeting.

In addition, they concurrently serve at no more than five Boards ([Cossin, 2021:55](#)). Others ([Steen, 2022:16](#)) take the perspective of an annual equivalent when estimating the number of hours that high-performing Board members spent in preparation for meetings, viz. between 250 and 300 hours, whilst others even stretch it to, as much as, twice or thrice that much. The point being, according to ([Barnett, 2021:148](#); [Cohen, 2015:355](#)), learning is an ongoing journey, otherwise arrogance and complacency begins to set-in amongst Board members.

3.4 Risk Culture

This Section seeks to first introduce risk culture, where after it illuminates that which essentially constitutes the key success factors of risk culture within trendsetter organisations. Lastly, the challenges of implementing a sound risk culture are debated.

3.4.1 Introducing Risk Culture

There is no single way in which to define risk culture. Building further on this view, [Sheedy \(2016:22\)](#) defines risk culture as the “*shared perceptions amongst employees*” and adds that this area of research remains emerging or that there is still very little that is known about risk culture. According to [Rasedi and Sibindi \(2023:70\)](#) and [Asher](#)

and Wilcox (2022:228), risk culture is central to ERM. Lee (2023:134) cites two perspectives. First, citing Banks (2012) that defines risk culture as the way those within an organisation think and act in relation to risks, based on their knowledge of such risks. Second, that the Institute of International Finance (Portilla and Strongin, 2014:11) defines risk culture as the norms and behaviours adopted by those within an organisation, as a reflection of how they identify, understand, and respond to risks faced by their organisation.

Building onto that view, others (Becerra *et al*, 2020:88) regard risk culture as the knowledge and experiences that inform how an organisation prioritises and responds to pertinent risks, whilst some (NACD Directorships/Protiviti, 2020:8) believe that it strikes a push-and-pull balance between strategy and risk appetite. That is, the latter view is about value creation based on the innovative posture of strategy, on the one hand and, on the other hand, ensuring high organisational performance. Bennett *et al* (2020:37) take a stakeholder perspective and assert that risk culture is about understanding and responding to how stakeholders expect the organisation to pursue its mission or identity statement.

Risk culture is one of the contributory factors towards strengthening the control environment of an organisation and serves to guide risk-taking behaviours at both the organisational and individual employee levels, respectively – bringing uniformity as well (Asher & Wilcox, 2022:224; Carretta *et al*, 2017:209). In part, it is also about how an organisation responds to, or handles, its various individual risks – and it does bear some linkage with institutional culture (Lee, 2021:138; Weston, Conklin & Drobnis, 2018:134). Socialising risk culture within and across an organisation remains a difficult challenge (Boghdadi, 2015:3); yet others (Batalla, 2020:84; Minsky, 2017:23; Khan, Hussain, & Mehmood, 2016:1902) view it as critical to mitigating against organisational scandals.

Illustrating their perspective that risk culture tends to be fragmented in most private sector organisations, Buehler *et al* (2008:108) used the layout as presented in Figure 3.1 below. Their key message was that the approach to management of risks within companies was highly fragmented, specifically in relation to the Board, the CRO, the

Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and other members of management. Thus, leading to either over-exposure to, or over-insurance for, specific risks.

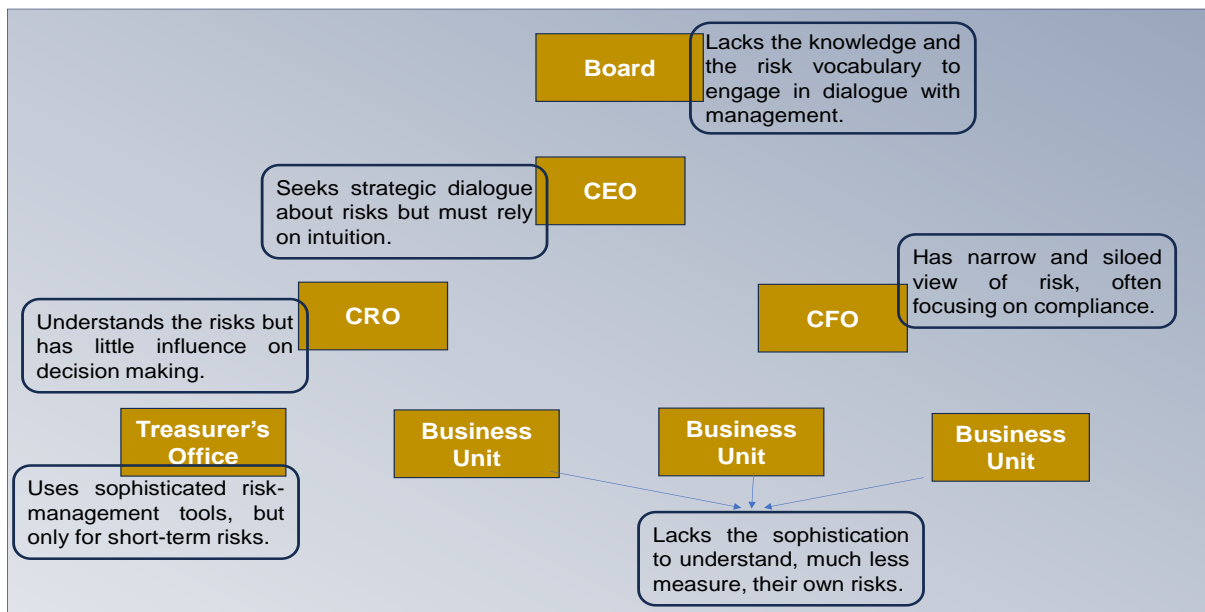


Figure 3.1: Risk Culture – A Fragmented View

Source (Adapted): Buehler *et al* (2008:108)

The figure above illustrates how risk culture tends to be fragmented in some organisations. That is, that despite the various role players per the formal organisational structure being accountable for the strategy pursuit, including ERM, but there tends to be inadequacy of risk culture deepening.

3.4.2 Key Success Factors

The establishment of a supportive risk culture within an organisation is not so simple and it takes several years to have it sufficiently embedded (Birkinshaw & Jenkins, 2010:45). Hence, it is with this reality in mind that the HEIs must consider some of the key success factors, which would require customisation in their journey towards a mature risk culture. After a thorough search of the body of knowledge, 11 prominent key success factors were identified, where each is discussed in the context of this study. The key success factors referring to the integration of risk culture with strategy as well as its linkage with institutional culture support the need for this study. Due to these two factors' importance, they are not included in this Section but jointly discussed, in greater depth, in Section 3.8.

3.4.2.1 Tone-at-the-Top

The risk culture, as is similarly the case with institutional culture, is top-down driven, with senior management as best placed to create the required tone (Grieser & Pedell, 2022:775; Osman & Lew, 2021:1083; Torrance, 2016:28; Gerstein & Shaw, 2008:53). Hence, an added view by Barnett (2019:25), who refer to an organisational character as entailing integrity, ethics and ERM. Further, that commonly the bar in terms of character is often hierarchically linked, viz. the CEO would ordinarily not set a bar higher than the Board's. Similarly, those below the CEO take a cue from her/him (Barnett, 2019:26). In their perspective, Osman and Lew (2021:1083) further point out that such tone also contributes towards improved alignment across the organisation, leading to better Board strategic decision-making.

The manner, in which core values of an organisation are communicated, practiced and socialised by senior leadership is essential to setting the tone-at-the-top in terms of risk culture (Tuveson & Ralph, 2016:13). Hence, organisational scandals have proven to be originating from a poor tone-at-the-top (Pachman, 2019) – including what Lundqvist (2015:442) refers to as corporate governance flaws. For instance, the admittance by Mitsubishi Motors to having tampered with their fuel economy testing methods and thus contravening Japanese government regulations (Dawson & McDonald, 2016:28) is a typical example. Such example, according to Keckley (2016:25), illustrates the bad behaviours which are symptomatic of bad institutional culture, viz. stress that leads to staff taking short cuts, excessive focus by the organisation on short-term incentives or targets, and a tolerance for breaches of rules. Unfortunately, according to Foley and Foy (2024:1), governance breaches have engulfed even the Big Four firms – viz. Deloitte, Ernst & Young, KPMG, and Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC). Thus, prompting some to include independent directors on their governance structure (Foley & Foy, 2024:2). An investigative report attributed this to a culture that was not conducive to open deliberations and/or challenge by staff, including the testing engineers. Linehan (2023:18) points to the two Boeing 737 fatal aircraft crashes, which led to the death of 346 people, as another engineering related example. Punishment was meted out to those who sought to raise a red flag internally, raising the imperative to explore whistleblowing.

Thus, pointing to a situation where the transition has a negative or adverse impact on the organisation through either shifting from good to bad, or through further deterioration.

Similarly, (Tobe, 2023:56) raises the context of Board meetings, whereby the executives are not openly engaging with non-executive directors. For instance, executives tend to provide the Board with reports that contain only minimal information. Unfortunately, similar organisational scandals tend to play out within the Higher education sector as well, e.g. through governance failure (Mpati *et al*, 2023:31; Kakabadse, Morais, Myers, & Brown, 2020). This perhaps then further raises the relevance of the point expressed by (Whalen, 2018:44; Flickinger (2015:154), who asserts that focus should also be on “tone at the middle”. Specifically, this talks to the need for closer collaboration between the strategists and the implementers within an organisation or institution. Thus, talking to a change in ‘procedure’ as part of the transitions theory.

Contrary to the Mitsubishi scenario, trend-setter organisations have a risk culture that embraces ERM proactively, ahead of any regulatory requirements being imposed onto the industry (Jabbour & Abdel-Kader, 2016:488). They also could set a common thread between all role players across the organisation, whereby there is no “us and them” between the leadership team and staff broadly – there is consistency of practice (Redmond, 2015:11). Creating a positive culture that is principle-focused and transparency-inspired, rather than pre-occupied with risk-aversion and fear for reprisal, takes several years (Birkinshaw & Jenkins, 2010:45). Still, there is a business continuity management element, in the context of instability in key positions within an organisation (Vanichchinchai, 2023:339; Randaree *et al*, 2012:486), viz. transition in the context of changes within the institution, specifically the key leadership positions.

An added challenge, in the context of the South African higher education sector is that of the Council, which when compared with UK HEIs, seems to be larger in size or number of its members. Specifically, according to a Henley Business School survey, 44% of UK HEIs have Councils that have between 16 and 20 members and 35% between 21 and 25 members (Kakabadse *et al*, 2020). Effectively, with the normal size of 30 members, rendering the HEIs in South Africa prone to debate-stifling and

being divided or factionalist, particularly when considering the inadequacy of relevant competencies (Kakabadse *et al*, 2020). The transition theory context, in this case, would be about difficulties in changing the status quo (Willson, 2019:838), given that across public HEIs the size of Council is large – something that is compounded by the fact that even Minister of Higher Education and Training has five appointees within Council. Still, Council is required to set the tone-at-the-top with regards to the HEI's risk culture (Summers & Boothroyd, 2009:17) – and this responsibility may be hampered when the Council structure is bloated.

3.4.2.2 Positive Outlook on Risk-taking

Understandably, risk taking could either turn out to be beneficial whereby the organisation becomes more successful in terms of competitive performance, or it could be unsuccessful where the risk negatively affects the organisation (Eleftheriadis & Vytas, 2016:67; Demidenko & McNutt, 2010:803). An example of the latter is illustrated by Oliver (2019:1), who cites the case of Barclays whereby the bank engaged in excessive risk-taking. This led to significant fines being imposed on it, which in turn saw the bank taking measures to improve on its risk governance – effectively transitioning towards improved policies procedures. Trendsetter organisations do not dampen the entrepreneurial spirit of their staff. Pointing to some of factors that count in favour of entrepreneurial posture, (Baškarada, Watson & Cromarty, 2016:785; Kantur, 2016:38) cites the competitive environment, increased market opportunities, and advancements in technology.

Some researchers (Fritz-Morgenthal, Hellmuth & Packham, 2016:72; Ludwig, 2015:31; Redmond, 2015:11; Hellings, 2014:58) believe that staff should be encouraged to develop better insights into the risk appetite and tolerance of the organisations, so that decisions taken fall within the ambit of such risk appetite and tolerance. According to Eastburn and Sharland (2017:21) risk trade-offs are assessed or evaluated based on how staff understand their organisation's risk culture. Risk appetite, which is a component of risk culture, is believed to be dynamic and must be revisited as often as strategy is subjected to regular reviews (Beasley *et al*, 2015:235).

These reviews should be incorporated into the daily operational activities, as a way of socialising such risk appetite across an organisation (Bray, 2016:34; Steinhoff, Price, Comello & Coccozza, 2016:15). Thus, aligning also with an assertion that skills and capabilities should be prioritised as part of ERM (Razak, Rahman & Borhan, 2016:38; Huber & Rothstein, 2013:655). This also lays a foundation for holding staff at all levels of an organisation accountable for their actions (Tuveson & Ralph, 2016:13) whilst simultaneously adopting a forward-looking approach that embraces opportunities and risks. In the process the organisation tends to learn from its mistakes, viz. where the outcomes of strategic decisions taken are not beneficial (Rochette, 2009:403).

Further, the depth of risk culture in such trendsetter organisations becomes more relevant when the competitive landscape changes, viz. the entrepreneurial urge sharpens rather than dampens and the focus is more on future opportunities than past failures (Shoham & Fiegebaum, 2002:138). In this regard also, organisations become more proactive in terms of tracking emerging risks rather than merely reacting to these when they ultimately actualise (Torrance, 2016:28; Stukalina, 2015:75), with some organisations having positioned themselves for response to novel risks (Kaplan, Leonard & Mikes, 2020:46). Thus, transitioning towards an alteration of behaviour, in a positive sense, seeking to be more competitive. Critical to recognise though is the fact that the identification of such emerging risks is inherently a tough job and is further compounded by the fact that the external environment from which they are driven is constantly changing (Christensen *et al*, 2022:2; Petruzzi & Loyear, 2016:45; Steinhoff & Comello, 2016:16). Novel risks are even tougher to identify, given such risks' inherent features, viz. such risks are punctuated anomalies, which are often difficult to recognise and/or comprehend, the questioning of known assumptions, and suspend the instinctive/default thinking (Kaplan *et al*, 2020:43).

Calfee (2006:230) drives the entrepreneurial mind-set further, by asserting that a contrarian perspective be adopted. Further, he points to a linkage between such positive outlook on the one hand, and a winning culture and strategy on the other hand. That is, that such a linkage then elevates an organisation onto a unique competitive advantage position. Thus, essentially constituting a transition in the context painted by (Bronstein, 2019:328), viz. allowing people to air their stories, articulating their reality in their own words, contributes to a new understanding. Such

a position is deeply focused on customer service as well as opportunity-seeking rather than being risk deterred (Abrahams, 2015:550).

3.4.2.3 Open Dialogue

Proceeding from the premise that ERM is everyone's responsibility (Nocco & Stulz, 2022:83; Akotey, 2013:33; Elahi, 2013:120; Kpodo & Agyekum, 2015:688) then the manner in which communication plays itself out across the institution broadly and on matters specifically pertaining to ERM in terms of transparency and timely decision-making, becomes critical (DeLoach, 2016:64; Grace, Leverty, Phillips & Shimpi, 2015:300; Shad & Lai, 2015:5; Archer, 2013:527; Gupta, 2011:135). For instance, others (Lee, 2023:151; Asher & Wilcox, 2022:229; Taylor, 2016:44; Arena, Arnaboldi & Azzone, 2011:794) cite the importance of challenging those in authority when their practices are not aligned with organisational norms, e.g. when they abuse their power, or creating a toxic risk culture. Such challenging could contribute towards a healthy dialogue, ultimately. Bryant and Sharer (2021:83) highlight a common risk which those in leadership face, viz. that the information and/or data that they receive tends to be filtered. Hence, the essence for leaders to be more self-conscious in terms of enhancing their listening skills. Continuing, these authors encourage leaders to give their staff 'permission' to divulge bad news, e.g. that the CEO informs her/his team that when they have bad news, they must text her/him, and if it is good news they must talk in person – thus, aligning with Hanssen, 2005:36. Thus, encouraging a culture whereby staff at the coalface of operational activities and/or at middle management can report risks without fearing for being punished. Instead, the organisation's tagline "*We don't have operator failures, only organizational failures*" tends to permeate across the organisation (Meyer *et al*, 2021:4). Other authors (Sax & Torp, 2015:1460; Pitt, 2010:61) present the same perspective slightly differently, viz. that everyone must be 'invested' in ERM and should as such actively seek to recognise and report risks that are pertinent to their organisational activities.

Taking the argument further, others (Redmond, 2015:11; Barth, 2012:636; Masson & Udas, 2009:265; Edmondson & Munchus, 2007:757) assert that it is a culture of open dissent that, however, conserves the smooth operation of the organisational activities. Bryant and Sharer (2021:84) concur by pointing out the importance of not associating

the respect deserved by a staff member to where such staff member is in the organisational hierarchy. That is, that leaders need to listen attentively to everyone within their organisation. In this regard, they maintain that there is more than one approach to achieving an objective, with the encouragement of divergent perspectives being an essential ingredient and early admittance to mistakes being encouraged.

In concurrence, various other thought leaders have cited a culture of not just doing more listening than informing or telling (Lane & Down, 2010:524) but candour and credible challenge (Baškarada *et al*, 2016:783; Fraser & Simkins, 2016:2; Taylor, 2016:56; Tuveson & Ralph, 2016:13; Kaplan & Mikes, 2012:53), the tendency to not overly elevate 'team-building' at the expense of difficult conversations (Zand, 2009:14; Bowman, 1995:7), the leaning towards broadening the portfolio of stakeholders from which to solicit strategic views (Schoemaker & Krupp, 2015:24; Calfee, 2006:230), as some of the factors that give a competitive edge to some organisations. According to Lee (2023:151), academics tend to be less inclined to speak their mind.

Taking a rather territorial if not patriotic stance, Stan-Maduka (2010:216) refers to the African context and asserts, "*The intense nature of competition and market uncertainties heightens the need to understand the culture and imbibe risk management within the culture of African businesses*". Essentially, his views imply that there are various versions to an institutional culture? Further perspective raised include caution against personality cult whereby some leaders are perceived to be beyond reproach and thus cannot be challenged (Sam, 2016:56; Kloman, 2008:355). Added perspectives include the need to be fully aware of the magnitude of pertinent risks, related appetites and tolerances, and mitigating plan options (Bilusich *et al* (2014:521), as well as diversity as advocated by Arnesen and Foster (2016:43) thus, "*With regards to immediate threats, employees at the operational level of an organization are often aware of risks than those at the top of an organization....Clearly all levels of the organization need to be involved in risk analysis*".

Elevating the open-dialogue posture to Board level, White *et al* (2021) point to two approaches. First, that Boards should engage in a practice of continually bringing in a guest speaker to address its meetings and challenge both their assumptions and a risk of becoming overly internal-focused. Second, the Board should create an

environment where executives are comfortable raising sensitive issues, with tough conversations being a norm in the Board room.

3.4.2.4 Continuous Improvement

In an effort to enhance organisational competitive edge, trendsetter entities place sufficient emphasis on innovation and continual improvement (Lazaretti, Giotto, Sehnem & Bencke, 2020:2182; Hellings, 2014:59; Rochette, 2009:403). This is done also as part of the drive towards integrating ERM into the exploratory space of the organisation, particularly given the rapid changes that occur in the external environment – thus requiring of both the organisation and the ERM function's capabilities to keep up with market trends (Lee & Green, 2015:208; Bowers & Khorakian, 2014:35; Hellings, 2014:50). In other words, how best to improve, what opportunities there are to be embraced in the market, what emerging challenges and/or risks can be identified within the strategy that is being pursued, how best to optimise the value proposition in terms of products and services that are currently on offer.

An additional consideration (Glaser, Stam & Takeuchi, 2016:1357) is to factor in the profile of individual employees. That is, the fact that whilst organisations encourage the exploratory mindset and the sense of initiative, there is a risk that some staff members may, in that process, act in ways that are counterproductive – as a result of their risk propensity. Citing an office furniture manufacturing sector case study, some authors (Fuller, Raman, Wallenstein & de Chalendar, 2021:132) point to a combination of environmental scanning and continuous learning. Specifically, that executives of the Steelcase company introduced the concept of Strategic Workforce Architecture and Transformation (SWAT) team. Essentially, such a team focused on tracking market trends and exploring opportune responses which the company needs to adopt – including volunteering by individual staff members to participate in projects outside their resident functions or operational areas.

As one of the key assurance providers, in terms of a typical combined assurance model, the IAF becomes of relevance in terms of risk culture deepening efforts. Figure 3.2 below depicts what could be regarded as the sweet spot of an Internal Audit

Function (IAF) value proposition, which [Roussy, Barbe and Raimbault \(2021:324\)](#) refer to as the outcome of an effective IAF. Specifically, that outcome is a contribution to stimulating learning and inspiring change across the organisation.

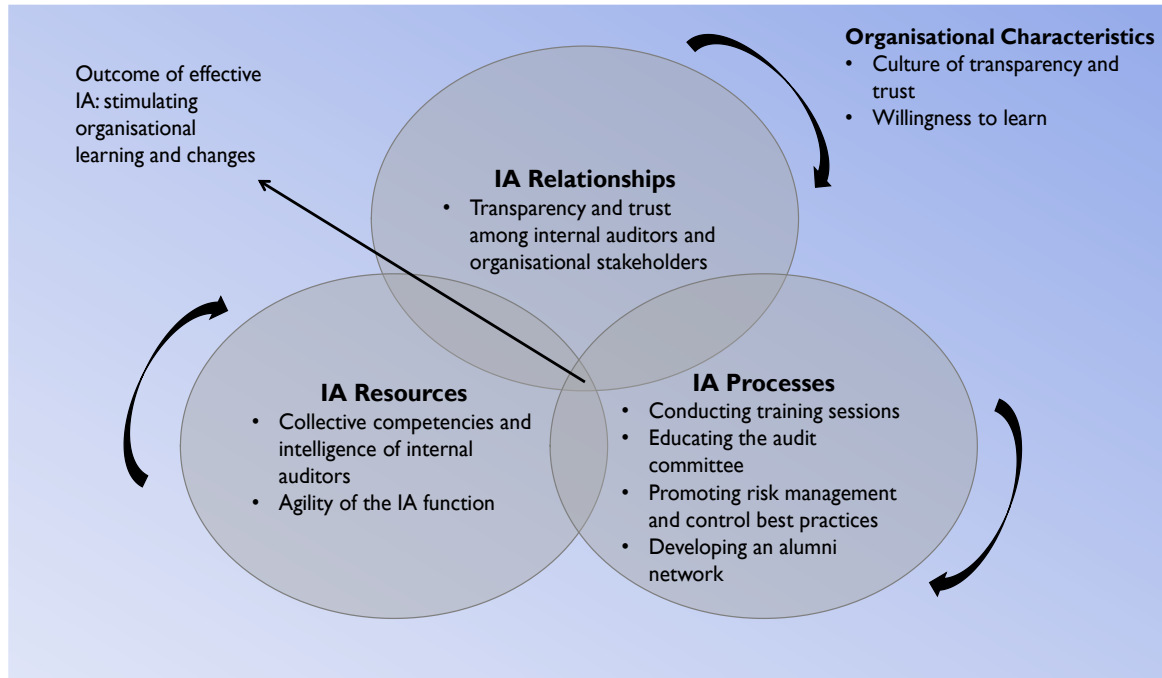


Figure 3.2: The Internal Audit Organisational Significance Model

Source (Adapted): Roussy *et al* (2021:324)

The figure above serves to illustrate that for an IAF to be able to contribute positively, and in a significant manner, towards organisational learning the IAF needs to prioritise three areas. These are adequate capacitation in terms of resources, strengthening its processes and ensuring that its stakeholder relationships are based on trust.

An increasing number of organisations are more deliberate in terms of instilling creativity in their midst, across all functions and hierarchical levels, with frontline staff also expected to possess such capability ([Kellerman & Seligman, 2023:139](#)). This means the human resources (HR) departments must be conscious of this need when facilitating the recruitment process ([Kellerman & Seligman, 2023:143](#)). With regards to HEIs in particular, [Miller \(2021\)](#) believes that they are not learning organisations though.

Reflecting on various sectors broadly, [Ludwig \(2015:31\)](#) reinforces the learning organisation perspective by pointing to the practice of an organisation deeply

understanding its products and services whilst also being open to lessons (Steinhoff *et al*, 2016:16) that emanate from adverse events. Concurring, Redmond (2015:11) stresses the need for basing any arguments on solid evidence, being transparent in responding to challenges, whilst simultaneously being accountable for any mistakes that arise. Taking the continuous improvement conversation a step further, Loosemore (2010:323) asserts an area that requires further exploration within the ERM space relates to the utilisation of multimedia in managing risks. With such tools introduced comes benefits such as an opportunity to improve customer focus, improved decision-making based on enhanced integrity of reporting, and better stakeholder relationships. He further cautions though, that these efforts should serve to complement the risk culture rather than replace it.

In the context of South African public institutions, which exclude HEIs, Moloji (2017:40) raises at least two concerns regarding some CROs. Firstly, that they are not affiliated with the country's professional body, which is the Institute of Risk Management South Africa (IRMSA). Nonetheless, IRMSA still had the highest proportion of members from the pool of CROs sampled for that specific research. Secondly, most of them hold a bachelor's degree, with only a minority in possession of post-graduate qualification. Perhaps, this could impede the appetite for keeping abreast with developments in the external environment, as referred to in Section 3.3.

Still within the HEIs context and illustrating how external/internal factors could encourage transition, Polimeni and Burke (2021:162) point to various measures that could be implemented in order for the accounting curriculum to infuse emerging technologies. Such measures include providing training to both students and academics on emerging technologies, the hosting of student competitions and conferences whereby academics will present/learn more about emerging technologies, as well as supporting research opportunities in the field of emerging technologies. Thus, as per concurrence by Wang (2022:533), contributing towards preparing students for enhanced relevance to the market in future.

Encouraging the innovation posture, Pisano (2019:65) sketches the context in a two-dimensional manner, viz. in relation to organisations as well as to individual staff working in those organisations. First, that although such organisations have a

tolerance for failure, they are intolerant of incompetence – and they strike a balance between individual accountability and collaboration. Second, [Pisano \(2019:71\)](#) points out that highly competent staff members tend to be comfortable with assuming accountability and taking key decisions; their disciplined experimentation tends to yield learning rather than waste. Concurring, [Göktürk, Bozoğlu and Günçavdi \(2017:254\)](#) reflect on a HEI context and point to two aspects that contribute positively towards better error management. First, that when hierarchy does not play a prominent role and thus encouraging more flexibility within teams – including expertise within such team. Second, when there is a technology-based tool being used, as the exchange of information pertaining to errors becomes quicker.

Further, given the exploratory nature of any innovation-focused initiative, there tends to be a high failure rate associated with each project or such initiative. As such, the risk culture (ERM architecture) of an organisation must accommodate uncertainty ([Slagmulder & Devoldere, 2018:735](#)). Concurring with the ERM architecture aspect, [Weston et al \(2018:134\)](#) assert, “*The precondition for a successful risk strategy is an effective risk management culture. A risk management culture describes the way in which the firm handles its individual risks and is affected by the corporate culture*”. In this regard, the leadership team, especially the C-suite (viz. senior executives), value more the quality of strategic risk conversations than the outcomes of such discussions. They believe that such quality or richness contributes towards awareness about uncertainty ([Slagmulder & Devoldere, 2018:736](#)).

It is, perhaps, because the Board is the highest decision-making structure within an organisation that [Finzi, Firth, Bujno and Lu, \(2020:49\)](#), alert CEOs about being deliberate in diversifying the skillset within the Board. That is, Boards need to have the capacity to, for instance, address the subtle risk of an organisation being rendered obsolete/irrelevant because of constant disruption emanating from the market or external environment. Such capacity requires a unique skill, e.g. an exploratory mindset, yet most Boards tend to be risk-averse and focus on the traditional risks when exercising their oversight responsibility.

Finally, providing an additional perspective regarding the Board, [Cossin \(2021:57\)](#) urges Boards to implement an effective evaluation process for meetings, which could

be undertaken internally or rendered by an external service provider – using technology tools. He warns that poor governance could arise from either a poor evaluation process, or intentional dysfunctional dynamics such as circulation of the Board pack late. Thus, constraining the Board members' preparation for meetings. [Cossin \(2021:57\)](#) further believes that such an approach serves to maintain the momentum in the interim, before the annual Board evaluation process time comes. Citing an example of an ineffective Board evaluation process, [Tobe \(2023:57\)](#) points to Boards undertaking evaluation in a 'tick-box' approach, with neither substantive issues being raised, nor productive engagements undertaken. A similar example is cited by [Engler and Grossman \(2022:54\)](#) who point out that at times executives prepare information, submit as part of the Board pack, yet Board members tend not to read such information.

3.4.2.5 Coordination of Interdependencies

The interconnectedness of an organisation is often carefully taken cognisance of by trendsetter organisations' risk culture ([Redmond, 2015:11](#)). For instance, [Guttman and Hawkes \(2004:35\)](#) allude to the fact that the senior executive leadership team often do not necessarily have sufficient detail about the pertinent realities upon which strategy needs to be based. As such, the need to involve the next layer of the leadership team within an organisation, in strategic planning sessions becomes critical. Such information flow would also entail the integration of ERM capabilities across the organisation – an essential ingredient to a winning risk culture ([Hellings, 2014:59](#)). Closely linked to this, is the essential leadership capability to manage conflict ([Guttman & Hawkes, 2004:38](#)).

This becomes of relevance to the higher education sector, given the often strongly hierarchical centralised leanings within these institutions ([Leisyte et al, 2017](#)), whilst at the same time faced with challenges pertaining to productivity ([Rathee & Rajain, 2013:1](#)). One example is the priority of UNSDGs, specifically in the context of undertaking research that is community focused ([Shabalala & Ngcwangu, 2021:1588](#)). Interdependencies, in that context, are at two levels, viz. amongst the researchers and support functions – such as Community Engagement team, Procurement/Finance - as well as between the actual community.

The deeply specialist nature of the various functions, together with pressures for service delivery to various stakeholders, also serve more to entrench the siloed approach to operational activities of HEIs (Leisyte *et al*, 2017). According to Epstein (2021:48) the procurement function has matured in some organisations, across sectors, onto a level where the procurement teams are 'highly capable difference-makers'. However, he believes that these are in the minority, whilst most procurement functions remain routine-driven and manual process focused. Stretching the narrative, in the context of HEIs, Lutzer (2015:17) believe that procurement tends to be viewed as bureaucratic and without much value-add by its internal stakeholders within the HEI. Hence, at some HEIs, the procurement team has gone to a point of implementing some marketing related tactics to enhance how it communicates its value proposition. Thus, playing into the transitions theory, in the sense of embracing change that is not voluntary in seeking to change the status quo and enhance operational efficiencies.

In looking at such interdependencies through the assurance providers' perspective, Trudell (2014:374) asserts that the success of an ERM function lies in its ability to collaborate with other role players in the combined assurance model, including internal audit. Such efforts would be undertaken as part of deepening the risk culture of an organisation.

Agarwal and Kallapur (2018:339) point to communication as one of the solutions to the common challenge of a risk culture where organisational response to ERM initiatives is merely a compliance one. For instance, this tends to be the case in organisations wherein the different lines of assurance – as per the combined assurance model – are operating in silos. Transitioning from that state could arise in the context of an unwanted change, which could require of the ERM function to illustrate how the transition could be of benefit to students. Thus, potentially turning such transition onto a voluntary transition. Another solution deemed effective, in terms of collapsing silos, would be to introduce risk champions into the institution, as part of the ERM infrastructure, who serve as the link between the ERM function and its stakeholders.

3.4.2.6 Reporting Structure for Enterprise Risk Management and/or Internal Audit Function

Hiring a Chief Risk Officer, within an organisation, is a critical mitigating action that a leadership team could take as part of rolling out and strengthening its ERM infrastructure (Karanja, 2017:289). The positioning of the ERM function in terms of organisational structure is another consideration for trendsetter organisations, whereby they ensure that the head of ERM or CRO has access to the Board and/or other strategic governance platforms (Flickinger, 2015:154; Grace *et al*, 2015:300; Kerstin, 2014:12). This could include the CRO having a dotted line reporting line to the Chairperson of the Board or the Board Risk Committee (Cossin, 2021:56; Mishra, 2019:178; Gontarek, 2016:122). Concurring, (Mishra *et al*, 2019:163) believe the need to strengthen the ERM's effectiveness, and responding to externally driven risks, necessitates the ERM function's elevation, hierarchically. Transitioning through such elevation would imply new knowledge which the CRO may not have when remote from the Board; it constitutes a change policies and procedures – specifically the job profile of the CRO – and is a positive change as it enhances the CRO's stature. Such access to the Board is justified also by that the central role that should be played by ERM in the strategic planning (Hellings, 2014:59; Frigo & Anderson, 2011:85; Elahi, 2007:11) of an organisation. The same principle applies to Chief Audit Executives (CAEs), they should report to a Chief Executive Officer, administratively, and to the Board, functionally (The Institute of Internal Auditors, 2024:47). This constitutes a slight departure from the 2017 edition of the Global Institute of Internal Auditors (IIA) Standards, which pointed the reporting line of the CAE, administratively, being to 'a level within the organisation that allows the IAF to fulfil its responsibilities (The Institute of Internal Auditors, 2017:4).

The CRO gets empowered to shape the dialogue from an ERM perspective, and thus becoming a great facilitator. Another way of strengthening the linkage with strategic management activities is for the CRO to be aligned with a senior executive that is directly accountable for strategy within an organisation (Viscelli *et al*, 2017:82). Concurring, Amoozegar *et al* (2017:20) calls for more authority being vested upon the CRO, arguing that failure to grant such authority would necessarily imply more risk exposure for an organisation.

He further argues for the centralisation of the ERM function, as opposed to decentralising it, which tends to be a feature in particularly mega organisations. This view, which talks to transitioning in terms of seeking to enhance efficiencies within the organisation, is also shared by [Skains \(2014:42\)](#). Taking a slightly different perspective, [DeLoach \(2016:64\)](#) argues for broader executive management support as an essential ingredient for a winning risk culture. Such executive support comes also in the form of granting the ERM function, particularly the CRO, a 'seat at the right table' to influence the risk culture through interactions with senior executives ([Grody, 2016:11](#)). However, the reality is that such 'seat at the right table' must be earned by, rather than merely granted to, the CRO – thus, constituting a behaviour change and new knowledge acquiring type of transition.

The ERM function is best placed to help collapse the silos within an organisation. It also helps sensitise the leadership team about the interconnectedness risks, which implies they should not be treated in isolation by respective risk owners ([Ogutu et al, 2018:43](#)). In this regard, the CRO also plays a crucial role in aspects such as supporting the leadership team towards better optimising the allocation of resources, enhancing the integrity of regular reporting, and improving inter-organisational communication ([Ogutu et al, 2018:45](#)). Citing further illustrative an example about regular reporting, various authors also concur.

First, the [NACD Directorship \(2018:10\)](#) cautions against risk reporting that tends not to be actionable and proposes that risk reporting should be positioned such that it contributes towards strengthening organisational agility by positively impacting decision-making. Perhaps, the example cited by [Fraser and Henry \(2007:407\)](#) illustrates better, viz. that executive discussions around key projects or contracts inherently integrate the ERM context. Further, for ERM reporting to enhance the ERM function's stature, it should provide clarity as to whether the organisation is entering a riskier period or not – as well what the underlying key drivers are. Second, [Wares \(2021:19\)](#) states that, besides being current and succinct, ERM reporting should be done via a method that is tailored to suit the target decision makers whom it is meant for. Thus, transitioning through process/procedure change as well as enhancement of operational efficiencies.

Third, [Henry \(2021:53\)](#) illuminates the ‘ability to figure out the kind of thinking that is required to address a given challenge’ – that this is what a leader should bring to the table. Broadening the perspective, [Knight \(2021:3\)](#) points out that knowledge is easy to acquire, and skills can be learned. But it is the appetite for learning that is more essential; that a lack of interest and/or inability to learn would be a red flag. [Cable \(2021\)](#) refers to the concept of learning as job crafting; that is, that it is the ability to redesign one’s job so that it enables the incumbent to be more energised and find more purpose in their job. Transitioning, in this context, recognises the complexity embedded in the delivery of any organisational strategy and the imperative continually learn to adapt.

In relation to the IAF, the competence of a CAE should befit the professional stature expected at senior executive and Board levels. Such competence includes an understanding of the strategy of the organisation and its business model, the portfolio of stakeholders’ expectations, and the impact of market trends of organisational risk profile ([Dabney & Smith, 2021:69](#)). Concurring, [Betti and Sarens \(2021:211\)](#) highlight the importance for the IAF to develop a consulting services mindset and be business partners. Relatedly, [Cassels et al \(2019\)](#) focus on the nature of reporting done by internal auditors, viz. that it tends to lack in terms of values add. For example, reports tend to be informed by a template defensive mode, and trust-deficit between the IAF and its stakeholders, rather than a value-adding focus. [Roussy et al, 2020:324](#) sums it up by pointing to the need for the IAF to stimulate organisational learning and contribute towards positive change. Transitions theory, in this context, plays out through the reality at hand which the IAF should respond to if the CAE is also to secure a ‘seat at the right table’. Alternatively, transitioning is arising in the context of a weakening economy which in turn calls for enhanced operational efficiencies and/or better coordination of interdependencies within the organisation.

3.4.2.7 Regulatory Compliance

The significance of the higher education sector necessarily implies that governments are likely to continue taking an interest in how this sector contributes towards socio economic development of the country in which the HEIs reside in. As the external landscape changes so would the pertinent regulatory framework that governs the sector.

Hence the importance of not just complying but keeping abreast of changes in the regulatory landscape (Ludwig, 2015:31) as well as proactively participating in such regulatory process with a view to positively influencing it (Hommel & King, 2013:545). Such an approach elevates the ERM within an organisation to a state-of-the-art level and deepens the risk culture of such an organisation.

Some of these trendsetter organisations already have a satisfactory risk culture, which is further embedded due to the regulatory framework and organisational need to comply (Jabbour & Abdel-Kader, 2016:498). That is, such organisations have a desire to go beyond compliance; they perceive regulatory framework as a source of their competitive edge, something that enables the development of stronger networks proactively, also with regulatory authorities (Hellings, 2014:59).

3.4.2.8 Policies and Procedures

Organisational policies and procedures constitute one of the core pillars of a winning risk culture, in part because they are developed in a manner that aligns the organisation with regulatory requirements. Such policies and procedures should also include guidance pertaining specifically to ERM (Steinhoff *et al*, 2016:15), e.g. the ERM framework, which contributes also to pursuit of goals and objectives (Wessels & Sadler, 2015:95). According to Walker and Ching (2021:3), such ERM framework should incorporate a process that guides on emerging risks as well as disruptive risks.

Well-developed policies and procedures become more essential given the increasing regulatory focus on the higher education sector (Ntim *et al*, 2017:102) and other industries. Zooming in on new academics, Willson (2018:870) points to the assumption of administrative activities such as grant proposal preparation, management of budgets, and the extended time spent on meetings. She further asserts that this administrative burden is in fact not more work for the new academics, but rather a different type of work, which is beyond the normal scope of a traditional academic. Thus, further necessitating the focused training on the HEI's policies and procedures.

In this context, it is imperative to remember the increased levels of fraud and corruption in the broader higher education sector (Chaudhary, 2019:107) and within the South African context, in particular (Curlewis, 2023; Jansen, 2023:192; Madondo, 2023:1; Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, 2018). Bringing a specific dimension, Guerin (2022:227) points out that fraud related activities often take place after hours – and further advises on the need to track trends within the institution's Information and Communication Technology (ICT) systems. Others (Osman & Lew, 2021:1075; Oliver, 2019:1) point to a need for more priority being placed on staff training and awareness in relation to such policies and procedures.

Trendsetter organisations take measures towards ensuring that such policies and procedures are fully understood and followed by all role players within the organisation. This is done to ensure that staff are empowered to speak truthfully on all matters pertaining to their organisation and would not compromise on standards in pursuit of undue competitive advantage (Ludwig, 2015:31). Such policies and procedures should also be geared towards making the institutions to leaning more towards evolution and revolution (Pucciarelli & Kaplan, 2016:312) in transitioning through enhanced knowledge, improved behaviours and strengthened policies and procedures.

Hence, Wares (2021:19) proposes the formal inclusion of a process that guides the organisation on how mistakes and risks arising therefrom are to be handled, presents an opportunity for organisational learning. That is, it not only encourages transparency when these mistakes arise, but also ensures that reporting thereof continues even between the reporting cycles. Concurring, Walsh (2021) brings forth a point that seems to be focused on the risk appetite and tolerance of an organisation, highlighting the importance of reviewing organisational policies so to avoid a situation where staff would be reluctant to admit when they have done wrong. Further, that Hotlines should be cybersecurity strong and allow for group whistleblowing.

3.4.2.9 Data Analytics

The complexity and dynamic nature of the environment within which organisations operate implies that pertinent risks are fluid and thus requiring agility on the part of the organisation. As such, the risk culture should also entail utilisation of a sophisticated ERM software, one that provides user-friendly customised information, which further empowers decision-making through risk intelligence (Grace *et al*, 2015:300). This includes proactive tracking of emerging risks, clearer identification and response to interdependencies of the various risks, as well as improved risk data quality and reporting (Hellings, 2014:60). Relatedly, others (Lu, Laux & Antony, 2017:646; Abraham, 2016:37) concur that data-driven decision-making should be embraced by HEIs' leadership teams, as opposed to the tendency to rely on intuition. Similarly, Girotra and Netessine (2011:104) make that same point, though focused outside the higher education sector.

Directly related to data analytics are two aspects. Firstly, the optimal utilisation of multimedia when interacting with ERM function clients (Loosemore, 2010:311), which is something that is regarded as having a positive impact on stakeholder engagement. Citing similar value of multimedia in the context of HEIs, Noetel, Griffith, Delaney, Sanders, Parker, Cruz & Lonsdale (2021:227) assert that student engagement is enhanced when teaching and learning occurs via multimedia.

Secondly, the sufficient prioritisation of the need for focusing on available information, reviewing and reading through it once it is at organisational leadership team's disposal (Pitt, 2010:60). This should be done in the context of empowering the Board and the broader leadership of an organisation in responding to complexities of the external environment including pertinent emerging risks (Whyntie, 2012:530). That way, quality information also serves to boost competitiveness (Kerle, 2015:40) of an organisation when it is available to the right people at the right time (Trudell, 2014:374), and also supporting the strategic conversations (Whyntie, 2012:530).

3.4.2.10 Interpersonal Skills

The cutting-edge delivery of a winning risk culture revolves around soft skills such as facilitative or interpersonal ones being deeply embedded on the part of the ERM practitioners within their organisation, especially because they must build trust and earn the respect of organisational executives (Quinn, 2014:24). For instance, given the dry nature and seemingly burdensome posture of in the eyes of risk owners (Beasley *et al*, 2009:30) it becomes incumbent upon ERM practitioners to display advanced facilitative skills (Kaplan & Mikes, 2016:13; Loosemore, 2010:311). There are other reasons that justify these skills.

First, the tendency by some organisations to have a culture that often hides information from senior executives and thus hampering the effectiveness of decision-making (Birkinshaw & Jenkins, 2010:45).

Second, some organisations - the higher education sector institutions included - have a track record of being risk averse and/or ERM immature (Jabbour & Abdel-Kader, 2016:501; Helsoot & Jong, 2006:157), something that is not supportive of efforts towards a mature risk culture, nor conducive for an organisation that operates in a competitive environment (Kantur, 2016:24).

Third, there could be a perception that the ERM function might strip the executives of their control over specific projects (Quinn, 2014:23). To transition from this status quo, ERM practitioners should be able to tap onto storytelling and position themselves as a strategic business partner whose value proposition includes the ability to synthesise complex information and articulate key messages to executives (Angkaw, 2023:19). Concurring, Weston *et al* (2018:149) cite various authors, asserting that stories well told serve to frame unfamiliar situations and ambiguity in a way that enables humans to connect with such stories and embed pertinent information contained in such stories. As such, initiatives such as incident management reporting that includes near misses (Meyer, Mikes & Kaplan, 2021:2; Masys, 2012:328) must be marketed, and this requires deeper interpersonal skills given that forcing an ERM approach down the throat of clients does not work (Quinn, 2014:23).

For instance, the Gulf of Mexico oil spill which cost BP Plc about \$20 billion could have been prevented had this global oil giant responded proactively to an incident that arose about six weeks earlier. Fourth, there is a need to encourage organisations to think more creatively about strategic risks (Ojiako, 2012:91), and this requires persuasion that is based on good interpersonal and facilitative skills.

In the context of integration, perhaps, such interpersonal skills are expected to prevail amongst the ERM stakeholders as well, within HEIs. For instance, Jooste *et al* (2018:703) assert that academics who do not necessarily hold a leadership role do need to tap onto their persuasive influence capabilities. These include teamwork, conflict management, and networking competencies.

3.4.2.11 Enterprise Risk Management Linkages with Performance

Trendsetter risk cultures lean towards linking performance of both the organisation and employees with the outcomes of their efforts within the ERM context in terms of incentives (Owusu & Gupta, 2023; Tuveson and Ralph, 2016:13; Hellings, 2014:59; Vazquez, 2014:11). In the context of the South African public HEIs, government adopts a deliberate stance that requires of ERM to be linked with institutional performance (Wessels & Sadler, 2015:75). In addition, such cultures seek to ensure that ERM responsibilities are properly assigned, with appropriate delegations of authority taken into consideration and metrics designed accordingly (Archer, 2013:530). Hence the notion of open communication and enriched dialogue (Gupta & Leech, 2015:498), as a priority of all employees, becomes relevant and important. In the context of South African public HEIs, Sityata, Botha and Dubihlela (2021:5) cite Moloi (2016b) to the effect that DHET requires of HEIs to report on their performance and ERM practices.

However, unlike Arena and Arnaboldi (2014:161), that study – by Moloi (2016b) - does not go further to reflect on the inclusion of an ERM related key performance indicator on institutional staff's performance management system. Perhaps, doing so constitutes a transitioning context similar to the view of (Guerin, 2022:221; Galloway & Funston, 2000:22), viz. that an appropriate response to risks presents an opportunity for an institution to elevate its competitive edge, in comparison to peers.

3.4.3 Challenges

[Alawattegama \(2022:111\)](#) sets the context within which the challenges of ERM could be viewed. He cites an external environment that is punctuated by elements such as an increased level of uncertainty, the prevalence of disruptive technology, and the occurrence of ethical and governance lapses. Further, that despite the increasing prominence of ERM, there is still not much research done into the factors that could impede the impact of its implementation in organisations. [Nocco and Slutz \(2022:88\)](#) believe that the implementation of ERM remains a challenging effort, which could be mitigated through selling its practical value-add across the organisation, so ERM is not viewed as an academic exercise. Concurring, [Frigo and Anderson, \(2011:81\)](#) point to the need for organisations of all size and type to excel in strategic risk management and governance. In this regard, they ([Frigo & Anderson, 2011:87](#)) suggest that ERM be elevated to a core competence status. Defining core competences, [Deep, Joshi and Patil \(2023:3782\)](#) cite other authors who pointed to these as specialised skills that constitute the strength of those who possess them, enabling them to remain competitive despite emerging uncertainties.

3.4.3.1 Intangible Nature of Enterprise Risk Management Benefits

[Naik and Prasad \(2021:33\)](#) point out that ERM is of intangible benefit, or should be regarded as an intangible asset of an organisation, with [Beasley et al \(2009\)](#) having already 'planted the seed' on the intangible benefit aspect. This view emerges in the context of the ERM's impact having been identified, as including after they have cited various authors who highlighted the impact of ERM, including enhanced organisational performance, better resilience against systemic failures, and increase shareholder value ([Naik & Prasad, \(2021:33\)](#)), the strengthening of corporate governance, the improvement of decision-making ([Shad & Lai, 2015:4](#)), the value of near misses ([Masys, 2012:328](#)) and related lessons learned. For instance, both the oil spillage in the Gulf of Mexico for which BP Plc was fined \$18.7 billion as well Hurricane Katrina are believed to have been because of overlooking near misses ([Masys, 2012:327](#)).

3.4.3.2 Change Management Capabilities

According to Kazmi (2008:1571) change management tends to revolve around behavioural issues, yet Weston, Conklin and Drobniš (2018:131) believe that these capabilities are often not the strength of ERM practitioners. The relevance of Kazmi's view is noteworthy based on two factors. First, ERM is still an emerging concept, which it is either yet to be introduced within an organisation, or it has recently been implemented and requires further socialisation. Second, ERM practitioners have a responsibility of having to drive risk culture related initiatives within the organisations they serve. Thirdly, as subsequently pointed out by Lu, Laux and Antony (2017:646), HEIs tend to be naïve when it comes to culture change, with leaders that tend to be poor in handling change management. Thus, even the primary stakeholders of ERM practitioners, viz. management, are not adept at change management.

The HEIs also seem to have a challenge, according to Vlachopoulos (2021:12) who points out that, despite being in various fields such as teaching and learning as well as research and innovation, executives in British HEIs have tended to be lacking when it comes to change management. Providing added perspective, in the context of a HEI still, Ketcham (2014:236) points out that sometimes ERM's value proposition could experience fatigue, arising from at least three sources. First, when there is incoming management who arrive with new expectations of ERM. Second, there could be new priorities that emerge within the university, leading to management looking for different support from ERM. Third, ERM practitioners may be falling short in terms of articulating their value proposition. Their (Ketcham, 2014:236) proposals on how to handle the situation are that the ERM and management should adopt a continuous improvement mentality.

Further, that instead of asking 'What keeps you awake', ERM practitioners should be asking 'What information do you need in order to know that you are operating effectively?', as well as 'What does success look like?'. He further advises that new ERM staff should visit the operations of the university for the first few months to gain deeper insight into the context within which risks are being raised.

The complex fast paced changes that occur even within an organisation require more agility in terms of managerial response (Dominguez *et al*, 2015:411) and this poses a challenge for ERM practitioners. The fact that the success of a change initiative depends also, to a large degree on the response of stakeholders makes it more complicated. Thus, the already evolving nature of ERM, as alluded to by LeBlanc and Kislewitz (2016:15) may need to accelerate further.

3.4.3.3 Overly Confident Attitude

If the leadership team, viz. the risk owners, become overly confident when running the organisation, to a point of being oblivious to alternative views, it could be a challenge to the ERM function (Kaplan & Mikes, 2020:110; Ciocirclan *et al*, 2011:996). The case pertaining to the leaders of the Hong Kong military defence team in the face of an imminent attack by Japanese Forces in 1941, serves to illustrate how dangerous an overly-confident attitude can be (Ciocirclan, Chung & McLarney, 2011:996). This is often the case when an organisation achieves a solid track record of success, which creates an element of invincibility. For instance, Cox, (2017:96) illustrates this view with recent cases at Volkswagen and BP Global – presumably the diesel emissions scandal and the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, respectively. He asserts that the leadership team tends to fail to recognise that risks interconnect, and the impact it has in terms of curtailing the leadership team’s ability to mitigate against such risks. Adding, Kaplan & Mikes (2020:111) point to a mistaken tendency to believe there a linear correlation between historical trends and the future that is nonetheless uncertain.

3.4.3.4 Ownership Dilemma

Taking the formal structure approach and focusing on the first line of defence per the combined assurance model, Ittner and Oyo (2020:159) look at the risk ownership and illuminate two roles for those tasked with taking responsibility for ERM:

The first role is to commit to prioritising ERM as integral to their responsibilities. Thus, providing guidance/direction as to how ERM should be implemented, allocating the necessary resources, and instituting mechanisms that will monitor and track implementation – including incentives for good work.

Secondly, they exercise their authority in terms of which risks the organisation should prioritise, and how mitigation strategies should be implemented. This latter role aligns with a view by [Vazquez \(2014:10\)](#), viz. that risk profiling should be undertaken across the organisation and the interconnected nature of critical risks should be recognised. Concurring, others ([Meyer, Mikes & Kaplan, 2021:4](#)) suggest that executive risk workshops should be held twice a year, with each executive talking through their key risks and allowing for deliberation and challenge from executive colleagues.

Focusing on the USA insurance industry context, [Hoyt and Liebenberg \(2011:796\)](#) cite various authors and practitioners who believe that some executives' reluctance to embrace ERM arises from a perceived inadequacy of a quantifiable impact of ERM on organisational activities. Whilst acknowledging the increasing popularity of ERM within organisations, [Lundqvist \(2014:394\)](#) points to a paradox in the sense of no-consensus on either the value proposition of ERM or its key components. Further, there is no standard framework either, with some organisations using the COSO Framework, others opting for ISO31000, and those that have decided to develop an in-house ERM framework ([Lundqvist, 2014:394](#)). However, it is worth noting that [Sofyani, Hasan and Saleh \(2023:2171\)](#) believe that the control environment, quality management and an ethical-leadership-conducive space would be achieved if HEIs adopted the COSO Framework. Pointing to the COSO Framework's constitute elements, [Burger \(2024:29\)](#) highlight governance and culture, strategy and objective-setting, review and revision, as well as information, communication and reporting.

Further, those who opt for the ISO 31000 may be influenced by its own constituent elements. These are integration of ERM into the various functions of an organisation, the designing ERM in a manner that takes into consideration the context of the organisation, the implementation that is informed by employee awareness, the evaluation of ERM impact, as well as commitment to continual improvement ([Ratter, Kalbarczyk, Pietrzyk-Wiszowaty, 2024:68](#)). Interestingly, both frameworks, viz. COSO and ISO 31000 have institutional culture as integral part thereof. Seemingly taking a solution-seeking mode, [Alawattegama, \(2022:114\)](#) points to risk culture, particularly the importance of tone-at-the-top in terms of supporting an ERM function in driving the implementation of ERM.

According to [Quinn \(2014:24\)](#) the ERM head (CRO) should elevate their role onto being a coach with good facilitative and communication skills. That is, what [Matsen \(2019\)](#), in his communication, refers to as being able to move away from technical language to speaking the language of ERM stakeholders, and listening to them. Thus, leading to situation where the CRO can paint the 'big picture' and create dialogue, with risk owners, around pertinent risks rather than owning the risks themselves.

3.4.3.5 Silo Mentality

A silo mentality tends to prevail within organisations ([Trudell, 2014:374](#)). This could take various forms that include hierarchical levels, and functional disciplines, and thus making it difficult to embed the required risk culture within the organisations. At times this could be in the form of risk practitioners themselves failing to realise that broad consultation is central to embedding a risk culture ([Loosemore, 2010:309](#)). Concurring, [Ibrahim et al \(2018:223\)](#) encourages HEIs to strengthen the sense of coherence amongst its various functions to enhance the HEIs' competitiveness. Such competitiveness would constitute the type of transitioning that is of benefit to students.

3.4.3.6 Risk Fatigue

Risk fatigue tends to engulf stakeholders across the organisation ([Trudell, 2014:374](#)) especially where there is also a perception that ERM is merely a compliance matter ([Loosemore, 2010:309](#); [Beasley et al, 2009:30](#)). Other barriers which may be attributable to this, and identified by the same authors, include insufficient Board support for ERM, the existence of other competing priorities, the insufficiency of perceived value, and scarcity of resources, to name a few.

3.5. Institutional Culture

There is no single definition of institutional culture ([Roy & Perrin, 2021:64](#)), and it not only differs from one organisation to another but could be influenced by competitive factors in the external environment ([Soares et al, 2018:502](#)). It is also difficult to gauge or measure it ([Kaul, 2018:131](#)).

Defined by various authors as the manner of doing things within an organisation, institutional culture is a top-down driven governance initiative (Saia, 2016:72). Broadening the definition, Young (2020:6) cites the 2016 published COSO Framework, and views institutional culture as a reflection of the ethics and values, attitudes and beliefs, desired behaviours and how the organisation understands ERM. Institutional culture is often regarded as one of the central pillars to the competitive edge of an organisation, with various authors describing it in different ways. Some call it the unique 'DNA' of an organisation (Simon *et al*, 2014:27; Girotra & Netessine, 2011:105; Calfee, 2006:230), others refer to it as the personality of an organisation (Chourey, 2015:10), whereas others view it as the immune system of an organisation (Kannan, 2016:1).

Institutional culture is a critical foundation in the context of the required agility, to remain competitive within the complex external environment. Such agility is found to be also linked with the hierarchical set up of an organisation, viz. where silos are entrenched then agility will be negatively impacted (Holbeche, 2018:307). Further, the human aspect is believed to be linked with agility. That is, a keen sense of continual learning by an organisation's team is considered to have a positive contribution towards its institutional culture. In this regard, the HR Department is advised to play a prominent role (Holbeche, 2018:307). Their role could include changing a culture that promotes mediocrity to one that encourages higher performance drive (Carney, 2011:527) – and this could be complex and take time consuming, whilst also not guaranteed to sustain. It is an initiative that requires collaboration from all the role-players across an organisational functions or departments (Johnson *et al*, 2016:284).

In addition, according to Brinkley (2013:5), in the absence of an intentional measure towards shaping or building a particular culture within an organisation then a default institutional culture develops. Building or shaping an institutional culture is an arduous process that must be sustained over a period, with a firm intent (Valine, 2018:306; Johnson *et al*, 2016:284; Katzenbach *et al*, 2012:117; Treise, 2010:139). The consequences of allowing a poor culture to continue prevailing are dire for an organisation – and include setbacks in the process itself that seeks to change the culture (Caballero, 2019:13; Johnson *et al*, 2016:285). However, undertaken diligently, it can be a very rewarding exercise; this includes its impact in terms of

human capital management – the attraction of critical skills, their nurturing as well as retaining them (Silva, 2017:170). Kassem, Ajmal, Gunasekaran and Helo (2019:130) break the concept of institutional culture into four components. They share the popular view by various researchers, viz. that institutional culture has a direct impact on the performance of an organisation and, according to Mihet (2013:142), an organisation's risk-taking decisions or posture. However, they take the argument one step further:

First, they describe 'mission culture' as relating to instances where an organisation sets a clear mission, goals and objectives, which serve to rally the entire staff around. Undertaken, properly, 'mission culture' has a positive impact on customer satisfaction. Concurring, Ribando *et al* (2020:291) define culture in a similar way, viz. as a glue that plays itself in the form of interwoven belief, values, and practices. that define who the team is and how it undertakes its core activities. These then serve to strengthen the bond between the organisation and its staff.

Second, they describe the 'adaptability culture' as relating to the sense of agility on the part of staff, or their appetite for change and learning. This type of culture was found to have the biggest impact on customer satisfaction. Perhaps, this logic arises from the fact that those who are open to change are necessarily able to keep up with developments in the market and external environment. It could also be staff who are more project oriented rather than job-for-time comfortable.

Third, the 'involvement culture', which is about the extent to which staff connect with their job, was found to also have as much impact as almost that of 'adaptability culture'. Underpinning such culture type is the extent to which an organisation engages with its staff in the decision making, training and development.

Fourth, the 'consistency culture', which is about the sense of uniformity in how various departments or teams across the organisation, would approach challenges and initiatives. This type of culture was found to have the least impact on customer satisfaction. Perhaps this makes sense in that it could imply a lacking sense of initiative, including the entrepreneurial spirit or innovative posture that expectedly ought to punctuate staff attitude towards work.

In a separate Malaysian study, [Ramachandran, Chong and Ismail \(2011:628\)](#) believe that the private and the public HEIs could learn from each other in relation to institutional culture. They further assert that a targeted effort should be made in terms of convincing academics about the benefits of a culture change.

Typical pillars of an institutional culture, as espoused by various researchers, include:

3.5.1 Learning Orientation

[Kumar and Sharma \(2018:817\)](#) take the perspective of learning and innovation, which arises in the form of an organisation encouraging its team to contribute ideas towards resolving challenges encountered. In addition, there is a reward and recognition element linked to finding solutions to problems or challenges that arise continually during the course of business. Concurring, [Ciganek *et al* \(2014:301\)](#) adopt a stakeholder management perspective. In this regard, they assert that the involvement of key suppliers and/or customers in decision-making points to a deeper risk culture within the organisation.

An added perspective is the one adopted by [Kools and George \(2020:262\)](#), which looks at continual learning being an integral part of, in particular, public organisations' strategic management process. They describe such organisations as having an appetite for three things: First, for deriving lessons from changes in the external environment – which [Brettel, Chomik and Flatten \(2015:879\)](#) also allude to. Second, for accommodating failure in the pursuit of performance measurements or targets, whilst discouraging the blame-shifting or finger-pointing behaviour. In this context, [Farson and Keyes \(2022:40\)](#) are of the view that failure-tolerant leaders have recognised that failure is a source of innovation or invention. Third, for embracing a co-competition posture in relation to sister organisations, which means realising that cooperation and competition, could co-exist in a sustainable manner.

Perhaps it is in this context that public HEIs could embrace co-competition ([Matadi and Uleanya \(2022:17; Dal-Soto & Monticelli, 2017:75\)](#)) and, within South Africa, leverage on the platform presented through the USAf umbrella body. In this regard, they could

interact more closely with private HEIs as well, with a view to learning, for instance, how they sustain operational efficiencies, and how they approach strategic investment decisions on technological infrastructure. Thus, according to [Kraus, Klimas, Gast and Stephan \(2019:61\)](#), borrowing from the craft beer industry, where competitor microbrewer organisations embrace the notion of cooptation, through operating in a collegial manner. An earlier study by [Intindola, Weisinger & Gomez, 2016:2573](#) had alluded to the fact that such conflation of cooperation with competition is a natural phenomenon. [Barret et al \(2019:177\)](#) believe that the higher education sector is under pressure from rapid changes in the external environment. Hence, some of them have placed more emphasis on leadership development programmes to capacitate their leadership team so they can exercise their duties more effectively.

3.5.2 Organisational Performance

Institutional culture bears a strong linkage with business performance, including a positive impact on its customers ([Kassem et al, 2019:135](#)). This view is supported by various other researchers ([Jabeen & Isakovic, 2018:1046](#); [Kumar & Sharma, 2018:820](#)). This perhaps explains the reason why culture is usually one of the first aspects that the leadership team would focus on whenever an organisation runs into significant trouble or crisis ([Lorsch & McTague, 2016:97-98](#)). However, [Katzenbach et al \(2012:113\)](#) call more circumspect when there are considerations to change culture, viz. that the leadership team should also recognise what is positive about the current culture and embrace it – whilst seeking to introduce modifications.

Reflecting specifically in the context of the higher education sector, [Roberts \(2018:151\)](#) highlights the linkage between institutional culture and an institution's ability to improve student retention. The coordination of interdependencies, especially as they relate to the academic and non-academic staff within a HEI also come up as a component of its culture. Still, [Ribando et al \(2020:291\)](#) look at institutional culture through the mergers and acquisitions prism. In this regard, they assert that organisational performance tends to be adversely impacted by a merger of HEIs, and that this could show up by way of a decrease in research outputs/productivity.

In Section 2.3.7 the mergers of HEIs in South Africa is discussed. Whilst the extent to which these were a success was not discussed, it worth pondering on whether these mergers were carefully thought through, beforehand, and whether adequate risk assessment on this mega-project that was to beset our country's higher education sector was properly undertaken. If not, then to what extent have these mergers adversely impacted on the strategic management process, including risk culture, within those consolidated institutions that emerged from the merger process? In the context of 'it is never too late to mend', the fieldwork phase of this research has illuminated this point, from the perspective of defining institutional culture within HEIs. In so doing, the perspective expressed by [Clegg \(2020:631\)](#) regarding the imperative to run a HEI like a commercial competitive entity was also considered.

[Chan and Muthuveloo \(2018:8\)](#) point towards private HEIs, and advise that beyond skills and competencies, public HEIs should be mindful of the candidacy profile of their staff. Broadly, there are transformers, viz. the star-performers who tend to come up with innovative ideas; then there are transactors, who are the high performers, and finally the steady performers. Getting that mix right enables HEIs to sustain high levels of performance.

3.5.3 Transparency (and Open Dialogue)

Taking a client-centricity perspective, ([John & de Villiers, 2022:13](#); [Kumar & Sharma, 2018:821](#)) believe that transparency is an essential component of a conducive institutional culture, and that this strengthens confidence in the organisation's products and processes. Closely linked with such transparency is open communication maintained with the customers, which is proactive and courteous – and this is also supported by other researchers ([Richardson & Blatch, 2018:17](#); [Jabeen & Isakovic, 2018:1045](#)). Planting the seed for such an argument, was [Lorsch and McTague \(2016:98\)](#), who asserted that culture is the outcome the leadership of an organisation achieves once they have reviewed and fixed the process and structures of the organisation itself.

3.5.4 Brand Reputation

Institutional culture also tends to have an impact on an entity's brand reputation, and hence Boards and the broader senior leadership team would take interest on matters pertaining to culture (Caballero, 2019:13; Richardson & Blatch, 2018:13). Similarly, in the context of HEIs, the students place value on the brand image of a HEI when assessing their own experience with such HEI (Kethüda & Bilgin, 2023:7; Arambewela, Hall & Zuhair, 2006:121). Hence, the importance of being able to articulate such value; yet some researchers (Adhikariparajuli, Hassan, Fletcher & Elamer, 2021:334) believe that HEIs are not good when it comes to how they communicate the impact they have on stakeholders, via their integrated reports.

3.6 Strategic Management Process

Strategic management plays an essential role in the running of an organisation, as it entails bringing coherence amongst the various levers or functions, the prioritisation of resources, and other aspects necessary for the pursuit of organisational strategic intent (Brandenburger, 2019:65; Shrestha & Gnyawali, 2013:191). Essentially, this implies, amongst others, that the optimal coordination of interdependencies within the organisation – and between that organisation and its external environment – is fundamental to strategic management (Shah & Nair, 2014:153). There are three phases constituting the strategic management process of an organisation. These are the planning phase, the implementation phase – which tends to have a failure rate of up to 70% (Cândido & Santos, 2019:39; Raps, 2005:141) – as well as the monitoring and reporting phase (Shujahat *et al*, 2017:57).

Some researchers (Parreiras *et al*, 2019:728; Cocks, 2010) break the planning phase into further constituent components. That is, the environmental scanning, definition of vision and mission of the organisation, development of strategic objectives and related strategies, development of an action plan, as well as budgeting. Lukac and Frazier (2012) highlight the articulation of a vision, as the starting point for organisational strategy.

Driving the point on environmental scanning further, some ([Fuertes et al, 2020:15](#); [Ivančić et al, 2017:64](#)) highlight the essence of understanding an organisation's position in the market, doing so through a strategic analysis of both the internal and external environment – and striving to remain competitive in relation to peers. Perhaps a pertinent question is whether HEIs do have a session dedicated to environmental scanning within their annual calendars. If they do not, given the view expressed above regarding strategic objectives that are not specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely (SMART), HEIs must be lagging far behind given that some organisations in the market undertake such an exercise even more frequently when the external environment changes more rapidly. An illustrative example, in this regard, is the coronavirus (COVID-19), which has engulfed the entire global village. That is, COVID-19 has not only placed the business continuity measures of organisations to test, but undoubtedly recalibrated our approach to the work-life in an unprecedented manner.

To what extent are HEIs keeping up in this regard, and how does this compare with other sectors and industries in the market? Hopefully, a response to this question would point us to HEIs' sense of strategic agility, which necessarily links up with risk culture. Expectedly, the fieldwork phase of this research has sought to determine the extent to which HEIs embrace the concept of a strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis. That is, analysing the SWOT as part of their strategic planning sessions. Doing so as part of seeking to better understand risks pertinent to their strategy as well as related opportunities. This concept is referred to by [Fuertes et al \(2020:11\)](#). From an opportunities point of view, one example of a market trend worth tracking could be the international students ([Barrett et al, 2019:164](#)), who are no longer an exclusive domain of the USA – the UK and Australia are showing signs of improvement, whereas Russia and the United Arab Emirates have 'just' begun focusing on this stratum. Necessarily, with South Africa being part of BRICS, our HEIs could tap on India and China as potential source countries for international student registrations. According to [Sataøen \(2019:426\)](#), there is competition amongst HEIs globally for international students.

Furthermore, from a threats' perspective, the mushrooming of private HEIs is a global trend that could erode the student enrolment of public HEIs. For instance, [Gebretsadik \(2022:2\)](#) asserts that in Ethiopia such private HEIs have grown exponentially, viz. to

270 institutions, whilst the public HEIs have grown to a meagre total of 50. In the context of South Africa, which has about 131 such private HEIs as of 2020 (Whitelaw *et al*, 2022:3), with most of them having been in existence for more than twenty years and thus potentially sustainable (Bird & Mugobo, 2021:276). The threat which these private HEIs pose could perhaps be viewed through the lens of government potentially deciding to fund students to enrol with private HEIs (World Bank, 2019). If this threat (or risk) were to materialise, it could constitute a dramatic shift in the higher education sector landscape.

Finally, in the context of environmental scanning as part of strategic planning, Gunsberg *et al* (2018:1315) stretch the conversation a bit, by proposing the adoption of an organisational agility maturity model for universities. They assert thus, in support of this proposal, “Universities must be agile if they are to respond quickly to the changing legislative and competitive environment and changes in teaching, learning and research practice”.

Perhaps incorporating aspects of organisational agility, as part of the Risk Culture Maturity Framework, which this research developed, might be more enriching to outcomes of this research study? Besides, such agility maturity model may bear relevance to addressing the concern around HEIs, viz. that they tend to be overly inward-looking (Miller, 2021:85; Paoloni, Cesaroni & Demartini, 2019:185). Such agility becomes equally pertinent when market turbulence – and thus need for competitiveness – is viewed through the Egyptian HEIs prism. In that country, according to Eldegwy *et al* (2018:920), it is not just the private HEIs that pose a challenge, but the international HEIs as well. Undoubtedly, those ones are likely potentially more armed with researched-based international business strategies. Thus, making those international institutions more powerful, strategically speaking.

Important to note is that the pace of change in the external environment makes the formulation phase of strategic management more difficult, partly because – in most organisations - it tends to mistakenly lean towards a stable predictable trend. Such change shows also through the increased proportion of companies that lose their top-three spot in terms of industry rankings (Reeves & Deimler, 2011:136). Broadening the perspective, Perrott (2011:20) believes that such increasing turbulence also

impacts the balance of power and responsibilities between management and the board. That is, that lower levels of turbulence could be countered through changes in the operational processes, whereas higher levels would necessitate Board intervention.

Reflecting further, [Reeves et al \(2012:82\)](#) assert that competitive advantage emanates from an organisation's ability to read trends in the external environment, including technological advances. Broadening the perspective, [Abu-Rahman & Jaleel \(2019:704\)](#) encourage organisations to undertake such environmental scanning more frequently if the uncertainty is perceived to be high, and that leaders must be trained on how to scan the environment. Driving the point further, [Wurthmann \(2020:38\)](#), stresses the essence of making the environmental scanning exercise an inclusive one – a multifunctional team effort - given the reality that strategic planning plays such a vital role in strengthening the survival capabilities of organisation. He also brings in the relevance of undertaking an analysis that looks at the external environment via a six-pronged lens, viz politically, economically, socially, technologically, environmentally, and legally (PESTEL). Perhaps in the name of 'charity begins at home', as well as the relevance of interdependencies, a pertinent question is whether HEIs do tap into the expertise within the academic staff at all. That is, given that some of them are strategy experts who might be presenting lectures for short courses, and MBAs should the HEIs not be making them part of their strategic environmental scanning teams. Transitioning in this context is about being open to new knowledge and embracing the any emerging current reality - and responding proactively to its demands.

Strategic management is integrative process that serves to coordinate the various components of an organisation, including those within a HEI ([Dandagi et al, 2016:76](#)). Through proper integration with (institutional) culture, the strategic management process could contribute towards the achievement of an organisation's long-term goals as well as enabling it to play to its strengths ([Thakur, 2018:387](#)). Concurring on the collaborative aspect, [Carney \(2011:533\)](#) highlights also the aspect of its contribution towards enhancing quality service to customers, whilst [Angiola et al \(2016:748\)](#), refers to it in the context of cooperation between professional staff and academics. In the context of the higher education sector there tends to be a lag in terms of some of the best practices that it seeks to introduce to its students, preparing

them for the working world (White & Weathersby, 2005:292). This applies also in the context of strategic management, wherein the focus of the sector tends to be more on the operational activities than on strategy itself (Angiola *et al*, 2018:748).

Another dilemma, which HEIs tend to experience, is the inability to formulate the strategic objectives in a manner that conforms to the SMART principles. That is, making their objectives specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound, (Angiola *et al*, 2019:389), which is compounded by the tendency of academics not to sufficiently get involved in the strategic planning activities (Angiola *et al*, 2019:390). This is despite the competitive landscape within which the HEIs operate, which requires the adoption of new strategies (Kuchta, Rynca, Skorupka & Duchaczek, 2019:336). Perhaps, it is this seemingly inward-looking tendency by the higher education sector, which brought about the NPM order onto the sector? By distancing themselves from strategic planning activities, academics within HEIs are affectively compounding a concern they sometimes raise, viz. that administrators within a university are increasingly becoming more powerful than they are as academics. This once again underscores the relevance of risk culture in the context of the higher education sector. Bringing an added dimension to the strategic management process, Dandira (2012:133) points to the need for professionalisation of the field of strategy. Thus, presenting an opportunity for continual training that could be provided to strategy practitioners rather than merely relying on their academic qualifications. With training comes competence, which Galloway and Funston (2000:23) point to as the basis for integrity.

3.7 Key Stakeholders of Risk Culture, Institutional Culture and the Strategic Management Process

In Section 1.6.1 reference was made to beneficiaries of this study; they are stakeholders. Further, there is a potential for positive outcomes in situations where an organisation considers its stakeholder relationship when making key decisions (Gambeta *et al*, 2018:124). An organisation's success is partly dependent on the extent to which it balances the seemingly contradictory stakeholder interests (Ogbechie, 2018:177; Chinta, Kebritchi & Ellias, 2016:999).

Stakeholders are thus often part of an organisational leadership team's priority list, and hence they shape culture with a view to enhancing stakeholder interactions (Armenakis & Wigand, 2010:149). ERM, as a key governance initiative, seeks to serve the competing interests of stakeholders. Its success tends to depend, partly, on the extent to which the risk manager reconciles the seemingly contradictory interest of such stakeholders (Loosemore, 2010:320). Taking the argument further, Brinkley (2013:5) asserts that an institutional culture is about how the organisation itself interacts with the outside world as well as how its inner workings occur. In this regard, she specifically mentions stakeholders such as employees and the broader community.

From a strategic management perspective, Wicks and Harrison (2017:267) believe that there is a close linkage with stakeholder-centricity management. In the context of the higher education sector, the notion of stakeholder management tends to be *ad hoc* and thus unstructured – especially in relation to the external stakeholders (Adams, 2018:333; Stensaker, Frølich, Huisman, Waagene, Scordato, Botas, 2014:198). And this is despite the fact that as public entities, HEIs are expected to be stakeholder-oriented (Casablanca-Segura, Llonch, & Alarcón-del-Amo, 2019:614). Highlighting students as the main customers, Kuchta *et al* (2019:336) draws a linkage with the competitive external environment and advises universities to refine their strategic management process. In this regard, they place more emphasis on the planning phase, which includes an analysis of current market trends.

Compounding the dilemma of HEIs is the reality that stakeholders expect enhanced efficiencies, quality, and practical commitment to excellence on the part of the HEIs. In this regard, some even go on to consider the locus of these institutions in the university rankings (Kumar & Thakur, 2019:793). This may not necessarily be referring to world university rankings, but the local rankings or merely a rudimentary perception by stakeholders on how the universities rank. Hence, perhaps HEIs need to place emphasis on the strategic positioning of the brand – marketing efforts must talk to this. That way, observing the view (Florea, Munteanu & Postoaca, 2016:204) that an organisation needs to track the performance of its brand, using a trustworthy framework.

Below, the seven most prominent stakeholders of HEIs are introduced. The rationale being that the strategy of a typical HEIs is inherently linked to addressing the expectations of the HEI's various stakeholders. Perhaps, to achieve success in terms of transitioning, both the ERM function and other role players within the HEI must recognise the inherent contradiction amongst the various stakeholders' expectations. Inherently, transitioning in that context would be disorderly and embedded on the VUCA notion.

3.7.1 The Board/Council

Given that the Board or Council is the highest decision-making structure in most organisations it is then a critical stakeholder from an oversight responsibility perspective (In the South African higher education sector this is referred to as the Council). The Board must be sufficiently socialised on the risk culture for its members to deliver on their responsibility of taking accountability for the implementation of an ERM initiative within an organisation ([Agarwal & Kallapur, 2018:327](#); [Eleftheriadis & Vytas, 2015:67](#)). Pointing to an illustrative example, [Ntim *et al* \(2017:67\)](#) believe that, because of strategic challenges that include institutional failures, the Boards of HEIs in the UK have been under scrutiny. In the context of South Africa HEIs, Council serves as the oversight structure, constituted by both internal and external members. Unfortunately, [Sebola, 2023:226](#) cites various authors who point to Councils having been at the centre of governance failures in some of the South African public HEIs.

3.7.2 Regulators of Industry

The realm of regulators often cuts across multiple industries and sectors. In the context of South Africa public HEIs, DHET is the main regulator with the Higher Education Act No 101 of 1997 (as amended) being the overarching regulatory framework. Similarly, given that HEIs account for about 80% of South Africa's research outputs, the Department of Science and Innovation serves as another stakeholder, given that research and innovation is HEIs' key focal area. For instance, [Onyango and Ondiek \(2022:1027\)](#) believe that government played a crucial role in relation to COVID-19 budget allocation - and for open innovation.

Regulators tend to believe that regardless of how advanced an ERM architecture – including tone-at-the-top and combined assurance - might be, the risk culture remains a definitive factor (Agarwal & Kallapur, 2018:340). Concurring, Ring *et al* (2016:382) place more emphasis on the achievement of statutory objectives as well as aligning these with the ERM industry, which the ERM function represents. Taking the argument further, Ogbechie (2018:181) points to the fact that the relationship with government needs proactive management by any organisation, in an effort to sustain its long-term business viability. He believes that leveraging on strategic management is an optimal way of strengthening such a relationship.

3.7.3 Customers

Customers benefit from the innovation related benefits of a positive institutional culture, which amongst other factors entails introducing simplicity whilst reducing frustrations within the customer experience (Harnett, 2018:29). In concurrence, Picoult (2018:14) points to a direct linkage between customer experience and the quality of employee experience. In this regard, he also asserts that there is a mutually beneficial impact between these two stakeholders, viz. that with a positive experience of customers also comes a positive effect on employees. In the context of HEIs, Konyana, Onwubu and Makgobole (2022:275) the equivalent of customers are the students; approaches used for measuring customer service experience are applicable in the case of students. John and De Villiers (2022:13) cites some examples on how a HEI could address expectations of students, as a stakeholder. Specifically, through transparency in terms of implementing policies and procedures, providing quality staff and appropriate physical infrastructure.

3.7.4 Employees

Employee as stakeholders, benefit from a positive institutional culture in that it empowers them to make their organisation more competitive (Kokt & Ramarumo, 2015:1209) and they become more engaged (Harnett, 2018:29). In concurrence, Kangas *et al* (2018:720) take perspective of reasons underlying the high turnover in

the leadership team of an organisation, and attribute pinpoint an unhealthy institutional culture, particularly as it relates to ethics or walking the talk. In the context of HEIs, the relevance of employees, in the context of risk culture, arises through workplace bullying and intimidation – as referred to in Section 2.3.5.

3.7.5 Higher Education Institutions

The HEIs, as stakeholders, could play a pivotal role. This could be in the context of tailoring their curriculum in such a way as to produce graduates that are better attuned to the needs of especially the African environment. Amongst other competencies, graduates and industry managers could learn matters pertaining to strategic environmental scanning, which contributes towards reducing uncertainty (Ogbechie, 2018:180).

3.7.6 Competitors

Competitors present an opportunity for building partnerships, particularly in the context of strategic management within the African market, which could also inform how organisations within the same sector interact (say) with government (Ogbechie, 2018:177).

3.7.7 Communities

It is within communities that problems requiring innovation-informed research exist. Thus, presenting an opportunity for HEIs, particularly researchers in conjunction with the Community Engagement team, to build rapport with the target community and gain their buy-in for the research. Effectively, such an approach enables the HEI to address real-world issues in their research (Shabalala & Ngcwangu, 2021:1587).

3.8 Linkage with the Elements: Risk Culture, Strategic Management Process and Institutional Culture

Though leadership views are not in consensus regarding the linkage between risk culture and institutional culture (Eleftheriadis & Vytas, 2015:67). Those who believe there is a link assert that (in deepening the risk culture) the ERM practitioners need to go beyond selling ERM as a compliance-and-must-do initiative. That is, that they should rather seek to understand the softer aspects such as behavioural aspects of an organisation, build rapport with staff and thus influence the risk culture (Weston et al, 2018:156).

The ERM function tends to be involved more in the implementation phase of strategic management than the formulation phase as well. This is despite the reality that a strong risk culture is essential towards reducing uncertainty and fortifying the strategic resilience of an organisation (Slagmulder & Devoldere, 2018:735). Perhaps one of the contributing factors to this late involvement is the common mistake which the ERM team tends to make, viz. not exerting enough effort in trying to understand the intricacies of their organisation's core business (Widmer, 2019:31). That is, when it comes to strategic planning, the focus is on understanding the market trends and being able to link these to both the industry in which the organisation operates on the one hand, as well as the specific dynamic realities of the organisation itself on the other hand (Walker & Ching, 2021:3; Pollard & Hotho, 2006:726).

As such, without insights into the core business, ERM practitioners find themselves unable to provide meaningful input to strategic deliberations – and serving as a trusted sounding Board to management. Transitioning by the ERM function must be in the context of seeing the 'big picture', viz. understanding the change process, including what it will require for the ERM function itself, to transform as well as end goal to be achieved. On the other hand, Kim (2019:346), who sees a direct linkage between risk culture and strategic management asserts thus:

“Managing risks is one of the key elements of strategic management.... To actively leverage risk, firms need to deploy systematic platforms to identify and respond to risks and build active RM culture”.

This author then takes the argument further and asserts that the active participation of every manager in the management of risks remains crucial.

Strategic planning is largely an exploratory forward-looking exercise, and its effectiveness is dependent to a large degree on its ability to anticipate disruptive emerging forces within the market, including pertinent risks. Necessarily, this calls for being proactive rather than reactive as an institution in terms of ERM (Kachaner, *et al*, 2016:44; Hellings, 2014:57; Akotey & Arbor, 2013:33; Cooper, 2012:353; Kubitscheck, 2000:39). A deeply embedded risk culture also enables such trendsetter organisations to discern what is essential to their strategy from what is not, and they have the courage to say 'No' to the latter (De Flander, 2014:32; Mezger & Violani, 2011:20). Such involvement would often not be limited to only strategic planning but spread over to other areas such as performance management processes that include the setting of objectives and related incentives (Hellings, 2014:59; Subramania, *et al*, 2011:151).

Trendsetter organisations recognise that the strategic management process is a critical area of any institution or organisation (Burns, 2014:23; Radomska, 2014:39; Harrison & Pelletier, 1995:53), especially since it is a Board or Council matter (Viscelli *et al*, 2017; Emblemståg & Kjølstad, 2002:842) also, then the extent to which ERM gets integrated into strategic management process conversations is an important consideration (Cheese, 2016:9; Taylor, 2016:44; Brewer & Walker, 2011:171; Burnaby & Hass, 2009:539). For this to happen effectively, ERM practitioners must acquire sufficient insights into the business of the institution, including the environment in which the institution operates. Equally essential, is for the head of ERM to realise that they must operate as an integral part of the organisation rather than in isolation from its activities (Quinn, 2014:25).

Taking the argument further, other authors have pointed towards a three-way linkage that strings institutional culture, risk culture, and organisational strategy. For instance, the institutional culture is cited as one of the key factors that hinder the effective implementation of an ERM programme (Zhao, Hwang, & Low, 2015:360; Eikelish & Hassan, 2014:293). One of the key success factors of an ERM programme is the

extent of its integration into the culture of an organisation, its systems and process, as well as strategic planning processes (Elahi, 2013:120; Kaplan, Mikes, Simons, Tufano and Hofman, 2009:73; Servaes *et al*, 2009:77). According to Arnesen and Foster (2016:48), organisations have different risk cultures and this serves as a determining factor in the respective organisations' ERM competence/success and strategic competitive edge. On the other hand, Fraser and Simkins (2016:2) assert thus:

“Unfortunately, ERM will not work in all cultures. Successful implementation of ERM depends on organizational willingness to be open....More research is needed regarding how corporate culture affects ERM.....a firm’s chances of success with ERM are directly proportional to its cultural capacity for openness, transparency, and teamwork”.

Although the need for ERM implementation is being driven by factors that include regulation (Hommel & King, 2013:545; Servaes *et al*, 2009:61), some authors have attributed ERM implementation challenges to institutional culture. That is, more of a voluntary transition than an involuntary one.

3.9 Conclusion

The key messages emanating from the literature review, some of which influenced the direction of the research instrument and fieldwork, emerged during this Chapter. The journey towards a winning risk culture may be likened to turning the ship around. It is often slow and difficult, yet impactful if done properly. A fair amount of patience, skill, collaborative effort, and clarity of purpose are required. As such, this Chapter focused on the four key themes, viz. the competitive external environment, the risk culture, the institutional culture, as well as the strategic management – including how the latter three integrate with one another.

Informed by the reality that the higher education sector is not operating in isolation, this Chapter sought to bring the key messages from other sectors back into the higher education sector.

Chapter 4

Research Design

“Organizational practitioners know that their strategy should take into account the shifts that are happening beyond the hustle and bustle of their daily work, because only that knowledge enables them to adapt to the emerging realities in a timely manner. Paying attention to these shifts is of even more importance for educational institutions because they typically educate people for the future. So, educators are keen to make sure that their trainings and services make students become a better match with the reality of tomorrow.”
– (Shadnam, 2020:831)

4.1 Introduction

In chapters 2 and 3 the concepts in the study are contextualised and the literature underpinning the body of knowledge is debated in the context of the transitions theory. This theory provides the lens of how the study is viewing the research problem and addressing the main and secondary research objectives. This Chapter is focused on illustrating that the research strategy applied in this research study is the most appropriate to address the research objectives (refer to Section 1.4). Refer to the diagram below for an overview of the journey through this Chapter.

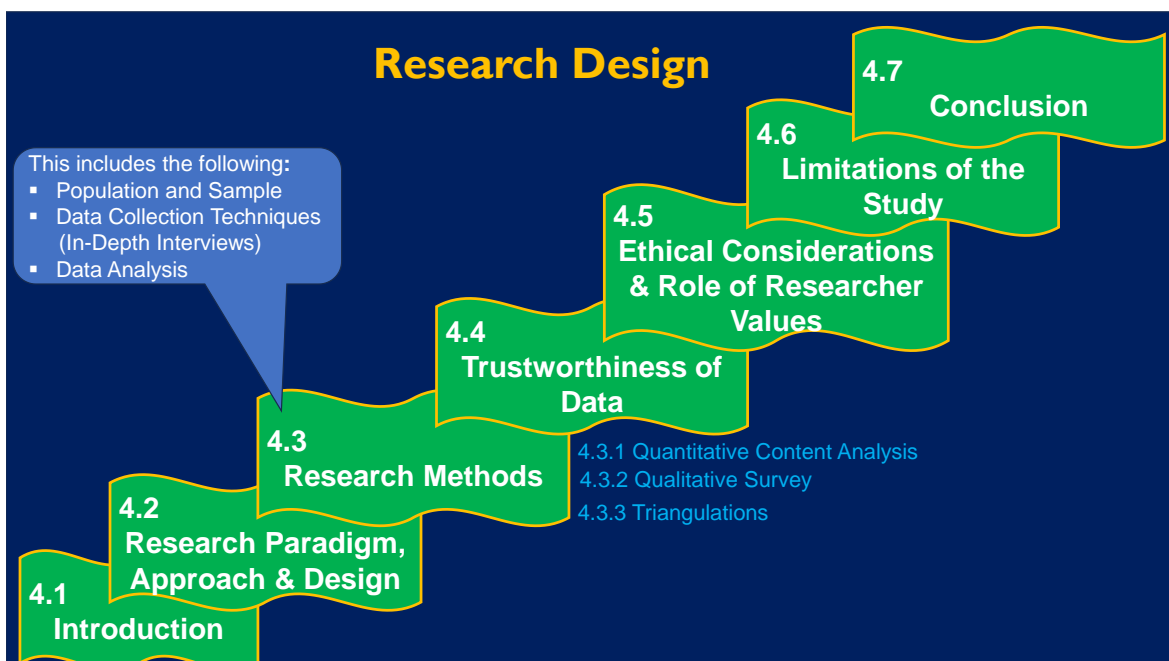


Figure 4.1: Structure of the Research Strategy Chapter

The purpose of this research study is to understand the dynamic integration between risk culture, the strategic management process, and institutional culture within public HEIs, leading to a framework mapping the integration as main objective, and underpinned by various secondary research objectives (refer to Section 1.4). In pursuing such purpose, the research is mindful of two aspects. First, the pivotal significance that HEIs play, both directly and indirectly, towards reshaping the socioeconomic landscape in the countries they serve (King, 1995:17).

Also, to better appreciate the significance of this research study, the specific components being studied about the higher education sector is considered, namely the risk culture (refer to Section 3.4) as part of the institutional culture (refer to Section 3.5) and the strategic management process (refer to Section 3.6). Secondly, the research gap that exists within the current body of knowledge, which has been identified through the literature review (refer to Section 1.2), has informed the research problem regarding the absence of a risk culture framework for the higher education sector. It further talks to how such risk culture integrates with the strategic management process. For the rest of this Chapter the elements of the research study are explained in relation to the main purpose of this study.

4.2 Research Paradigm, Approach and Design

4.2.1 The Research Paradigm

A research paradigm, as part of the research philosophy, has been defined in several ways by various authors. A common thread through these definitions is the perspective that it is simply a world view amongst researchers on an approach to thinking and applying research (Meissner, 2022:543; Khatri, 2020:1436). For instance, Guraya, Harkin, Yusoff and Guraya (2023:1) define a research paradigm as a perspective held by a community of researchers which is based on shared assumptions, research strategies, and a criteria for rigour. Others (Gannon *et al*, 2022:6; Collis & Hussey, 2014) view it as that which informs the way scientific research is to be conducted. Khatri (2020:1436) adds that a research paradigm is a school of thought that informs a researcher's view about the meaning and interpretation of research data.

Further, that it is about the researcher's stance on ontology, epistemology, methodology and axiology of her/his research work (Khatri, 2020:1439). Therefore, a paradigm might be a guide of how the scientific research will be conducted by a group of researchers holding the same views on the research process. There are essentially four broad categories to a research paradigm, which a researcher would potentially consider in undertaking a research study. These are the interpretivist

research paradigm closely linked to the constructivism paradigm, the critical theory research paradigm, the positivist research paradigm, and the post-positivist research paradigm (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

For this research study, an interpretivist research paradigm, which refers to a lens that directly links with a qualitative research approach (Mattimoe, Hayden, Murphy & Ballantine, 2021:4; Goldkuhl, 2012:136), is applied. Some (Guraya, Harkin, Yusoff, & Guraya, 2023:03) assert that such interpretivist research paradigm, as an axiological position, acknowledges the presence of researcher values when conducting research. In the context of this study, such researcher values became operational in the choices made in selecting research participants, and in informing how the data was collected. Thus, as pointed out by some (Kelly, Ellaway, Reid, Ganshorn, Yardley, Bennet & Dornan, 2018:4), operationalising axiology in relation to each of the research questions, which was carried through to the final phases of the study, which are the analysis of results and synthesis thereof in the last chapter.

In their reflective attempt to unpack, ontology and epistemology, with specific focus on which of these two concepts precedes the other during a research journey, Ylönen and Aven (2023:584) cite various authors. In this regard, they assert that views are mixed, with one perspective being that ontology precedes, whereas another is the vice versa; still there is also a view that these concepts are mutually and inextricably interrelated.

4.2.2 The Research Approach

Various perspectives (Collis & Hussey, 2014; Creswell, 2013) assert that there are essentially three different types of research methodologies or approaches, viz. the qualitative approach, the quantitative approach, and the mixed approach. The latter may take on various forms but is essentially a combination of the other two approaches, viz. qualitative and the quantitative approaches. This study adopted a mixed method approach, commencing with a quantitative section (quan) that provides guidance and supporting information on the focus area, namely the qualitative section (QUAL). Hence leading to a quan+QUAL approach.

The quantitative research approach refers to a method that is informed by a positivism or modernist posture, and this approach dominates the research world thus far (Batt & Kahn, 2021:1080; Baškarada & Koronios, 2018:15; Cassell *et al*, 2006: 162). It is an approach that is centred on the view that an objective depiction of reality could be achieved through ‘measurement’ (Lenger, 2019:950) and statistical representativity (Lenger, 2019:949). On the other hand, a qualitative research approach refers to a method that centres around the constructivist and interpretivist paradigms. It is about understanding multiple participant meanings, generating theory, and untangling complexity (Lenger, 2019:949; Garcia & Gluecing, 2013: 431). It’s credibility stems more from trustworthiness of the data and analysis thereof rather than through replication (Batt & Kahn, 2021:1080). Some believe it is suitable more for emerging markets (Azungah, 2018:384), such as South Africa.

The rationale for choosing the interpretivist paradigm and, as focus, a mixed method approach for this study, is that the purpose of this research study is exploratory in nature. That is, all five sub-objectives, together with the main objective they underpin, are seeking to understand an area that is not well investigated and documented in the scholarly literature. The discussion on the research gap (refer to Section 1.5), focuses on risk culture in the context of South African public HEIs – including how such risk culture integrates with both the (broader) institutional culture as well as the strategic management process. Therefore, to adequately understand the subject matter at hand, an in-depth information is required. For this study, perceptions of various experts working in the field, and the interpretation of the collective qualitative data gathered, may provide this in-depth information.

A qualitative approach, supported by the interpretivist paradigm, is mostly informed by inductive reasoning, which is a reasoning that builds from data to broad themes and to a generalized theory/model (Creswell, 2013:99). In other words, the qualitative approach has a broader contribution in terms of expanding the pool of scholarly knowledge by exploring innovative (research) solutions based on the perceptions of individuals that have knowledge of real-life societal problems (Tembo

& Akintola, 2022:352; Agarwal, 2020:79; Holmlund *et al*, 2020:114). Relatedly, it emerged early on during the literature review for this research study that risk culture remains relatively immature within the higher education sector – and that this was the case in both emerging economies as well as developed world. Hence, constituting a real-life problem that makes inductive reasoning – which is sometimes referred to as the bottom-up approach - more pertinent. That way a qualitative research approach may contribute towards bringing in the depth or sufficiency of information (Mwita, 2022:621; Lanka *et al*, 2021:4).

Expectedly, this research study has developed a deeper understanding into how the risk culture, strategic management process and the institutional culture of an organisation integrate. HEIs tend to grapple with all these three elements constituting the focal area of this study. Further compounding such complexity are a few factors, viz.:

First, leading and monitoring HEIs requires a more specialist set of competencies and is a demanding task (Okofu-Darteh & Asamoah, 2020:211) – delivering on the strategic intent tends to be harder.

Second, the differing perspectives, by various stakeholders who take interest in the sector, also contribute towards keeping the sector at the centre of societal conversations. For instance, some prioritise the quality of higher education (Pezeshki *et al*, 2020:1101), whilst others are seeking to transition the sector from students-as-customers to viewing students as co-partners (Calma & Dickson-Deane, 2020:1230) - and still, others emphasise the aspect of creativity (Burayeva *et al*, 2020:1439). The point is, ultimately, HEIs have become increasingly significant to society over the years – yet, according to some thought leadership practitioners (Jabbour & Abdel-Kader, 2016:501; Tufano, 2011:57), the implementation of ERM within the higher education sector largely remains immature. As such, a deeper understanding into how to enhance the way in which institutions operate, specifically with respect to risk culture, becomes relevant.

4.2.3 The Research Design

Building on the paradigm and approach chosen for the study, an exploratory research design, which is informed by the need to gain insight into an area that has not been sufficiently researched before ([Rockmann, 2022:334](#); [Creswell, 2014](#)) is chosen. This research design serves to build onto the transitions theory, adopted by this research study (refer to Section 3.2). Although scholars have different interpretation of a research design, highlight that a research design serves as the blueprint for conducting a research study, which if comprehended and properly applied, tends to support the researcher in terms of minimising undue interference on the research findings.

In addition to an exploratory research design, a multiple case study research design, with the higher education sector as the case being focused on, is used. [Creswell \(2007:73\)](#) describe a case study as a qualitative investigation of a real-life phenomenon in a bounded system(s) by obtaining in-depth information using multiple sources of information. By focusing on several HEIs, each presenting a specific case study, a more holistic set of research findings may emerge. To obtain in-depth information on the research topic, it was deemed necessary to focus on specific HEIs in South Africa and try and understand the phenomenon under investigation from their unique environment and using multiple sources of information. Hence, the use of a case study design. Despite the significant amount of time consumed in undertaking a case study-based research design, the research findings tend to be more enriching. Informing this view is the in-depth nature of conversations or intensive investigation that punctuate a case study-based design ([Yin, 2013](#)).

However, there tends to be reluctance on the part of research participants to invest as much time on the research, providing the required detail of information. That is, besides the sensitive nature of information, some of which is highly confidential, and its divulgence could hamper the organisation's competitive edge, the pressure emanating from other priorities also informs such reluctance. Nonetheless, this research study has undertaken a case study design, which [Yin \(2009\)](#) believes to

be applicable when the intention is to address a research objective that investigates aspects from the view of obtaining clarity on questions such as *why* and/or *how*. Based on the interpretivism paradigm, using a mixed method (quan + QUAL) approach, leading to an exploratory research design in the form of case studies, the research methods used to support this study are discussed in the next section.

4.3 Research Methods

Defined as a technique or tool that is utilised during undertaking an inquiry or investigation (Mir, 2018:308), a research method is the focus of this section. Given the decision to apply a mixed method research approach, the specific methods applied within multiple case studies include a quantitative content analysis (quan) as well as a qualitative survey (QUAL). Specifically, the explanatory sequential mixed method design, whereby the quantitative results as obtained through content analysis, were further unpacked through in-depth interviews, using a qualitative approach (Creswell, 2014). The rationale being to develop a deeper insight into how the topic of the research study plays out in the context of the public HEIs in South Africa.

4.3.1 Quantitative content analysis

Content analysis refers to a research method whereby the observation of documented information, in the form of text or images, is undertaken in a systematic and objective manner (Shea *et al*, 2019:1047). Its usage, in the market, is on the rise, viz. more researchers are finding it valuable and thus applying it in their studies (Vourvachis & Woodward, 2015:166). Reflections on content analysis point to its grown significance in terms of theory development (Carliner *et al*, 2015:467), as demonstrated by the fact that over a fifteen-year time horizon, ending 2017, its usage has grown by over 590% (Lee *et al*, 2020:617). One of its benefits is that it mitigates against a situation where the research participants could unduly influence the outcomes through changing their behaviour or posture (Rahman, 2016:72); for instance, if it is the annual report being investigated this will have been published already.

The content analysis can be either qualitative or quantitative. For qualitative content analysis the purpose that it serves is that of analysing secondary sources of data such as existing literature information, including the generation of meaningful categories (Nwadingo *et al* ,2022:985), or interpreting meanings from textual data (Metinal & Ayalp, 2022:662), thus methodically converting vast amount of data into (a) concise structured version(s) (Royal *et al*, 2022:506). For quantitative analysis, as is used in this study, it refers to a systematic approach that is applied in coding content that is both unstructured and unquantified (Si *et al*, 2023). In other words, quantitative content analysis applies an algorithmic search process whereby the frequency of words is the primary focus (Royal *et al*, 2022:506).

For this study, quantitative content analysis was applied through a review of the annual reports for the 2019 financial year of the respective HEIs in South Africa. First, four concepts or themes (hereafter refer to as themes) were identified, together with 57 sub-themes. Although these themes and sub-themes were identified from the literature (see chapters 2 and 3), each was identified based on the overall discussion of the theme and not necessarily being part of the specific contribution to this study’s topic. During the content analysis additional sub-themes were identified. Refer to Annexure 2 for the list of all themes and sub-themes, respectively, indicating the source of the theme. In Section 5.3 the analysis of each theme per case study is discussed in greater detail. Table 4.1 summarises the themes and sub-themes as it forms part of the content analysis. The themes and sub-themes that emerged during the fieldwork are discussed in Section 5.3.

Table 4.1: Themes and Sub-themes Used in Content Analysis

Main theme	No of sub-themes emerging from literature review	No of sub-themes added during content analysis	Total
External Environment	2	0	2
Risk Culture	15	0	15
Strategic Management Process	28	3	31
Institutional Culture	12	3	15
	57	6	63

These themes and sub-themes were used to gather information in the annual reports and to analyse the qualitative data gathered in the second phase of the study, namely a qualitative survey. For the first application, it was used to determine how each of the HEIs were doing in relation to the phenomenon of this research study. In other words, it assisted in determining which case studies should be chosen. For the second application, as stipulated by [Creswell \(2014\)](#), the type of mixed method approach used is explanatory sequential, and the data gathered by the content analysis was used to refine the themes that was used to analyse the data gathered by means of the qualitative survey.

After the themes were developed, the annual reports were obtained from the 26 public HEIs in South Africa. There are six institutions that did not have their 2019 annual reports published on their websites; and attempts to obtain these through liaison with some of the institutions' officials proved fruitless. Of these six, one specific institution proclaimed that they have taken a stance that annual reports are not for public consumption – and therefore are never published on their website. Perhaps this is a pointer towards how an immature risk culture plays itself out within that institution. The content of the annual reports was analysed using the themes developed. Furthermore, while analysing the data, specific focus was placed on how these documents articulate risk culture, especially as contained in the statements made by some of the universities' key officials. Such officials being the Council Chairperson, the Chairpersons of Council sub-committees, the Vice Chancellor (VC), the CFO, and the lead executives in the three-dimensional core business of a typical HEI – all documented in the annual reports.

In approaching the content analysis, the core words deemed critical as part of an institution's lexicon, in the context of this research study, were prioritised and searched for. These were the risk culture or risk maturity, the risk appetite and tolerance, as well as the strategy or strategic management process. Thereafter, informed by the literature review, additional terms were also considered. In this regard, a word such as innovation was not counted where it shows up as part of (say) the name of a function such as Research and Innovation, or an Ethics Committee. Focus was more on those instances where the word was used to

describe what the institution was doing in terms of delivering its strategic and operational activities.

Arbitrary values were assigned to the legend options. Where a specific sub-theme did not appear at all, a value of 0 was assigned; where it appears once or twice, the value of 1 was assigned. Then the values of 2 and 3 were assigned to those instances where the term appeared 3 to 5 times, and more than 5 times, respectively. Refer to Table 5.1 for the detailed results of the content analysis of all HEIs analyses and Section 5.2 for a subsequent discussion thereof. A summary of the results is presented in Table 4.2, as it forms part of the identification of the case studies within the research strategy.

Although the annual reports are available within the public domain, to provide anonymity to the six case studies and the related individual interviewed, the 20 HEI are numbered HEI 1 to HEI 20. For each HEI that was chosen to be included as a case study, only the overall score per main theme is provided, with the total illuminating the highest ranked HEIs with regards to risk culture. Due to protecting these institutions' privacy the case studies are referred to as Case Study 1 (CS1), Case Study 2 (CS2), etc.

Table 4.2: Summary of Content Analysis Results Leading to Case Studies

	Competitive External Environment	Strategic Management Process	Risk Culture	Institutional Culture	Governance	TOTAL
CS1	6	9	10	1	0	18
CS2	10	9	14	5	0	38
CS3	4	9	11	7	1	31
CS4	7	8	8	13	0	36
CS5	8	12	16	6	0	42
CS6	6	11	17	12	0	47

The analyses indicated that 11 institutions obtained a score of above 20, of which five of these were chosen as case studies. In terms of geographic spread within the country, these 11 institutions represent five provinces, viz. the Free State, Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, North-West, and the Western Cape, of which the five case studies

chosen are in four provinces. Included within these 11 HEIs are both the traditional universities as well as the universities of technology (refer to Section 5.2), with five of the case studies being traditional and one being a university of technology. Although the actual column stipulating the score for each of the HEIs, respectively, has been hidden to safeguard these HEIs' anonymity, a key message that emerged was that the risk culture within the South African higher education sector is largely immature. In relation to the international rankings as discussed in Chapter 2, there are 11 South African public HEIs that appear in the Top 1000 for the year 2020. Of those public HEIs, 3 are part of the 6 case studies used in this study.

As mentioned, the population consisted of the 26 public HEIs in South Africa. As the annual reports of six HEIs could not be obtained, the original sample of five case studies was chosen from the 20 HEIs - thus constituting 20% of the relevant population. The sample size was based on the principle of saturation, viz. that data collection be stretched only to a point beyond which additional new insights may not be derived (Zilber & Meyer, 2022:381). As mentioned, the choice was informed by the highest scores obtained from the content analysis. The reason being that higher scores were associated with relevance of those HEIs to the objectives of this research study. In addition, one of the newly established HEIs was added as a sixth case study (CS6). The reason being to assess the extent to which the late-mover advantage applies within the sector. Especially, given that in the context of South Africa there is a much lower rate at which new public HEIs emerge.

4.3.2 Qualitative Survey

Using the themes and sub-themes as indicated in Table 4.1 and Annexure 2, a qualitative survey was conducted, consisting of in-depth interviews with participants at each of the six case studies as indicated above. A survey can be both qualitative or quantitative. Reay, Zafar, Monteiro and Glaser (2019:207) believe that themes and sub-themes contribute towards illuminating the interconnections of findings. A quantitative survey applies in situations where objectivity is regarded as paramount and thus requiring of the researcher to maintain a distance from the research participants (Patterson *et al*, 2023:170) and consists of mainly a numbers-based

focus/approach (Tembo & Akintola, 2022:352). A qualitative survey refers to a situation where a series of open-ended questions are crafted by the researcher and asked on a specific subject or topic. The responses to the questions are meant to produce a rich in-depth set of information (Braun *et al*, 2021:641). However, there is a view that qualitative research method lacks the scientific rigor (Carcary, 2020:166). For this study a qualitative survey was conducted to develop an in-depth insight into topic being researched. The sample that was chosen, the data gathering, and data analyses are discussed in the rest of this section.

4.3.2.1 Sampling of participants

At each of the six case studies, respondents were chosen based on their knowledge of the practical problem, namely the integration between risk culture and the strategic management process and institutional culture, in line with the interpretivism paradigm. Data was gathered by means of interviews, guided by questions based on the themes, and the results of the content analysis conducted on the specific institution's annual report. Hence, there was no interview guide developed. In deciding on who to target as participants within those HEIs, the researcher was mindful of the fact that the topic is about strategy, institutional culture, and risk culture. All these are matters that are driven largely from the higher echelons of an organisation. Only one criterion was set as measurement for participants to be included, namely an individual had to have been in a specific position for a three-year period, at the least. The reason is that such a minimal period is deemed good enough to understand the basic intricacies of the university from that role. This is especially relevant given that each participant would have been chosen based on the current role they hold within that case study (or HEI).

The rationale for looking at a relatively larger proportion of these institutions (six case studies) was to derive the value that emanates from a broader diversity. For instance, there was likely to be peculiarities in so far as the positioning of the ERM function and, specifically, the CRO role. Similarly, the matter of outsourcing and/or in-sourcing of both the ERM and the IAF would likely play out in varied fashion when comparing the different institutions – with more breath, the main findings of the research will be more comprehensive. Equally critical, unique sources of

competitive capabilities are likely to shine out more – especially if geographic spread partly informed the sample selection.

Table 4.3 provides a summary of additional information on the participants interviewed at each of the six case studies. Again, to ensure anonymity, participants are numbered per case study and per type of participant. Tier 1 refers to the VC and Principal of a HEI, which can be classified as Top Management. Tier 2 refers to Deputy Vice Chancellors (DVC) / Vice Principals (VP) or senior executives who are responsible for a specific portfolio of the HEI, e.g. Teaching and Learning or Research and Innovation. Tier 3 are executives who lead functional disciplines within the broader portfolios led by the DVCs/VPs. Tier 4 are Senior Management who work closely with the executives and are part of the broader portfolios.

Table 4.3: Summary of hierarchical positioning of participants

Case study	Tier 1	Tier 2	Tier 3	Tier 4	Total
CS1	0	2	2	2	6
CS2	0	3	3	0	6
CS3	1	2	1	0	4
CS4	0	0	3	2	5
CS5	0	3	3	0	6
CS6	1	2	1	0	4
Total	2	12	14	3	31

Although 36 participants were targeted, viz. six participants in each of the six case studies, after 26 interviews data saturation was obtained. Nonetheless, five additional interviews were already scheduled and thus also conducted. In total 31 interviews were conducted for the six case studies. Some scholars ([Hassan et al, 2022:216](#); [Boddy, 2016:429](#)) indicate that for a qualitative survey that is exploratory by nature, the saturation point is reached when 12 in-depth interviews have been held with a homogenous total population. In this context homogeneity arises in the context of public HEIs within the same country and accountable to the same Ministry's strategic policy direction.

And, each of the six sampled HEIs are organisationally structured similarly, with all having the three key focal areas, viz. Teaching and Learning, Research and Innovation, as well as Community Engagement. However, other scholars such as [Chitac \(2022:32\)](#), believe that saturation is reached more at a sample of 20 to 30 interviews. Hence, the 31 interviews were deemed sufficient, especially since there were also an additional seven participants constituting the External Group of Practitioners (EGPs).

Figure 4.2 below depicts an overview of how participants are positioned on the hierarchical ladder, followed by a discussion of the role and importance of each level for this study.

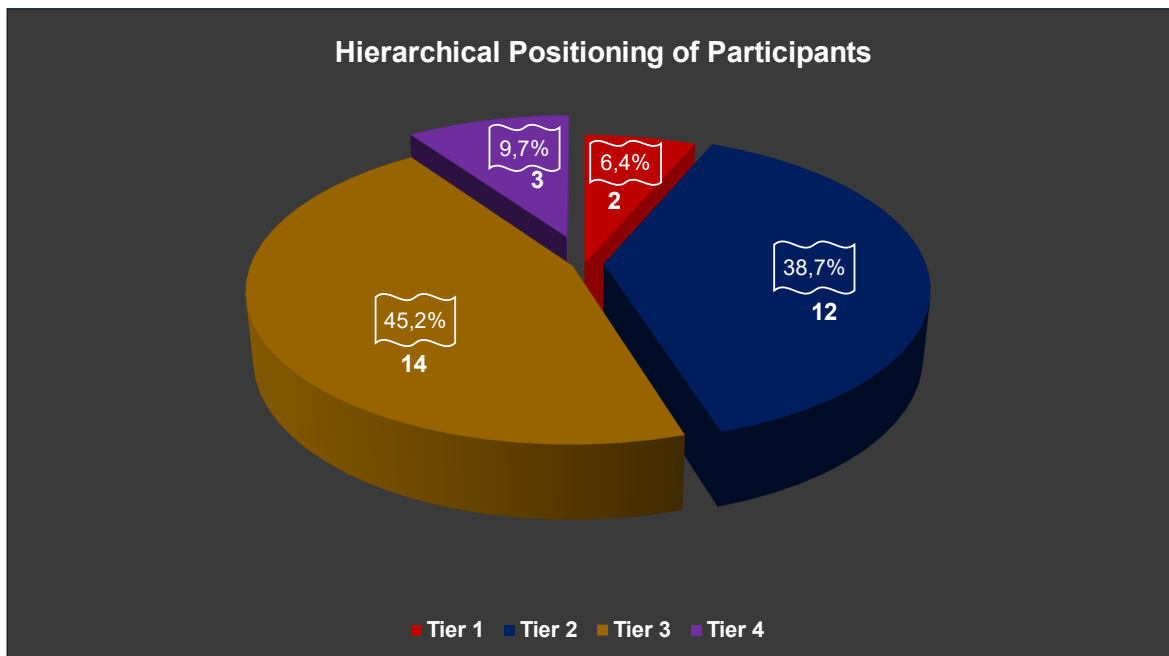


Figure 4.2: Hierarchical Positioning of Participants within Respective HEIs.

The figure above indicates that most participants were from Tier 3 (15 participants or 48%), followed by Tier 2 (12 participants or 39%). This indicates that the implementers of strategy and influencers of the mood-in-the-middle in so far as institutional culture ([Sayyadi & Provitera, 2023:26](#); [Yu & Wang, 2018:61](#)) are adequately represented. This blends well with an equally good representation of the senior executives (Tier-2s) who, together with Council, set the tone within HEIs. Equally imperative to note is the fact that Tier-4 is the hierarchical level that drives implementation of the strategy; they interact more closely with the broader university community. Although Tier 1 leaders are the primary custodian of strategy, on behalf

of Council, three of the participants from this category are new in their roles within their current HEIs, and thus did not meet the three-year minimum criteria which informed the choice of participants and was thus eliminated.

Although the original plan was to target Tier-1 and Tier-2 leaders, viz. the VC as well as the DVCs/VPs, given the strategic inclination of the research topic, some flexibility became necessary during the fieldwork. That is, there were some changes to the original plan, in terms of target participants due to the non-availability of the Tier-1 and Tier-2 level individuals to participate in a lengthy interview. A further drilldown into each of the six HEI, to indicate the area of speciality or responsibility for each of the participants, depicts the information as provided in Table 4.4.

Furthermore, additional interviews were held with seven participants, referred to as the External Group of Practitioners. These seven participants are mostly from HEIs but are now serving in other areas, all with a vast knowledge on HEI and its risks (see details of each in Table 4.4). This was done to further broaden the perspective of the research study and potentially enrich its results. That is, diversity of perspectives could arise not only in terms of case study to case study, and the different functional focal areas, but also in terms of how those on oversight structures or operating outside the South African higher education sector as well. Besides, the strategic tilt of the research topic itself implies the significance of an external-inward viewpoint. A unique number is linked to each participant that is used in the discussion of the findings in Chapter 5. For example, CS1P1T3 refers to case study 1, participant 1 of the case study, that is a Tier-3 level employee. The seven participants in the External Group of Practitioners are labelled EGP1 to EGP7.

Table 4.4: High-level Profile of Sampled Case Study Participants Interviewed

Case Study	Position of Research Participant(s)
CS1 (6 participants)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ HEI-01-01 - Tier-2 Executive (DVC/VP). ▪ HEI-01-02 - Tier-3 Leader, who oversees Research and Innovation. ▪ HEI-01-03 - Tier-4 Leader, who oversees the ERM function, viz. the CRO. ▪ HEI-01-04 - Tier-2 Executive, who was overseeing the registration related processes within the HEI.

Case Study	Position of Research Participant(s)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ HEI-01-05 - Tier-3 Executive, who oversees a faculty, within Teaching and Learning. ▪ HEI-01-06 – Tier-4 Leader, who oversees the IAF, viz. the CAE.
<p>CS 2 (6 participants)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CS2P1T2 - Tier-2 Executive (DVC/VP), who oversees a campus. ▪ CS2P2T2 - Tier-2 Executive (DVC/VP), who oversees the Teaching and Learning. ▪ CS2P3T2 - Tier-2 Executive (DVC/VP), whose primary focus is Community Engagement. ▪ CS2P4T3 - Tier-3 Executive, who oversees the registrations and Council secretariat related processes. ▪ CS2P5T3 - Tier-3 Executive, who oversees institutional culture. ▪ CS2P6T3 - Tier 3 leader, who oversees the IAF, viz. the CAE.
<p>CS 3 (4 participants)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CS3P1T1 - Tier-1 Executive (VC). ▪ CS3P2T2 - Tier-2 Executive (DVC/VP), who oversees academic affairs. ▪ CS3P3T2 - Tier-2 Executive (DVC/VP), who oversees Finance. ▪ CS3P4T3 - Tier-3 Leader, who oversees the IAF, viz. the CAE.
<p>CS 4 (5 participants)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CS4P1T3 - Tier-3 Executive, who oversees Finance. ▪ CS4P2T3 - Tier-3 Executive who serves as Faculty Executive Dean. ▪ CS4P3T3 - Tier-3 Executive who oversees strategic projects/initiatives ▪ CS4P4T4 - Tier-4 Leader, who oversees the Institutional Research and Planning processes. ▪ CS4P5T5 - Tier 4 Leader, an Academic with institutional culture as an area of speciality.
<p>CS 5 (6 participants)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CS5P1T2 - Tier-2 Executive (DVC/VP), who oversees strategy and ERM. ▪ CS5P2T2 - Tier-2 Executive (DVC/VP), who oversees institutional culture. ▪ CS5P3T2 - Tier-2 Executive (DVC/VP), who oversees the Research and Innovation activities. ▪ CS5P4T3 - Tier 3 leader, who oversees the IAF, viz. the CAE. ▪ CS5P5T3 - Tier-3 Executive, within Finance. ▪ CS5P6T3 - Tier-3 Executive who oversees the Research activities.
<p>CS 6 (4 participants)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ CS6P1T1 - Tier-1 Executive (VC). ▪ CS6P2T2 - Tier-2 Executive (DVC/VP) who oversees the Teaching and Learning activities. ▪ CS6P3T2 - Tie-2 Executive (DVC/VP) who oversees the Research and Innovation activities. ▪ CS6P4T3 - Tier-3 Executive who oversees the Finance activities.
<p>External Group of Practitioners (7 participants)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ EGP1 - Former Council member in a HEI, and previously an executive in the VC's office, who now operates outside the sector, within South Africa.

Case Study	Position of Research Participant(s)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ EGP2 - Former VC in at least two HEIs, who now leads a HEI outside South Africa. ▪ EGP3 - Former Council member in a HEI, who plays a prominent role in transformation initiatives targeted at developing the emerging chartered accountants from disadvantaged communities in the country's various provinces. ▪ EGP4 - Member of HR Directors Forum at USAf and serves the HR and Remuneration Committee within this organisation. ▪ EGP5 - Former CEO of an organisation accountable for quality assurance within the education space, and currently Chairperson in a similar space within South Africa. ▪ EGP6 - External member serving at a HEI, specialising in ERM and internal auditing. ▪ EGP7 – A Board member in a business school attached to one of the HEIs; a former Council member in another HEI, and a CEO in the private sector within the country.

In summary of each of the case studies, the following is provided regarding the profile of participants who were chosen but declined:

- Case Study 1

Of the originally targeted participants, the Tier-1 leader politely declined; two of the Tier-2 executives also declined. Instead, they recommended alternative colleagues within this HEI as potential participants. The Tier-3 leader responsible for Planning was not responsive.

- Case Study 2

Two of the Tier-2 executives, as well as the Tier-3 individual overseeing the student experience were non-responsive, despite repeated reminders. The Tier-3 executive overseeing Finance instantly declined participation.

- Case Study 3

The Tier-2 executive overseeing the registration process and Council secretariat activities instantly declined participation. The other Tier-2 executive, a Chief

Operating Officer (COO), did not meet the three-year minimum tenure requirement deemed an essential pre-condition for participation.

- Case Study 4

In granting the approval to do the research at this HEI, their Research Office placed a pre-condition that none of the first two Tiers of the leadership team should be selected as target participants. This caused a disarray somehow, given that they were in fact planned for inclusion given the focal area of this research topic, viz. strategy, risk culture and institutional culture. The next level was then used as a focus for this research; the understanding being that this next tier interacts with tiers 1 and 2. The Tier-3 executive who oversees institutional culture was not keen to have the interview recorded. The executive also brought in some members of her team into the interview. As such, the researcher opted to exclude proceedings of the interview in the research results, as it would have been impossible to corroborate.

- Case Study 5

The two Tier-2 leaders who oversee Teaching and Learning as well as ICT, respectively, politely declined.

- Case Study 6

The two Tier-3 executives who oversee institutional planning/strategy as well as institutional culture, respectively, were non-response to the invite to participate in this study. Similarly, the Tier-2 executive responsible for institutional support declined.

4.3.2.2 Data Collection

As stated, data was gathered by means of interviews. First, due to the differences in the annual reports of the six case studies, and the tier levels of the participants, the information that had to be obtained from each participant differed. Hence, no interview guide was drafted. The researcher used the annual report information, and the content analysis results as basis for the interview (refer to the ethical clearance, or Motivation Letter to Sampled Case Study's Research Ethics Office, obtained in

this regard – Annexure 6), after which probing questions were based on the answers obtained from the specific interviewees.

The fieldwork was conducted during a COVID-19 pandemic era, which essentially means a period when social distancing had become a priority imperative. This informed the decision to have virtual interactions between the researcher and the participants, rather than the in-person option. Further, due to the physical distance between the researcher and the six case study premises, virtual interviews assisted that more higher tier participants could be targeted (not all participants may have been available in a day or two-time frame that would have been required if face-to-face interviews were conducted and the researcher had to travel to the premises). During interview sessions with research participants, the researcher was mindful of the following basics, which according to [Robson \(2002\)](#), are aimed at ensuring the success of the data gathering process:

- Being attentive and, especially, doing more listening than talking. In this context, being mindful that the data gathering session is not a platform for displaying the researcher's prowess, but rather it is more about sourcing the data in an optimal way.
- Remaining neutral in the sense of the researcher being mindful not to give away her/his stance on any aspect of the questionnaire or opinions (s)he is trying to determine from the participant. In other words, being weary of the risk that the participant may be easier swayed into taking the view of the researcher, rather than remaining true to own views as a participant.
- Being articulate, in the sense of putting the questions across in a frank and forthright manner, whilst at the same time avoiding being misconstrued as being threatening. In addition, being mindful of the importance of vocal variety and avoiding any appearance that could give an impression of being bored during the discussion.

To provide some guidance and information to participants, a Participant Information Sheet and Assent Form was sent to each participant prior to the in-depth interview (refer to Annexure 8), which contained the following information:

- The purpose of the research study;
- The rationale behind choosing the specific participant for the research;
- The benefits that would arise from the participants' positive response to the invite (to participate);
- The focus area of the interview (refer to the five themes as identified in the literature review);
- Confidentiality aspects as well as the participant's right to withdraw;
- Ethics clearance for the study; and
- The approximate time-duration it will take to complete the in-depth interview;

Furthermore, in most instances, the six HEI case studies required that additional ethical clearance be obtained from the specific institution (refer to Section 4.5 for a discussion). Due to the diversity of questions asked, it was necessary to record the interview sessions. When it comes to the recording of research data gathered during the fieldwork, there are two schools of thought, viz. those who believe that these proceedings should be recorded ([Brennan, 2022:396](#); [de Villiers et al, 2022:1777](#)) as one way of preserving the integrity of the study. However, others hold a different viewpoint. For instance, [Crump \(2020: 215\)](#) cites the fact that transcribed data could be lengthy, something that is time consuming particularly when the number of participants is high – as is the case with this research study. For purposes of this research study, all data gathering conversations were recorded, as part of the effort to enhance the credibility of research results – from an accuracy and completeness perspective.

Another advantage of recording the discussions was to enable the researcher to have a better opportunity to concentrate on building the rapport with the research participant. That is, with less attention being paid to note-taking, then there was a better opportunity to focus on 'connecting' with the research participant ([de Villiers, 2022:1776](#)). It is also about being able to keep up with the interviewee, should (s)he be faster, in terms of speaking, than the researcher's pace of taking notes.

The permission to do the recording was discussed upfront with the research participant and prior permission sought and obtained (refer Annexure 7). Although scholars argue that transcripts should be reviewed by the interview participants or interviewees, this was not possible due to the business of the interviewees, particularly given the seniority of their roles. To address this problem, the transcripts were compiled by the researcher himself, which in a sense closes the gap that would arise had this critical task been assigned to a third party (Brennan, 2022:385). In addition, a qualified editor who is also a member of the South African Translators Institute served as a second quality-assurer, verified the transcripts to the actual recording. Thereafter, the analysis of data, via the transcriptions, commenced.

In total 38 interviews were conducted, all being recorded and ranging from 1 hour and 17 minutes to 3 hours and 4 minutes. The majority were about 1 hour. The next step was to analyse the data gathered.

4.3.2.3 Data Analysis

The journey towards research-based solutions includes the hurdle of data analysis, which gets even more compounded in the case of qualitative research techniques. That is, the high volume of data that often emerges, because of the in-depth nature of qualitative research methods, implied the need for more skill in terms of unpacking the data, illuminating key messages, and consolidating those into meaningful recommendations. Unfortunately, and as Yin (2009) confirms, there is no magic formula on how to undertake data analysis for qualitative information or results. However, some authors (Haenssger, 2019:88; Creswell, 2005) perhaps disagree, by pointing to the following basics for analysing qualitative data:

- Utilisation of a specialised data analysis software, with the aim of enhancing efficiencies in analysing especially a high volume of data (Jenkins, Monaghan & Smith, 2023:106; Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019:261). Nonetheless, important to remember, is the fact that it would not be the software itself that does the analysis, but the researcher – with the software merely aiding in the process (Haenssger, 2019:88). In the context of this research study, the program Atlas.ti was chosen as a data analysis tool.

- Strengthening the researcher’s familiarity with the data (Mattimoe *et al*, 2021:6), which in turn enhances the ease with which the researcher can retrieve the data, particularly given that research tends to occur over a relatively long period (Linneberg & Korgaard, 2019:261). As such, the researcher undertook this through data cleaning before it was loaded onto Atlas.ti. In so doing, the researcher remained mindful not to tamper with the context and the messages which the interviewees were seeking to convey.
- Generating initial codes, particularly as informed by the literature review (Eftenaru, 2023:216; Mattimoe *et al*, 2021:6). Outcomes of this step led to the detail as noted in Annexure 2.
- Going back to the literature review, with the intention of illuminating key themes around which coding will be undertaken. The codes were uploaded onto the specialised software (Nowell, Norris, White & Moules, 2017:7), mindful of the key-themes identified (Haenssngen, 2019:89). A step further was the merging, re-naming distilling and collapsing of some of the codes (Mattimoe *et al*, 2021:6). Figure 4.3 below illustrates those movements, and the updated list of themes are presented in Annexure 2.

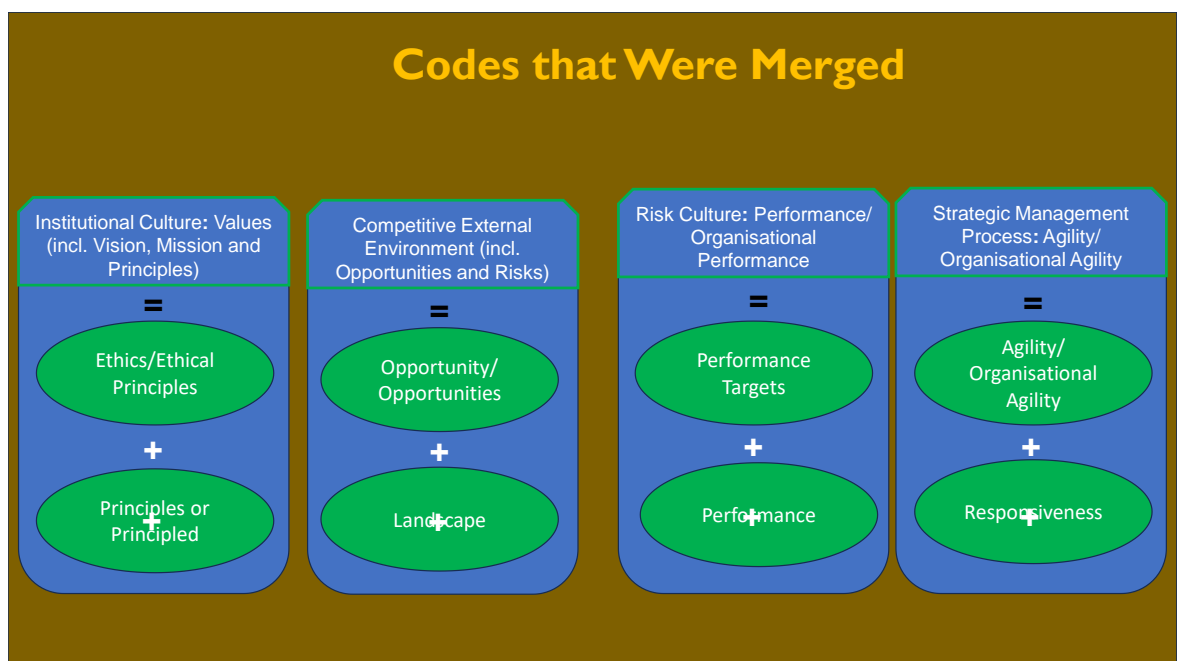


Figure 4.3: Merging of Themes During Coding

- Reviewing of the key themes with the purpose of refining them, including ensuring the alignment between research objectives and in-depth interview outcomes ([Mattimoe et al, 2021:6](#)). Hence, in addition to the themes that emerged from the literature review there was an additional theme that focused on Governance/Governing Structures, in the context of this study. Refer to Annexure 2 for the final list of themes used.
- Producing the report, which is an articulation of key messages emerging from the interviews, and thus constituting the results of the study ([Mattimoe et al, 2021:6](#)). The approach to the report has been to provide an analysis per case study, including the information gathered during the content analysis and per the various tier levels, and then reflect on the common thread across the six case studies and the EGPs. This included contrasting the key messages, which served as a basis for formulating the main contribution of this study to the body of knowledge.

4.4 Trustworthiness of Data

One of the key success factors of a research study is the trustworthiness of data viz. the extent to which the results and findings of the research study can be described as true and certain. In other words, are the results and findings a true reflection of real-life situations and is the supporting evidence substantive. According to various thought leadership practitioners ([Bhattacharjee \(2012; Sekaran, 2009\)](#)), trustworthiness takes various dimensions.

First, they point to criterion-related validity, which they describe as based on quantitative analysis of data - when statistical analysis such as factor analysis and correlation analysis are used.

Second, there is construct validity, which talks to the extent to which a given measure relates to one or more external criterion.

Third, there is content validity, which [Mugenda \(2008\)](#) also reflects on. It refers to a measure of the extent to which data that is collected via a specific tool represents a specific domain of indicators. Providing a further perspective, [Levitt, Bamberg, Creswell, Frost, Josselson & Suárez-Orozco \(2018:32\)](#) assert that the value of qualitative research outcomes can best be assessed through the eye of the reader (of such outcomes).

In undertaking the journey of this research study, the researcher was mindful of the essence of optimising both the internal validity and external validity. Reliability, which is another critical consideration to strengthen the credibility of a research study, was prioritised by the researcher. In this regard, a conscious effort was exercised in terms of building the research design and deciding on which would be the most appropriate research methodology to apply. Specifically, the aim was to ensure that if another researcher conducted the research study all over again, (s)he would produce similar results ([Yin, 2003](#)).

Despite the criticism which qualitative research receives, particularly from the perspective of its trustworthiness ([Shufutinsky, 2020:56](#)), its emerging prominence continues to grow. Various authors have focused on how trustworthiness of qualitative research results could be enhanced. For instance, [O’Kane, Smith, & Lerman, \(2021:130\)](#) believe in an approach that views the result the prism that looks at transferability, confirmability, dependability and credibility. [Patterson et al \(2023:177\)](#) assert that there are essentially three themes that inform the rigour of a qualitative research outcomes. These are the ethical co-construction, the methodical alignment, as well as the multiple-perspective interpretation. Taking the narrative a step further, [McSweeney \(2021:1065\)](#) points to a potential risk of the researcher commencing the research journey with an already preconceived perspective on the matter being researched. He cautions the researcher to keep an open mind to any surprise that could emerge and disproving the preconceived perspective.

In the context of this study, trustworthiness has been preserved through the following measures:

- Dependability which refers to the extent to which the gathered data emanates from wide enough a range of participants. In the context of this study not only were there a minimum of four participants from each institution, but these were reflective of the core business of a typical university, viz. Teaching and Learning, Research and Innovation as well as Community Engagement. Support functions were also represented. This gives a more complete picture of each case study, whilst also enabling the six case studies to compare with one another.
- Confirmability is about the consistency, neutrality, and repeatability of findings. In the context of this study, the researcher has on file, not only the recordings of the in-depth interviews but transcripts as well. Further, given the number of case studies as well as the number of participants selected within each case study, this has contributed towards triangulating the findings of this study. Thus, strengthening the confirmability thereof.
- Credibility, whereby the selection of quotations from participants has been undertaken in such a way that their 'real voices' come through. That is, where the participant/interviewee repeats themselves, the researcher chose the version of the quotation that is deemed more articulate of a particular perspective by the participant. This has been undertaken, first by picking all relevant quotations, and thereafter doing the selection of the one that best articulates the perspective which the participant was seeking to articulate.
- Transferability – having applied Atlas.ti in analysing the data results emanating from the interviews, the frequency of each code serves as a basis for indicating the transferability of such results. Such frequency shows at a participant-level as well as the combined number of participants. The coding process followed also shows how each case differs from the others in relation to specific codes.

4.5 Ethical Considerations and Researcher Values

This section of the Chapter seeks to illuminate some of the ethics related considerations. Figure 4.4 below depicts a high-level view of these and is followed by a brief narration thereof.

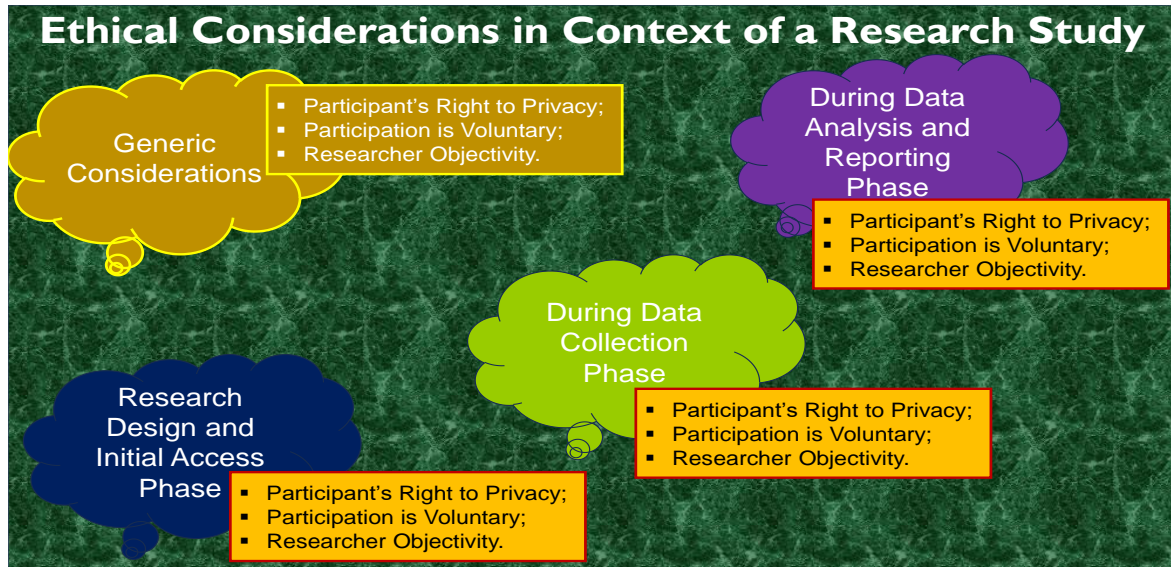


Figure 4.4: An Overview of Ethical Considerations

4.5.1 Generic Considerations

According to [Collis and Hussey \(2003:38-39\)](#), there are various generic ethical considerations, which even this research study must observe:

First, research participants – including potential research participants - have a right to privacy. Hence the importance of the researcher being mindful not to temper with this right.

Secondly, their participation in this research study was understood to be voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from participating at any stage during the fieldwork stage. Such withdrawal could be partial or absolute.

Thirdly, the researcher was wary of the participants' sensitivity to any aspect of the data selection method, or their entitlement to confidentiality, and thus the researcher tried to maintain objectivity. Refer to Annexure 7 for the Participant Consent Letter, and to Annexure 8 for the Participant Information Sheet and Assent Form - as both provided to the respective participants.

4.5.2 Research Design and Initial Access Considerations

Consideration of ethical implications that are pertinent to the initial stages of accessing the participants is important, which includes their refusal to participate in the research study. Their consent ranges from lack of consent, through implied consent, to informed consent.

In the context of this study, the risk of falling into the lack of consent or implied consent was mitigated by the fact that the research participants work at, or relate to, HEIs. Expectedly, they may have been involved in research in one way or the other – and would most likely be relatively conversant with basic research ethics issues, especially in relation to consent. Nonetheless, the researcher undertook a conscious effort to make the participants aware of their rights to consent or not consent. In this study, as mentioned in Section 4.3.2.1, some potential participants did not agree to participate in the study. The alternative candidates with similar profile, in relation to the topic of the research study, were identified and approached. Fortunately, this second attempt was successful on each occasion.

4.5.3 Data Collection Phase Considerations

Ethical sensitivities pertaining to the data collections phase were considered by the researcher (Kamal, 2021), and these took two dimensions, viz. general considerations as well as data collection consideration. The former encompassed aspects such as ((Kamal, 2021): 1) the participant' right to participate in a research study, which implicitly talks to their right to withdraw from it at any stage. One of the basic measures the researcher implemented, in mitigating against this challenge was through ensuring that the scope of the research, as prior-communicated to the participant, did not get altered with any further communication. 2) Preserving the level of confidentiality and anonymity that has been promised to the participant. In the context of this research, there could be sensitivities around some of the information that is shared by participants, particularly when viewed against the background that HEIs tend to be siloed in relation to hierarchy and disciplines. So, for instance, a participant might provide a piece of information that paints a negative

picture about (say) the academics' embrace of risk culture. If the source of that information were to get known, then the participant's right to confidentiality and anonymity would have been prejudiced. Hence, throughout the gathering of the data, care was taken that a specific individual could not be identified.

The ethical considerations pertaining to data collection methods are about whether the researcher coerces the participant to provide a specific response. This tends to be the case, especially, during face-face interviews (Saunders *et al*, 2000:138), and could arise also in the context of the researcher taking interest in a particular point and thus inadvertently seeking to stretch it in a different direction which (s)he has interest in (Kvale, 2007). In the context of this research study, these practices were avoided.

4.5.4 Data Analysis and Reporting Phase Considerations

To uphold the validity of data that has been collected, the researcher should take note of the importance of ensuring that all components of that data are included (Creswell, 2014). In other words, due care ought to be exercised in terms of presenting the findings in a balanced manner when reporting. Once again, the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants must be maintained as part of this data analysis and reporting phase (Creswell, 2014). Further, an added dimension to this component is how third parties use the researcher's conclusions. Failure to mitigate against these considerations will equate to a breach of research ethics, by the researcher.

4.6 Limitations of the Study

The main limitation of this study relates to the potential bias when it comes to the research methodology, especially as mentioned that the researcher is familiar with the HEI and his proximity to the subject matter being researched. However, the researcher was cautious to control research bias by means of various controls as discussed in Section 4.4 on the trustworthiness of the data.

A second limitation was that not all HEIs data was available and hence six potential sample units from a potential 26 were excluded from the study. From these six, two are ranked in the top five HEIs in the country. As this study is exploratory by design, developing a framework based on the best practices, not being able to include these institutions may be seen as a limitation. A third limitation was that not all participants that were targeted for the study were willing to participate. This limitation was minimised by ensuring that the participants ultimately chosen still met the criteria in terms of experience and that they were still part of the broader leadership of the HEI being used as a case study. Yet, as with the previous limitation, valuable best practices might have been missed. A fourth limitation was that the transcribed data was not sent for verification by the interviewee. However, a professional editor verified the transcribed information with the recording.

4.7 Conclusion

The primary focus of this Chapter was to provide the research design aimed at guiding the study. Discussions, in this context, have touched on the research paradigm and approach, the research methods, the critical considerations in terms of enhancing and/or preserving the trustworthiness of the data, the ethical considerations which the researcher had to be mindful of, as well as limitations of the study.

Chapter 5

Research Findings

“Organizational practitioners know that their strategy should take into account the shifts that are happening beyond the hustle and bustle of their daily work, because only that knowledge enables them to adapt to the emerging realities in a timely manner. Paying attention to these shifts is of even more importance for educational institutions because they typically educate people for the future. So, educators are keen to make sure that their trainings and services make students become a better match with the realities of tomorrow.” – (Shadnam, 2020:831).

5.1 Introduction

Presented in this Chapter are the results and findings of the study – both the results from the quantitative content analysis as well as the findings from the qualitative surveys, where in-depth interviews were conducted with the research participants. The content analysis (refer to Section 4.3.1) addresses all the SROs (refer to Section 1.4), and the results of the desk top analysis are presented in Section 5.2. The results also led to the identification of the six case studies (refer to Section 4.3.1) that formed the basis of the qualitative survey (refer to Section 4.3.2), addressing (again) all the four SROs (refer to Section 1.4), leading to address the main research objective (refer to Section 1.4) and developing this study's research contribution, viz. Risk Culture Maturity Framework within a higher education sector context (refer to Section 1.4 and Annexure 4).

The layout of the second part of this Chapter (refer to sections 5.2.1 – 5.2.7.4) is structured in a similar manner to the related themes as indicated in Annexure 2 (refer to sections 3.3 to 3.6 and Annexure 4), which is that for each case study there are four sections. These are the competitive external environment (refer to Section 3.3), the risk culture (refer to Section 3.4), the institutional culture (refer to Section 3.5) and the strategic management process (refer to Section 3.6). In addition, there is information that emerged from the EGPs. To balance the credibility of these findings with the need to retain the flow of the write-up, there are instances where the direct extracts of participant responses have been included. Such extracts also contribute towards making the participant voices 'audible' in this research report. The final part of this Chapter reports on the triangulation (refer to Section 5.4) of the case studies and framework developed (refer to Section 5.5).

5.2 Quantitative Content Analysis

As discussed in Section 4.3.1, quantitative content analysis was applied through a review of both the strategic planning documents, such as the annual performance plans, as well as the annual reports of the respective HEIs in South Africa. Of the 26 public HEIs in the country, only 20 were documented on the Internet. After further

inquiries, those 20 were collected. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 5.1. In approaching the content analysis, the core words (refer to the first row of Table 5.1) deemed critical as part of an institution's lexicon, in the context of this research study, were the risk culture or risk maturity, the risk appetite and tolerance, as well as the strategy or strategic management process. Thereafter, informed by the literature review (refer to Chapter 3), additional terms were also considered. In this regard, a word such as innovation was not counted where it shows up as part of (say) the name of a function such as Research and Innovation, or Ethics Committee. Focus was more on those instances where the word was used to describe what the institution was doing in terms of delivering its strategic and operational activities. The key to the colours presented in the table is provide below in the legend. The total for each HEIs is also indicated on the table in the second column.

Table 5.1: Quantitative Content Analysis

Institution	Risk Culture/ ERM Culture /ERM Maturity	Risk Appetite/ Tolerance	Organisation/ Institution Culture	Strategic Planning/ Management	Innovation/ Continuous Improvement/ Change	Opportunity/ Opportunities	Compliance	Dialogue	Ethics/ Ethical	Interdependencies/ interdependency/ Collaboration
Cape Peninsula University of Technology										Collaboration
Central University of Technology										Collaboration
Durban University of Technology										Collaboration
Mangosuthu University of Technology***										
Nelson Mandela University										
North-West University										Collaboration
Rhodes University***										
Sefako Makgatho University***										
Sol Plaatjie University										Collaboration
Stellenbosch University										Collaboration
Tshwane University of Technology										Collaboration
University of Cape Town				Strategy						
University of Fort Hare										Collaboration
University of Free State		Tolerance								Collaboration
University of Johannesburg										Collaboration
University of KwaZulu-Natal										Collaboration
University of Limpopo										Collaboration
University of Mpumalanga										Collaboration
University of Pretoria***										
University of South Africa				Strategy						Collaboration
University of Venda***										
University of Western Cape	ERM Maturity									Collaboration
University of Zululand										Collaboration
Vaal University of Technology**										
Wits University										
Walter Sisulu University										

** Under Administration during 2019 year

*** Annual report for the relevant year could not be obtained



What emerged in undertaking the content analysis is that most of the HEIs do bring in the terminology that bears reference to risk culture in their respective annual reports. There were a few that would incorporate such terms into the Vision, the Mission Statement or even the Values and Principles of the institution – and this was deemed even more critical by the researcher.

As the results of the content analysis were used as a basis for choosing the case studies, the discussion of the results is presented in Section 4.3.1. Additional information includes themes that obtained the most appearances, (viz. purple), which were interdependencies/integration/collaboration, innovation, as well as compliance. The first two are directly linked to the core business of a typical HEI in the sense of engaging in international collaborations. The annual reports were reporting more on HEIs' targets as contained in their annual performance plans. Compliance aligned with the literature review in the sense that HEIs are said to be more compliance-focused and, hence, less entrepreneurial. The three themes that received the lowest scores are risk culture/risk maturity, risk appetite, and dialogue. This aligns with both literature review as well as the overall findings of this study.

5.3 Case Study Design: Qualitative Surveys

Before discussing the data of each case study as gathered by means of in-depth interviews, a few important aspects are discussed. First, there were seven strata constituting the pool of target research participants for this study and presented in this section. These are the six HEIs case studies, based on the outcomes of a qualitative content analysis, as well as a stratum composed of those who contribute to the sector from an oversight structure level, referred to as EGP. All six target HEIs embraced the study, through providing guidance on how to navigate through their research protocols, which starts with engaging the Research Ethics Office. Once all the necessary documents had been completed, the approval was obtained. Table 5.2 presents the seven strata, indicating the number of participants selected, participated, and the final participation form the original selected participants, providing a picture of the commitment of the participants to this study.

Table 5.2: Selected and Responsive Participants

Strata	Originally Selected	Participated	Total from Originally Selected
HEI-01	6	6	4
HEI-02	6	5	4
HEI-03	6	4	4
HEI-04	6	4	4
HEI-05	6	6	5
HEI-06	6	4	4
EGP	7	7	7

From the information provided, it is noteworthy that of the 42 participants targeted, a total of 35 individuals participated in the study. Qualitative experts indicate that a minimum of 12 in-depth interviews is sufficient for a qualitative research study – refer Section 4.3.2.1. Secondly, of the 35 participants, 31 were from the pool originally selected responded positively, and thus supporting the alternative, viz. that saturation is reached at 20-30 – refer Section 4.3.2.1.

Another aspect that is important to note before presenting each case study, is that there were additional sub-themes that were derived from the interviews (refer Annexure 2) and were included in the analyses of the data gathered. Depicted in Figure 5.1 below are the codes that emerged only during the fieldwork, namely in-depth interviews with participants, including the frequency of each code.

The final list of themes and sub-themes, developed from the literature, content analysis, mergers of themes and interviews are presented in Annexure 2.

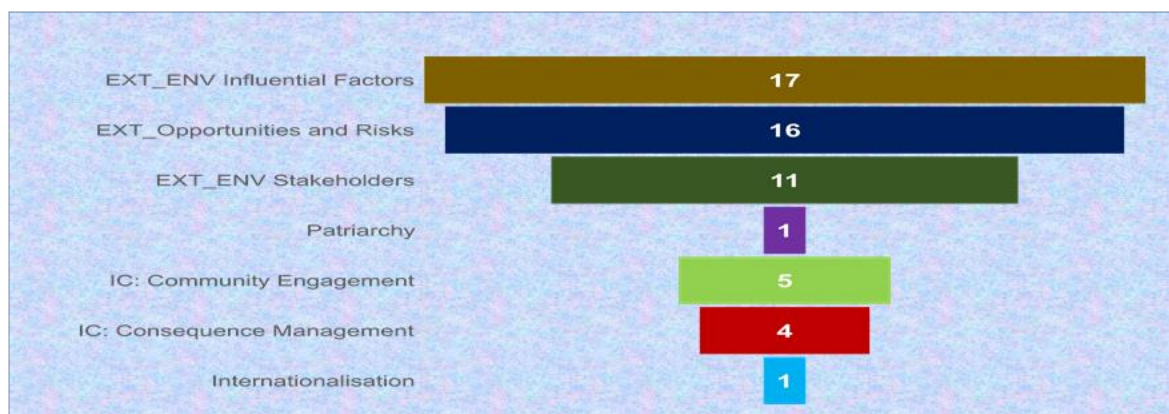


Figure 5.1: Frequency Sub-Themes that Emerged During Fieldwork

The external environment (EXT_ENV) featured in broadly three categories, with participants reflecting on either all of these; alternatively, they touch on one or two. Specifically, these relate to:

- Influential factors that are viewed as contributing to the competitiveness of the external environment. Perhaps due to the seniority of the participants, most of them focused more on how the external environment was competitive.
- Opportunities (EXT_) presented and risks posed by such external environment, to HEIs. The researcher was deliberate in positioning the question as opportunities (first) and risks. The rationale being to nudge participants toward talking to those too, and thus testing the perception that HEIs are risk averse.
- Stakeholders referred to role players such as government, who are the custodian of policy, and the industry that serves as 'consumers' of the graduates.
- Patriarchy arose in a context of institutional culture (IC), whereby the participant believes that their university is engulfed by not only bullying and intimidation but also masculine dominance. That is, leadership team that perceives women as less capable in comparison to men, which makes deliberations more difficult especially when a woman takes a minority stance on a matter.
- Community Engagements refers to the third mission, which is a priority area for universities – in addition to Teaching and Learning as well as Research and Innovation. It was quite strange that this did not feature as much from participants.
- Consequence Management is a concept that plays out in two ways. Firstly, it serves as an integral part of university's learning organisation posture. Where there have been performance related shortfalls, lessons learned are identified and an improvement plan put in place. Secondly, it is about holding people accountable, where there is evidence of negligence. In this context, such a response is informed by the fact that universities are run largely at taxpayers'

expense. Literature review points to consequence management being one of the main reasons that some within HEIs complain about managerialism or corporatisation of the higher education sector (refer to Section 2.3.2).

Internationalisation plays a key role in terms of ensuring that HEIs' contribution to socioeconomic development expands beyond the borders of their respective countries. It provides opportunities such as student-exchange programmes, research collaborations, and staff-exchange programmes. University rankings, which is another key priority for most universities, are informed partly by the extent to which a HEI plays into the internationalisation space.

5.3.1 Case Study 1

5.3.1.1 Competitive External Environment

Infusing a literature review perspective, Chapter 1 (refer to 1.2.2) reflected on the importance of the external environment, with particular emphasis on how it relates to the higher education sector. For instance, [Popescu \(2015:413\)](#) pointed to such external environment being the driving factor behind the significance of strategic management within especially African universities.

During the in-depth interviews, there were two interrelated questions asked in relation to the external environment, viz.:

- Factors that inform such external environment.
- Opportunities and risks pertaining to such external environment.

A key observation is that participants for HEI-01 were focused more on the risks / challenges rather than opportunities as well. Only two opportunities were raised, yet eight risks were mentioned. This potentially points towards being less entrepreneurial and more risk-averse, which equates to a poor risk culture; thus, aligning with the literature (refer to Section 3.2.2.10). Seven specific aspects mentioned are discussed below.

5.3.1.1.1 Funding or Financial Sustainability

Consistent with what emerged as the most common thread within the literature review, financial sustainability, or funding, was indicated as either an influential factor or a constraint/risk. For instance, HEI-01-01 (refer to Table 4.1 on how participants are numbered) viewed it more as an influential factor, as he also believed that there is competition for the same resources amongst the HEIs in the country.

“I think higher education at the moment finds itself in a very interesting and challenging position in the sense that we’re competing as the 26 institutions for the same treatment, or consideration of our requests, from government. And we have to argue our case when we have to submit for the various grants; specifically, the Infrastructure and Efficiency Grant....and also the ICT given the need to transition onto an online learning mode of delivery. Government has finite resources in terms of what SARS collects versus what is made available to higher education.”

Perhaps the competitive perspective he adopts in his reflections is closely linked with the fact that HEI-01 has embraced entrepreneurship as part of its 2030 strategy. Furthermore, the point he raises about physical infrastructure perhaps talks to the regulatory compliance risk, specifically the ageing infrastructure that is non-compliant with the Occupational Health and Safety Act, No 85 of 1993. On the other hand, HEI-01-02 looked at funding through the socioeconomic status of the students, whereas HEI-01-03 viewed it through the declining state of the economy, as well as low (investment) reserves that are compounded by poor focus on alumni relations as a source of philanthropic funding.

Taking the narrative further, HEI-01-05 looks at funding through the country’s student funding system, namely National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), and argues that due to administrative hurdles students tend to be negatively impacted. For instance, the payment of student allowances for books, accommodation, and/or transport tends to get unnecessarily delayed, despite the majority of this institution’s students being dependent on NSFAS. As such, it also

leads to high outstanding debt for the institution – especially given the fact that most students in this institution are NSFAS dependent. HEI-01-05 further highlighted mitigation efforts for this risk, viz. the development and administering of short-learning programmes with a view to strengthening third-stream income generation capacity. HEI-01-06 also highlighted this as a risk, citing it as financial resource limitations. Perhaps, inevitably, this financial sustainability factor also has an adverse impact on the broader teaching and learning service delivery for the institution – thus potentially escalating the student throughput risk.

5.3.1.1.2 University-Industry Partnerships

Two participants raised the strategic priority of university-industry partnerships, as a factor that drives competitiveness. On the one hand, HEI-01-01 viewed it from the perspective of university rankings in both the local and the international context. He indicated that, to attract such partnerships, universities must be mindful of their profile, which includes their public profile and the extent to which they maintain their status in terms of university rankings. On the other hand, HEI-01-02 viewed these partnerships from the perspective of the relevance of graduates to the market, viz.:

“And leading to that, obviously it’s a push, is the demand by our local industry or industries, in terms of universities producing relevant people. People who are able to do; people who are able to learn. I think problems in the world today currently are quite enormous, to the extent that they need graduates who are going to solve problems, not [those] who are going to spend two or three years learning how to do the type of stuff.”

Expanding further, HEI-01-02 linked such problem-solving capabilities with innovation, asserting that such graduates must be highly innovative, and that they should focus on research that seeks to address global challenges as well, including the SDGs, rather than engaging in research that does not have impact as an endpoint. Building onto graduate relevance, HEI-01-04 highlighted emerging technologies, such as the Blockchain and Artificial Intelligence, as well as the inevitable embrace of online teaching and learning, as other competitive factors driven from the external environment. To broaden the institutional context on 4-IR,

HEI-01-02 highlighted the fact that there is some university academia who do not embrace the notion of 4-IR, which might be concerning for the institution as this could point towards the extent to which some remain inward-looking within HEI-01.

“We have a group of human beings who never wanted to hear about the concepts of Artificial Intelligence and the Fourth Industrial Revolution. They thought it was derailing them from running a faculty.”

5.3.1.1.3 Policy Certainty

Referring to it as policy certainty, HEI-01-03 highlighted three aspects which he believed are interrelated and arise from policy certainty. These are quotas in terms of how many students each HEI must enroll, how funding from government is regulated, and the Programme and Qualification Mix, which is a set of qualifications and learning programmes, which DHET would subsidise the HEI for. HEI-01-05 mentioned the challenge of student politics as an influential factor that derives from the Student Representative Council (SRC), with the common infighting at the SRC, which is linked to national political party affiliations, tends to have an adverse impact on the HEIs activities. Taking that narrative further, HEI-01-06 indicated that the SRC tends to overstep, supporting the notion of political uncertainty as a risk factor:

“The Student Representative Council is highly influenced by this political factor. And because of this, our students are being involved in areas where they should not be involved in, which are purely management decisions, but you find the Student Representative Council or students are involved. ... So, I think the political environment is a highly influential factor within HEI-01.”

5.3.1.1.4 Student Protests

Related to the challenge of student politics, as included in the preceding point regarding policy uncertainty, two participants highlighted the matter of student protests. For instance, HEI-01-03 looked at it through the prism of society, viz. due to regular service delivery related protests in the communities, students – who

happen to come from such communities – have no alternative understanding of resolving challenges. He asserts thus:

“I just think, from my perspective and within the sector overall, protests will always be number one [as a risk]. I happen to live in [this township], where I think a quarter does not pass before there is a community protest of some kind, with demands on the government. So, when you have your youth growing around that, that influences how they view the world and how they view communicating their interests and expecting outcomes.”

Concurring, HEI-01-5 points to the fact that there are various causes for student unrest.

5.3.1.1.5 Technology

Technology, as an influential factor, within the external environment, emerged in the context of COVID-19 and, relatedly, online teaching. That is, even as the national lockdown eased up, only 50% of students could return to campus. In this regard, HEI-01-05 highlighted the integrity of student assessments, as punctuated by the increased disciplinary cases resulting from plagiarism and cribbing. He also indicated that even the university’s leadership were poorly prepared to run the university during an era of the pandemic or national lockdown:

“Since the national lockdown, we had a huge challenge driven from the external environment, specifically in relation to switching to online teaching. We were not really geared for that because we are not an online service provider. That was a huge challenge for us.”

Perhaps, this situation points to the inward-looking tendency of HEI-01, as having been attributed to the broader higher education sector (refer to Section 3.5). Given that, by its nature, HEI-01 should be higher-prioritising technology, how come there are some within its academic leadership team who still doubt the importance of 4-IR? Besides, other HEIs have even introduced online degrees, informed by the reality that some students may not be able to attend on-campus. Further, given the

declining funding by government, combined with inability to strengthen their alumni network for philanthropic funding, how come HEI-01 is silent about the imperative to attract international students? Especially so, also when one takes into consideration the NSFAS dependence of most of their students.

5.3.1.1.6 Fraud and Corruption

Identified more as a risk than an influential factor, fraud and corruption emerged as another element that is driven from the external environment. Particularly, the focus was on procurement and physical infrastructure projects which are fertile ground for collusion that involves bidders from private sector organisations. For instance, HEI-01-03 indicated:

“I think fraud is a huge risk because when you look at a university, it is a microcosm of society, it’s an ecosystem. You have communities that live here. You have to service them in different ways....that...attract spending. To an extent, that opens the universities up to fraud, especially in the areas of procurement. You have large infrastructure projects and even collusion by private sector individuals.”

5.3.1.1.7 Massification of Higher Education

At least one participant reflected on the massification of higher education, viz. HEI-01-02, citing the high volumes of students seeking to be registered in HEIs. Hence, the yearly challenge of students that demand to be registered despite the online applications having closed.

5.3.1.2 Strategic Management Process

The relevance of the strategic management process is informed by the main research objective of this study (refer to Section 1.4), that is, to develop a risk culture maturity framework, including how it integrates with the strategic management process. A secondary research objective (refer to Section 1.4.2) is to determine the

elements of a sound strategic management process in the context of a typical HEI. As such, it was important for the researcher to get a view as to how each HEI understands and implements the strategic management process. In this Section, three aspects are discussed below.

5.3.1.2.1 Phases of the Strategic Management Process

Part of the criticism against the higher education sector is its tendency to be inward-looking and silo-driven, as debated in Section 3.5. As such, in seeking to determine the extent to which participants understood the various phases of the strategic management process the aim was to assess the integrated posture of the HEI. In other words, whether participants try to understand the strategic management process holistically, particularly given the significance of strategy in any organisation – regardless of sector.

None of the six participants in HE-01 mentioned all three phases of a typical strategic management process. Instead, their narration indirectly pointed to one or two of these phases. Perhaps, it is an indication of intuitive engagement in the process rather than consciously ‘segregating’ the process into its constituent phases. Unfortunately, the manager within the university’s planning unit could not participate in the research study.

5.3.1.2.2 Planning Phase

Three participants who were more explicit and elaborated, focused on the consultation aspect of the strategic planning phase. First, HEI-01-01 illuminated their practice of consultations with external stakeholders in both the private and public sector. Seemingly deliberate in addressing the gap that was addressed in Section 3.5, viz. that external stakeholders tend not to be adequately prioritised within the higher education sector, HEI-01-01 reflected:

“In order for strategic management to take place, strategic planning needs to take place; strategic management needs to take place. So, at HEI-01 we have quite a robust system of planning where we engage external stakeholders. In

fact, we engage all stakeholders in order to get their perspectives, expectations, their views on what they believe the university should be. And that's government and the private sector.”

Second, HEI-01-04 focused on the internal perspective of consultations of the strategic planning process. She then took the narrative to the latter phase of the process, which is reporting and monitoring, in asserting thus:

“It starts organically in the sense that all those units or regions or sections that will be involved in the implementation have to be involved right from the beginning of the planning process itself. We are reporting quarterly, we have a quarterly reporting system whereby now the targets that we have set ourselves are monitored and evaluated.”

Concurring, regarding consultations, HEI-01-02 asserted that the strategic planning process should be driven from the bottom-up, contrary to current practice within HEI-01. A seemingly contradictory view was expressed by HEI-01-05, who asserted thus:

“It [strategic management process] starts organically in the sense that all those units or regions or section, or whatever you call them, that will be involved in the implementation have to be involved right from the beginning of the planning process itself.”

The differences in opinion could be due to the hierarchical positioning of each participant (refer to Section 4.3.2.1 for an explanation of the various tiers); HEI-01-05 is at Tier-2 whereas HEI-01-02 is at Tier-4 and is thus more on the ‘receiving end’ of the constrained involvement. Thus, a Tier-2 role player is a co-driver of the strategy rollout and could perhaps not realise limitations or inadequacies within that exercise (of strategy rollout).

5.3.1.2.3 Implementation Phase

In this section, seven aspects were highlighted by the participants of this case study.

- Enrolment Targets

South Africa's aspiration, as espoused in the NDP is to achieve a target of 1.6 million enrolments by 2030 (refer to Section 2.4.1). Hence, HEIs have enrolment targets as part of their annual performance plans. It is perhaps against this brief background that the perspective of HEI-01-04 should be read. He raised the concern around academic offerings, whereby the content of subjects seems to remain as it has been originally, rather than being updated to incorporate the current needs of the market. Specifically, that such content must be informed by the needs of both business and government. Yet, HEIs seem to not realise that, over time, the outdated nature of their curriculum could lead to students shying away from them.

- Undue Jostling for Job Opportunities

The undue jostling for positions whereby, for instance, the union formations tend to lobby for specific individuals to an extent of potentially distracting institutional activities from focusing on delivery of the core mandate of the university. For instance, HEI-01-02 made the following observation:

“And that itself has created a culture of jostling for power. Positions arise, and people start talking about opportunities prematurely. They start putting their own people even before the job advert is out; or when the advert is out, people are already talking about who they want. The unions will start talking about ‘No, we are targeting so and so for this [position]’. So, that culture itself removes the institution away from the core mandate...”

Perhaps, this practice of undue jostling for positions does link to the trend of bullying and intimidation, which was referred to in Section 2.4.4. Specifically, the aspect of bullying and intimidation that arises through failure to accord due recognition to those who are deserving of it. Allowed to continue undeterred, such practice could hamper institutional performance, which could be compounded by the fact that

individual performance management systems/processes tend to be immature as well within the sector.

- The Proactive Embrace of Coopetition

Priority placed on what is often refer to as coopetition, which is the combination of cooperation on the one hand, with competition on the other (refer to Section 3.2.4). Specifically, HEI-01-02 asserted:

“Our Senate recently approved that we can buy, and use, the Invigilator App developed by the University of Johannesburg. So, we’re in the process of procuring that App now.”

Perhaps, this builds onto the normal practice of academic collaborations amongst the HEIs, which includes the exchange programmes in terms of academic staff and/or students. It bears significance given the fact that it is one of the key measures considered for purposes of international university rankings. Furthermore, this practice of coopetition is of benefit in that it recognises that all the country’s HEIs draw funding from the same source, viz. DHET. As such, it is economic to tap onto innovative initiatives already developed by other HEIs. Besides, as alluded to by [Kools and George \(2020:262\)](#), coopetition within the higher education sector is an integral part of continual learning (refer to Section 3.2.4).

- Graduates’ Relevance to the Market

The broader initiative of the relevance of graduates to the market needs, which includes graduate employability, was raised. In this regard, HEI-02-02 asserted:

“And leading to that, obviously it’s a push, the demand by our local industry or industries in terms of universities producing relevant people; people who are able to do; people who are prepared to learn. I think problems in the world today currently are quite enormous, to the extent that they need graduates who are going to solve problems and are highly innovative. This includes engaging in research that speaks to United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.”

Secondly, HEI-01-02 seemed to concur with regards to the relevance of graduates to the market, although placing focus more on the quality of graduates as related to the integrity of assessments. His view was that the national lockdown, because of COVID-19 has led to poor work-ethic on the part of students. This could lead to compromised quality of qualifications earned by such students.

In contrast, HEI-01-05 highlighted a challenge pertaining to the implementation phase of the strategic management process, viz. failure to meet the enrolment targets.

“Another challenge that we face sometimes is our enrolment planning agreements with DHET. As you know, we’re allowed to deviate 2% from targets that we’ve been given ... In the past three years or so, Management Sciences was the only Faculty that reached the targeted student in-take for first time entries. But this year, the other faculties also put in a huge effort, so we have made our targets.

It is worth noting that this institution has been struggling to meet student intake targets, despite a general trend of HEIs battling to contain the enrolment within pre-agreed targets. In other words, their challenge has arisen in areas beyond the STEM fields, which traditionally have trouble in attracting sufficient student enrolments.

The relevance of the view expressed above, to strategic management process, is the fact that one of the strategic goals identified by this HEI is to produce work-ready, entrepreneurial, and holistic graduates. It also bears a direct linkage with a similar view that emerged from the literature review, viz. graduate employability – as referred to in Section 2.4.1.1.

- Vision and Mission Refinement

The continual revisiting and/or refinement of the university’s Vision and/or Mission and tapping onto these for purposes of rallying the broader university community and inspiring it. For instance, according to HEI-01-05 opportunities could be explored because of such a vision refinement:

“Well, I think in terms of strategic management, in an ideal scenario, there are many more opportunities than challenges. At [HEI-01], we have recently revised our Vision. We previously had a Vision 2020... And then we engaged in a process to formulate Vision 2030 which a very exciting and focused on innovation and entrepreneurship. And if you have a clearly formulated Vision, the strategic management process follows the Vision and then your whole strategic planning process can clearly be articulated with the Vision in mind.”

It appears that HEI-01-05 is already trying to illustrate part of this research study, viz. how the strategic management process links with institutional culture. That is, even though the notion of ‘how we do things around here’ - the vision and values - is often linked with institutional culture, he opted to raise it as part of the strategic management process. This also aligns with the literature (refer to Section 3.5), where the Vision and Mission is integral to strategic planning.

- Resourcing of the Strategy

Seemingly taking the Vision and Mission narrative a step further, HEI-01-06 highlighted a challenge which the institution commonly experiences, viz. inadequate resourcing of the strategy. Her view was that:

“Now, a gap that I have always raised within HEI-01 is that when we set the strategy, the Vision and the strategic objectives we often fail to link those objectives to the resources currently available versus those required.”

- Organisational Agility

Organisational agility emerged as a two-pronged posture. First, as referring to responsiveness to changes in the external environment, including positions and/or announcements by government. In this regard, HEI-01 has embraced Incident Management Reporting, which is part of the broader business continuity management:

“I chair the Incident Management Committee, which is part of our business continuity management. So, whenever the President makes an

announcement, I convene the Incident Management Task Team and we critically analyse the implication for our institution. For instance, can we feasibly deliver our academic plan online; what about the risk of fraud and poor quality that is associated with online assessments?

Secondly, this participant considered the multi-campus model as another element of organisational agility. His view was that peculiarities applicable to each campus must be considered, and responses to those customised to each campus, if overall strategy delivery is to be more impactful.

5.3.1.3 Institutional Culture

Institutional culture featured in the participants' responses in the context of organisational performance only. Hence, the discussion in this section is only focussing on this element.

The relevance of organisational performance to institutional culture is informed by a view that HEIs that prioritise enhanced performance are often better positioned to attract more funding – refer to Section 3.2.5. It is perhaps against this background that HEI-01-02 lamented the poor work ethics at their institution:

“At [HEI-01], Friday is seen as a free day. ... You won't get any support at HEI-01 if you arrange a meeting on a Friday that goes beyond 13H00. ... So, that type of culture itself is derailing to whatever strategy the institution might have.”

Taking the dim narrative on performance a step further, HEI-01-05 lamented the insignificance of a typical bonus payout at this institution, yet everyone has enrolled on the performance management system. Perhaps it is paradoxical that an institution that has 'Excellence' as one of its values to have the two views expressed above. Yet, on the positive side, this institution has a maturity model against which it assesses itself. As at the time of the research interview, this institution was only a

level short of full maturity, as expressed by HEI-01-01. The question arises, against such poor work ethics, whether the assessment of the maturity can be trusted.

5.3.1.4 Risk Culture

For HEI 1, 10 aspects were raised by the participants, each being presented below.

5.3.1.4.1 Academic Offerings or Re-curriculation

In the context of perhaps, the continual improvement element of risk culture, two of the participants focused on re-curriculation or academic offerings. First, HEI-01-02 highlighted the need to be global and respond to changes in the global landscape through re-curriculation. He highlighted aspects such as entrepreneurship, Big data and the 4-IR as worth considering. Clearly concurring, HEI-01-04 emphasised the fact that in prioritising entrepreneurship, their institution has introduced (and inaugurated in 2023) not only a Master's programme specialising in this field, but also undergraduate programmes.

5.3.1.4.2 Positive Outlook on Risk-Taking

Perhaps talking to the positive outlook on risk taking, which is another element of risk culture (as highlighted in Section 3.2.2.2), HEI-01-04 raised a concern about a culture of fear:

“There is a culture of fear, you know, people can’t even innovate because they are scared that if this goes wrong then they will be in trouble, serious trouble. That stifles the innovative, creative minds of the people. As a result of that, we appear to be celebrating mediocrity because people are now not proactive and innovative enough.”

Expressing a similar sentiment, HEI-01-02 lamented:

“There’s the last constituency or ordinant of culture, which I call a culture of fear. HEI-01 has been embroiled in a number of challenges, I mean from top management, with unions, with the students, even with the higher education department itself [DHET].”

Given that this is the very same institution that has introduced entrepreneurship programmes, as part of its portfolio of academic offerings, perhaps there is another risk culture element at play, viz. change management. Coincidentally, change management has emerged in the literature review as one of the challenges to the deepening of risk culture (refer to Section 3.2.3). Relatedly, another risk culture element that seems to be at play is that of tone-at-the-top. That is, as [Tuveson & Ralph \(2016:13\)](#) assert, how senior leadership communicates, practices and socialises the core values of the organisation (refer to Section 3.2.2.1. Could it be that the shortfall, potentially by senior leadership, in creating an innovation-inspired environment, is because of the political uncertainty as referred to by HEI-01-03:

“When you look at the fact that we have all these five-year plans; we have this vision. We look at what could get in the way of that. In terms of the external environment, I think we always start with the political uncertainty.”

Yet, this is the very same institution that engages with external stakeholders in both the private and public sector, soliciting a broadened insight as part of developing its strategic plan.

5.3.1.4.3 Open Dialogue

The relevance of this component of risk culture is informed by a market perspective which believes that changing the way in which an organisation responds to risk requires candid engagements, including challenging senior leadership (refer to Section 3.2.2.3). It is perhaps in this context that almost all the participants highlighted the fear factor, as prominent in stifling an open dialogue across the HEI-01. For instance, HEI-01-06 asserted:

“So another thing that was brought up in that meeting...that people are still afraid to speak up.But people were sick of being afraid to speak and being afraid of bringing issues up, in fear of reprisal. So, I think we’re still in that state. And, in my opinion, at the moment, our lips must be shut. We are blocked, our employees are blocked from moving forward should they identify anything negative. Which really should not be the case.”

This participant further asserted that even though the VC, at the time, remained supportive of the function headed by this participant, some of the reports tabled in relation to governance of the institution were blocked. In other words, those reports were not allowed to proceed to oversight structures, where they would be deliberated upon by committees that include external members. Taking the narrative a step further, HEI-01-04 highlighted the fact that repercussions include potential non-renewal of employment contract, if the staff member viewed as troublesome or overly vocal is on fixed-term contract, and that even matters pertaining to the institutional culture of the university itself are not encouraged for open discussion.

In concurrence, HEI-01-03 looked at this challenge from a racism angle as well as the gender discrimination perspective. Regarding the latter, it seems to apply even when the supervisor is a female too, viz. she tends to be condescending towards her female subordinates – yet acting differently towards male subordinates within the team. In seeking to drive the point further, HEI-01-03 asserted:

“I think when you build, as a leadership, a culture of mistrust and fear, you’re going to have an environment that’s not conducive for Teaching and Learning, or working at all, low staff morale, people can’t deliver, people can’t take risks and opportunities because of that fear factor.”

Providing some form of evidence, HEI-01-02 cited an example whereby a staff member was vocal in a certain meeting, and then about two weeks later that staff member was suspended from the employment of the institution. Perhaps offering a somehow balancing view, HEI-01-05 claimed that although there is a perception of a fear factor, regarding what one can raise or talk about, such perception is more at lower levels of the university’s organisational hierarchy. Unfortunately, as [Arnesen](#)

and Foster (2016:43) assert, it is those employees that are at the coalface of organisational operations who are often aware of some risks (refer to Section 3.2.2.3). Thus, affording those employees a voice serves to further strengthen risk mitigation efforts across the institution.

Stretching the narrative, HEI-01-04 raised a red-flag regarding patriarchy within this university:

“We still feel it as women in particular that there is covert patriarchy in the institution. You know, quotas are not going to help us, if we’re going to set quotas and say by year what-what there must be four women in senior management and so on, and so on. One needs to go deeper.”

Elaborating, this participant went on to highlight the fact that this matter had been brought to the attention of the Council, whereby they also highlighted the essence of creating a conducive working environment.

5.3.1.4.4 Hierarchical Positioning of Enterprise Risk Management and/or Internal Auditing

Three participants commented on this sub-theme, viz. HEI-01-01, HEI-01-03, and HEI-01-06. Their views were aligned on the fact that both the CRO and the CAE report administratively to a DVC/VP as well as VC, respectively. Then functionally, they both report to the Chairperson of the Audit and Risk Committee. As such, the CRO, in relation to the context of this study does have an opportunity to shape the strategic dialogue, from an ERM perspective. This bodes well from a risk culture deepening point of view.

Relatedly, the capacitation of both functions seems to point towards a rather unstructured posture, which could be an indicator of a lower level of risk maturity. Specifically, the ERM function effectively inherited staff members from other parts of the university, e.g. the Occupational Health and Safety Specialist was located elsewhere in the university structure, before being relocated to the ERM function.

5.3.1.4.5 Integrated Posture

Organisational interconnectedness, in the context of its various spheres/functions as well as the interconnectedness of the environment in which it operates, is another constituent element of risk culture that emerged during the literature review (refer to Section 3.2.2.5). Adding to the latter aspect, in Section 3.2 it is debated that transitions within the external environment can have a positive or negative impact on organisations. As such, views expressed by participants should be interpreted against this short background. For instance, HEI-01-01, in seeming response to resourcing of the strategy as raised by HEI-01-06 in Section 5.2.1.2.3, asserted thus:

“So, we have identified an improvement opportunity in the planning part, which is that its timing and sequencing of the financial plan must support the strategic plan. We need to do a better job of costing the strategic plan, even though it’s just projected budget. Once the plan is in draft form, the risk office then looks at that and identifies the strategic risks associated with each of the intended objectives that are linked to those seven areas. That’s how we ensure integration.”

Perhaps, the involvement of the ERM team in the strategic planning phase is commendable in that the CRO has access to the ‘right table’, viz. platforms where senior executives convene. Thus, enabling the CRO to serve as a sounding Board and contribute towards shaping strategic conversations at HEI-01. This aligns with best practice (refer to Section 3.5). In fact, HEI-01-04 articulated this point quite forthrightly:

“First of all, let me mention that Enterprise Risk Management features in our strategic management [conversations] to the extent that you find that our Chief Risk Officer is sitting at almost all these strategic committees of the institution. So that, right from the beginning, that office is in a position to say ‘Have you thought about this, or there is a risk about what you’re proposing’, etc.”

Seemingly concurring, Participant HEI-01-03 asserted:

“You find that whenever serious decisions have to be taken, whether it’s infrastructure purchases, or graduations during the COVID-19 period, a lot of that still required risk advisory thumbs up before they move ahead.”

The assertion by HEI-01-01 implies that the CRO reports to a senior executive who is directly involved with strategy, which is a best practice (refer to Section 3.2.2.6). What seems to be amiss though is a strategic risk workshop, facilitated by the CRO – a market practice that also points towards risk maturity within an organisation (refer to Section 3.2.2.6).

Stretching the narrative, HEI-01-02 highlighted a three-pronged tension: First, one that arises from silos between academics and non-academics, asserting that these two parties tend to bicker on a continual basis. Second, that there is a similar tension between students and academics. Third, tension between the Technology Transfer Office and Innovation and the academic researchers. That is, whilst the Technology Transfer Office and Innovation insists on research that has a societal impact and practical relevance, there seems to be difficulty in meeting this target for those researchers who are focused on social sciences. Yet the Technology Transfer and Innovation team does not seem to have an appreciation of that constraint. HEI-01-05 opted to highlight the silo-inspired tensions that tend to exist between Registrar’s domain, particularly the Examination Department, and the institutions’ Teaching and Learning divisions. A similar tension continues to exist between the Student Registration teams and the faculties.

5.3.1.4.6 Stakeholder-Centricity

HEI-01-05 raised a concern that there is a general poor coordination of stakeholder interdependencies within the university. Pointing to the essence of leadership, which he parallels with a Jockey:

“And today we have very good relations with Human Resources. So, it’s all about the Jockey, in my view. I am not saying, because we have challenges with the Registrar’s Division, that they do not have the correct Jockey. I’m just saying there are things that need to be fixed. So, the Jockeys – the senior managers in those Divisions – will need to sit down and fix whatever challenges are there. But, yes, there are challenges between support divisions and academic faculties.”

Perhaps the significance of this concern could be better assessed through the ethical prism, as debated in Section 2.4.8, where it is highlighted, that higher education is a human rights priority, which means any failure by this sector constitutes a breach of human rights. A contradictory debate (refer to Section 3.5) associates stakeholder-centricity with institutional culture and defines it as how that organisation interacts with the outside world as well as how its inner workings, which include staff, play out. As such, the view expressed above by HEI-01-05 seems to confirm the unhealthy climate in the form of a fear-factor, as highlighted by other participants.

5.3.1.4.7 Tone-at-the-Top

The embrace of institutional values, with particular emphasis on integrity perhaps, is what HEI-01-06 lamented as at times lacking within some members of the leadership team. Asserting that some were not setting an appropriate tone-at-the-top, or being exemplary:

“The same person, while students and the Students Representative Council were fighting the Vice Chancellor, appeared aligned with the students. Coincidentally, it subsequently came out in one of the investigations how she was entertaining students. An impression that emerged is that all the mess that has been taking place within the institution may have been instigated by people like her. People like her, who are in management but are not in full support of management – they would rather support students. So, there is bad observed behaviour within HEI-01.”

The scenario painted above seems to illuminate risk culture as defined by various authors as debated in Section 3.3.1, including a view that it is difficult to implement, believing that risk culture is not just about the knowledge of what is risky, but rather it is also about the ability to act in mitigation thereof. One could argue that the concern expressed by HEI-01-06 might be more about contrarian views, and being truthful to ‘principle’ than going with the flow?

A second aspect of tone-at-the-top was also brought about by HEI-01-06. Focusing on business continuity, as broadly defined by some thought leadership practitioners (refer to 3.3.2.1):

“Instability within the high positions that we have; within the university structures that we have, including the Students Representative Council itself.”

It is quite commendable that this participant has looked at the high turnover in key positions at the higher echelons of the university as not only a business continuity challenge, but a tone-at-the-top dilemma too. It is a concern that could potentially tarnish the brand image of the institution as well.

Another aspect which emerged as a commendation came from HEI-01-3, who focused on the fact that, in addition to the ERM function’s functional reporting to the Audit and Risk Committee, they participate in Council-convened workshops as well. Relatedly, Council would request specific reports to be developed and submitted by the ERM function. As such, this participant believed there is a deeper understanding of the importance of ERM by the senior leadership of this university.

5.3.1.4.8 Value Proposition

In Section 2.2, [Valero and Van Reenen \(2019:60\)](#) take a view that HEIs differ in terms of, amongst others, the value proposition. It is precisely the same point that HEI-01-01 indirectly laments about their institution, in comparison to other

universities. That is, expressing a view that other HEIs have a more attractive value proposition than that of this university when looking at university rankings, financial sustainability, and brand image. Thus, influencing the decision of both students and staff when it comes to choosing a university and/or employer. Concurring, HEI-01-02 focused on the calibre of academics within their institution, specifically singling out those who hold a Doctoral degree. The concern being raised revolved around their laxity when it comes to the internationalisation agenda of the institution. Further, other related aspects which do not receive priority from these academics include participation in the sourcing of external funding, as well as engaging in international collaborations. Taking the criticism a step further, this participant focused on the recently embraced priority, that forms part of the institution's value proposition, viz. entrepreneurship. That is, whether academics themselves have the necessary capability in terms of knowledge on the subject.

Perhaps, compounding the severity of the challenge posed above is the stance of the NDP, viz. the target of 75% of academics being holders of a Doctoral qualification by 2030 (refer to Section 2.2). The NDP also asserts that there is a shortage of academics in South Africa. It might be worthwhile, perhaps, for this institution to heed the advice of [Lai and Vonotas \(2020\)](#) to the Russian HEIs, viz. to attract international researchers and academics into their employment (refer to Section 2.2.3).

5.3.1.4.9 Quality Assurance

Emerging in the context of continuous improvement, quality assurance measures were raised by two participants. For HEI-01-02 a key concern arose from the fact that teaching and learning was being compromised due to the university management yielding to pressure from students. Specifically, students were insisting on online learning whilst at the same time refusing to take assessments. On the other hand, the academics were running well behind, in terms of academic teaching for the year, especially when compared to other HEIs in the country. The concern was raised in the context of university management unduly yielding to student pressure, potentially compromising the quality of academic offerings and

graduates themselves. Inevitably, this impacts the institutional brand reputation as well. Concurring, HEI-01-06 pointed to what they referred to as a 'risk of poor academic standard'.

5.3.1.4.10 Risk Maturity

There are various other elements raised by the different participants, which pointed to the extent to which this institution has progressed, or not progressed, with regards to risk maturity. Specifically, HEI-01-02 commended the academic faculties for maintaining risk management as a standing item on the agenda of their regular meetings. The rationale being to continually ponder on how the decisions and actions being taken relate to any potential risks, supporting the COVID-19 pandemic's contribution towards accelerating the focus on risk matters. Further, HEI-01-03 reflected on the focal areas of the ERM function, with each of these having at least one staff member driving its agenda. These are the occupational health and safety, insurance matters, ethics and forensic investigations, ERM, and compliance management. This bodes well from a risk maturity perspective. HEI-01-05 commended the fact that over the past five years, since the appointment of a CRO, the risk profile of the institution is well managed, and that regular reporting is value-adding.

5.3.2 Case Study 2

5.3.2.1 Competitive External Environment

In this section, an overview of the 10 factors that emerged from the various participants, as influencing the competitive external environment.

5.3.2.1.1 Emerging Technologies

Digitalisation emerged from HEI-02-02, in the context of the 4-IR, citing it as an imperative the university identified in terms of its repositioning. In so doing, the rationale was also to align with broader efforts aimed at transforming the South

African economy. Perhaps, this participant was reflecting, as debated in Section 2.4.2, on the modernisation of the economy that drives 4-IR, which in turn renders current skills, including those of academics, obsolete.

5.3.2.1.2 Financial Sustainability

Three of the six participants mentioned financial sustainability as an influential factor. For instance, HEI-02-06 viewed it through the NSFAS prism, citing recent failures to release these funds timely so students can be catered for, viz.:

“But for the last two years they [NSFAS] were not in a financial position to give us the money before the end of April. So, what we, as the university, have done is to look at our cashflow and, with Council approval, allocate money upfront for that purpose. ...about R280 million. If you look at other universities, they simply were not able to do that. So, students have to wait until April for NSFAS to pay up, before they can get allowances. That’s why there’s so many protests.”

HEI-02-04 not only concurred with the lateness of NSFAS funding and the anxiety it placed on students in relation to their registration status but took the narrative a step further. That is, pointing to broader financial constraints that curtail the university’s ability to sustain competitive remuneration packages for, especially, academic staff.

Stretching that perspective further, HEI-02-02 brought in additional aspects of strong governance oversight and interdependence. First, that it takes a long time to invest in a professorial pipeline within HEIs. To have the numbers that will make the HEI a centre of excellence requires that remuneration be competitive in relation to market rates, that the university’s performance be quite high, and there be depth of experience therein. Second, that interdependencies within the university be informed by best practice governance processes.

HEI-02-02 also brings in the reality of a loftier purpose, which is the public common good which HEIs ought to deliver on – more so than their private HEI counterparts.

Closely linked to that, in his view, was the promotion of an inclusive, transformed, and diverse institutional culture. Perhaps, the views expressed above by the various participants need to be considered also in the context that the South African government is investing a larger proportion of the country's GDP, compared to other countries, particularly in the developed economies, as debated in Section 2.4.1.

5.3.2.1.3 Fraud and Corruption

The scourge of fraud and corruption emerged from only one participant, viz. HEI-02-06, who highlighted that as a result thereof there is a trust deficit between the broader population and government. The population believes that had fraud and corruption not taken root to the extent that it has, then there would potentially have been more funding available for higher education. Perhaps, the trust deficit being referred to is directly linked to the propensity of students to go on a protest in relation to NSFAS. That is, that unless there is added pressure, exerted proactively through protests, the NSFAS may not ultimately pay the allowances?

5.3.2.1.4 Institutional Autonomy

Taking an academic freedom perspective, HEI-02-03 felt that there is a distinct politicisation of relations within HEIs, leading to the recruitment process being choreographed. That is, decisions on who will assume key appointments are taken elsewhere outside the formal process. Broadening that perspective, HEI-02-02 pointed to a near thirty-year time-horizon over which university autonomy has been curtailed. Specifically illuminating both public funding as well as the prioritisation of transformation imperatives, HEI-02-02 alluded to the fact that these were particularly emphasized during the early years of South Africa's democracy. Concurring, HEI-02-05 emphasised fee regulation:

“I think fee regulation is a big concern for the university, and universities generally in South Africa. Because we don't know what government's plans are in this regard.”

Perhaps fee regulation is influenced by the paradoxical priorities of the national government, viz. where the drive for broader access to higher education is confronted by constrained pool of academics and poor quality of graduates. Hence, as alluded by some researchers (refer to Section 3.5), private HEIs become a viable option. Still given the entrepreneurial flair that is called for within HEIs, does this regulation not dampen it?

5.3.2.1.5 Integrated Posture/Interconnectedness

Encouraging the embrace of an integrated posture on the part of the HEIs, in response to the external environmental landscape, HEI-02-02 cited it as a wicked problem. That is, the type of challenge that arises from climate change, which he views as closely linked with environmental impact, human agricultural activity, population densities, and density of natural HR. He further claimed that this requires, in response, the integration of technology and knowledge.

5.3.2.1.6 Mergers and Acquisitions

Two of the participants, HEI-02-01 and HEI-02-02, raised the aspect of mergers of HEIs which arose in the early 2000s across the country. Elaborating, HEI-02-01 focused on their three campuses, which still face a challenge in terms of working as one institution. The demographic profile of students at these campuses seems skewed and not adequately reflective of the South African society – despite the more than two decades that have lapsed since the merger. She went on to highlight the restructuring or re-engineering exercise that occurred within the last five years or so, stating:

“And then, in 2017, we actually went through a route re-engineering exercise, where we took 15 faculties to becoming only eight. And we’re sort of aligned across campuses, which are quite far from each other. So, to get that alignment was quite difficult.”

Perhaps, whilst the merger referred to above relates to the external environmental dynamics as has been the case in some parts of the world the specific issues raised seem to relate more to institutional culture. As such, the researcher wonders if it would not have been worthwhile for this HEI to consider bringing in an organisational-dynamics expert to facilitate the reengineering exercise.

5.3.2.1.7 Stakeholders

Whilst not regarding the list as exhaustive, two participants, HEI-02-01 and HEI-02-06, raised a total of six stakeholders whom they regard as instrumental in the delivery of their university strategy. HEI-02-01 dared to state that such stakeholders are broadly the same for all HEIs. Those six are: 1) Communities, which universities serve through various means that include developing graduates that are relevant to those communities; 2) Parents of students enrolled at universities; 3) Students themselves, who constitute the core product, which universities deliver to the market; 4) NSFAS who funds students enrolled at HEIs; 5) Professional and regulatory bodies such as DHET who serve as shareholder of HEIs, and provide direction regarding the state subsidy, enrollment planning and other activities of HEIs. In addition, they cited the Health Professions Council of South Africa, which is responsible for accreditation of some programmes such as pharmacy, nursing, etc.; and 6) Donors and sponsors.

Elaborating a bit more on communities, HEI-02-06 highlighted the fact that the university engages in research that is impactful on the community. Further, that as microcosms of society, universities tend to inherit problems that arise within those communities. Concurring, HEI-02-02, asserted:

“To some extent, another factor would be something along the lines of social consciousness. In other words, the capacity of the institution to make a positive and sustainable impactful contribution to the communities around it. This, again, is a seismic shift in comparison to how institutions of higher learning positioned themselves traditionally fifty odd years ago within communities.”

Perhaps, the fact that communities, as a stakeholder, came out so prominently is a pointer to the fact that Community Engagement is one of the focal areas of a typical HEI. It serves to sensitise HEIs to a need for them to not only be the benefactors from communities they serve, but to prioritise their contribution to such communities. Specifically, this pertains to aspects such as the upliftment of socioeconomic economic within those host communities.

5.3.2.1.8 Technology

The prominence of technology emerged from two of the participants. HEI-02-05 highlighted both the digital transformation aimed at enhancing operational efficiencies, as well as the inherent cybersecurity risk accompanying it. HEI-02-06 viewed technology through the COVID-19 period, with specific focus on how it has positively impacted the value proposition of staff:

“One of the biggest opportunities that we have seen in our strategy is digitisation and, of course, COVID-19 brought that forward. So, the value proposition to staff has changed and we can have a better proposition for staff in terms of flexibility, working remotely.”

Perhaps, the government support for technology-related investments by HEIs, which could have a positive impact in the higher education sector within South Africa, should be prioritised by DHET. Specifically, this could reshape the re-skilling of, in particular, the academic fraternity, even though for emerging economies such technology uptake has been relatively lower (refer to Section 2.4.2).

5.3.2.1.9 University-Industry Partnerships

Continuing an opportunities line of thinking, HEI-02-06 focused on the Sector Education Training Authorities, whose purpose is to enhance student employability. Specifically, the focus was on relation to how they contribute towards both internship programmes and related funding for university students. She believed that this enhances the relevance of graduates to market needs.

5.3.2.1.10 Weak Economy

Lamenting the state of the economy, which has remained relatively weak for several years, HEI-02-06 pointed to impact in the form of a high unemployment rate. That, even though some of the graduates produced by HEIs are of a high quality, they tend to remain unemployed. Naturally, in the context of South Africa, the challenge is financial sustainability, as already highlighted in Section 5.2.5.1.2. Similarly, this is illustrated in Section 2.4.1.

5.3.2.2 Strategic Management Process

Describing the strategic management process, HEI-02-03 pointed to it as a “glue that holds the university together” and contributes towards its pulling to a specific direction. Building onto that narrative, HEI-02-01 cited the excellence posture as being an integral part of any strategy:

“So, you can go and get that whatever you want about the strategy for the university, but basically, we had a different approach, I think that we talked about our dream. And, we talked about internal success factors and external success factors. We don’t what is commonly referred to as a vision and a mission – we don’t have that. We said that what is our strategy; our strategy is really to become an integrated university.”

In this section, four aspects are included in the debate amongst the participants.

5.3.2.2.1 Phases of the Strategic Management Process

In a response that seemed to highlight a strong tendency towards silos, HEI-02-03 cast doubt on whether everyone understands strategy within the university:

“People don’t understand the constituent parts of the university, let alone the phases should be followed to cultivate a proper strategy.”

Seemingly intimating the planning phase of the strategic management process, HEI-02-03 then highlighted the relevance of the DHET Act, namely the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997. It guides HEIs on how they should engage with the law in providing their service. Concurring, HEI-02-06 also mentioned DHET and the fact that the strategy covers a five-to-ten-year time horizon. Then, continuing and pointing to broader consultations as pertinent, HEI-02-03 mentioned some of the key stakeholders to be part of the consultation process, viz. Council, the Senate, the Portfolio Committee on Higher Education, Science, and Innovation. For the student, in particular, the view thus was expressed:

“So, the strategy needs to be clear for the student. The student needs to understand what the university stands for. There are many students who think that because they pay fees that is enough for them to be free and do whatever they want.”

Perhaps the views expressed above point towards a need for HEIs to revisit their orientation programmes for students, as well as the induction for the SRC. It also talks to the essence of embracing market best practice, viz. the continual rollout of an induction programme for staff, as part of ongoing training and awareness.

5.3.2.2.2 Planning Phase

Taking a loftier perspective, HEI-02-02 defined the strategic planning phase through the prism of a risk. In this regard, he pointed to the imperative of aligning strategy with national goals, and cited the under-/over-supply of teachers trained at HEIs in the country, viz.:

“... and, it is often reported in the media that there being at any one time an over-supply or under-supply of teachers. If you aren’t generating enough graduates in particular fields to grow your economy or to meet your professional health regulatory and other needs as an environment, then there is a misalignment. This is a major risk. It’s a dynamic risk. It changes every year.”

Providing another example, HEI-02-04 cited the challenge which the university faces in relation to achievement of employment equity targets. One specific campus is cited as dominated by a particular racial group in terms of academic staff. That, although the accelerated transformation, which includes the empowerment of female professors-agenda, has been developed, it's the implementation remains a challenge. Building further on this point, HEI-02-01 cited the pertinent matter of an incoming VC, who could potentially call for a review of the strategy once appointed. In addition, she pointed to the imperative to undertake another review of the strategic decisions taken during the 2017 institutional review.

5.3.2.2.3 Implementation Phase

In this section, six aspects are debated within the context of the implementation of strategy.

- Enrolment Targets

Enrolment targets emerged from only one participant, viz. HEI-02-04, as another challenging area in relation to implementing the university strategy. Specifically focusing on first time entering students (FTENs), she raised this concern as one of the key risks that the university faces, given that enrolment targets are part and parcel of the Annual Performance Plan of the HEI. Perhaps, this risk speaks to a need for the student recruitment drive of the university to be further enhanced, especially given that this participant did not mention those 'scarce' student candidates in specialist fields such as engineering.

- Integrity of Assessments

Again, only one participant raised the critical matter regarding integrity of assessments, looking at it as a risk that could impede delivery of the university strategy. In this context, HEI-02-04 positioned the risk as an ethics angle:

"I think the ethics; it is very important. So, the ethical conduct of our staff, and I'm not just talking about issues like fraud and corruption. I'm talking about issues of plagiarism and everything that ethics comes down to. So, I think

you know that's clearly something that needs careful consideration of risk management."

Particularly worrisome about the concern raised above is the fact that it is academics themselves engaging in plagiarism. This could have a ripple effect on not only the integrity of research outputs from this institution, but quality of graduates delivered to the market. It could also flow over to the brand image of the institution; thus adversely impacting its ability to, amongst others, attract third stream funding and high-calibre researchers.

- Organisational Agility

Perspectives that talk to organisational agility, as a feature that contributes towards delivery of strategy, emerged from three participants. First, clearly comprehending agility as a source of competitive edge, HEI-02-02 reflected:

"Competitiveness, I think, has a lot to do with how agile and how ready institutions are to respond to those changing climatic and also market related environments. So, agility, responsiveness, I would put as the first two aspects of how institutions measure their competitive edge."

Illustrating the point above, this participant then went on to cite the capacity to integrate technology with education, as an example of competitive agility. Another example cited was the capacity of universities to offer a teaching and learning agenda, or a research agenda for that matter, that is responsive to emerging market trends, doing so in a manner that demonstrates social impact as part of HEIs' strategic positioning. Perhaps, the view expressed by this participant seeks to address the concern raised by some authors regarding the higher education sector. That is, that the sector tends to be inward looking and not adequately embracive of market trends.

The second participant, viz. HEI-02-03 illuminated the aspect of incorporating distance education as part of the value proposition of HEIs. That is, that this should be done not only by HEI-02, but all HEIs across the sector. This view was premised on both the lessons learned from the national lockdown that arose from the COVID-

19 pandemic, as well as the reality that demand for higher education seems higher than supply. Perhaps, it is strange that despite years whereby students aspiring for being enrolled at universities exceed the demand for such universities in terms of their enrolment targets, there remains lower uptake of distance education across the country. From an organisational agility perspective this points to strategy paralysis, or lack of the entrepreneurial, innovative drive within the sector.

Concurring, in the context of COVID-19 lessons learned, HEI-02-04 lamented the fact that it took their university about a whole year to fully embrace virtual platforms. That is, to navigate the hurdles arising from the university community's inexperience with the then new normal:

“So, it took us about a year to figure out how to use the virtual platform. How do we use meeting? How do we use our communication strategy to maintain connection with staff? How do we use our employee assistance programme so that we are there, visible, supporting our members of staff?”

Despite the dilemma that the university leadership faced, in relation to the virtual platform, it is noteworthy that the frustration was informed by the curtailed ability to practice the 'ethics of care'. That is, a term which was mentioned by HEI-02-04, who referred to it as part of lexicon within this university.

- Research Outputs and/or Impact

Three of the participants reflected on research outputs, which is an integral part of the Annual Performance Plan of any HEI. For instance, HEI-02-03 clearly pointed out that research and innovation is a fiercely competitive space. It is from that space where opportunities for ratings for research scientists, opportunities for publishing and citations, to name a few, emerges. Concurring, HEI-02-04 addressed the loss of productivity that arose from ill-health and/or bereavement, because of the COVID-19 pandemic. That, inevitably, research outputs were negatively impacted.

Taking the narrative, via a post-graduate student route, HEI-02-06 highlighted a revelation that emerged from a recent workshop held, where most students in the country are funded by parents/guardians who are beneficiaries of the South African

Social Security Agency (SASSA), and thus who depend on it as their main source of income. Thus, HEI-02-06 pondered as follows:

“Last week, at a planning workshop, we learned that 63% of all students in South Africa are studying SASSA grant holders, and we know that NSFAS only funds the first qualification. So, how will the 63% fund their Honours and/or Master’s degrees? and, we can already see a drop in the number of postgraduate students.”

Now, inevitably, a drop in postgraduate students across the country implies a drop in research outputs. Ultimately, the broader search for impactful innovative solutions will most likely be curtailed.

- Socioeconomic Transformation

Looking at socioeconomic transformation through the prism of balancing the staff demographics profile, HEI-02-04 lamented the challenges which their university faces. Highlighting the fact that each of their campuses is punctuated by skewed proportion of one or the other racial group, this participant went on to reflect thus:

“We do have a Vision, in terms of which we know what we have to do. But the implementation poses some challenges for us. And, obviously, especially in the area of scarce critical skills, it becomes more difficult for us. All 26 universities are fishing in the same small talent group for resources. ... And so employment equity at HEI-02 means different things on different campuses. So, employment equity there [one-campus] means we’re trying to attract white candidates so that we can have a proper mix.”

Concurring, HEI-02-02 reminded that it is in fact the NDP itself that talks to transformation as an imperative. That the transformation of society can best be achieved when undertaken concurrently within the education sector, doing so in pursuit of excellence.

- Talent Management Effectiveness

Reflecting on the university's competitiveness through the prism of salary packages, HEI-02-01 highlighted the constraint of the university's ability to attract and retain quality staff. Yet, the university also battles with correcting the demographic profile of staff, viz.:

“There’s something else, the whole issue of diversity and transformation is also a risk for us. We inherited campuses with this specific diversity profile and now need to manage and/or address that.”

Compounding this dilemma, she asserted, was the fact that they receive relatively lower levels of government subsidy, and their fees are as low as 50% when compared to some other HEIs in the country.

5.3.2.2.4 Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting

This phase of the strategic management process was mentioned by two of the six participants. For instance, HEI-02-02 called for a proactive approach in terms of measuring the KPIs, as well as the alignment with strategic goals. As a point of emphasis, this participant proposed that such measure should occur iteratively during the year – including progress in terms of implementing risk mitigating actions. Taking the narrative a step further, HEI-02-03 cited what could be regarded as integrity of information, by referring to the annual declaration of interest, which is another governance imperative that HEIs monitor:

“But I have seen how risk management can also be used nefariously by people who expect a person to fall foul to compliance measures. As an example, regarding the declaration of interest, I have seen a few documents that do not clearly articulate this compliance requirement, leading to the declaration being seemingly untruthful or appearing to conceal some relevant information.”

Perhaps the concern expressed above, by HEI-02-03 leans towards the instrumentalism posture that was mentioned in Section 2.3.2, whereby an argument was raised against the NPM.

5.3.2.3 Institutional Culture

Thoughts expressed by two of the participants, in relation to institutional culture, were found pertinent. For instance, HEI-02-03 linked it to both the strategy as well as performance of an organisation, viz.:

“You know, I just think that institutional culture is not something that happens outside of your strategy. Institutional culture must be informed by your strategy, because the institutional culture will determine the performance of the institution, for example.”

As such, this perspective talked directly to the topic of this research, viz. which seeks to determine the linkage between institutional culture and the strategic management process. Such linkage has emerged from the literature review as well. On the other hand, perhaps demonstrating the essence of branding, which includes the choice of words and names used in specific situations, HEI-02-04 highlighted the renaming of their HR Department, renamed to [a more caring name], as part of the university’s efforts towards higher-prioritising the value of institutional culture. Perhaps the mentioning of a climate survey which was administered within this university in 2019 serves as evidence of the prime value they place on institutional culture – including reshaping it. Noteworthy, is the fact that the remainder of this section on institutional culture is structured largely as emerged during the literature review (refer to Section 3.3). As such, the views expressed by participants have been mapped along four key themes as per the literature review.

5.3.2.3.1 Learning Organisation

The notion of a learning organisation, in the context of this university, was painted by two participants in a manner that points to apparent contradiction. For instance,

HEI-02-06 was more optimistic, citing a deliberate effort to heighten awareness levels regarding race and gender related issues. The university dedicated a whole week to each of those priority conversations:

“So, you have to create controlled environments where you can have these conversations. Where people can feel safe to express themselves, and I think we have. This is now the third or fourth year that we’re having this. So, we have made huge progress.”

Perhaps these dedicated weeks, focused on two separate priorities, equate to what was mentioned in Section 3.2.2.3 as a healthy dialogue. Painting a somehow different picture, still in the context of a learning organisation, HEI-02-02 alluded to the fact that all their campuses face issues of race and gender-stereotypes, emanating from the pre-merger period:

“And you will find that HEIs are not equally good at dealing with this challenge of transforming institutional culture. ...and HEI-02 is not an exception to this as a merged institution. ... That history is important to see; it’s also important to counter; it’s also important to work with to change and transform.”

Perhaps a key lesson to take from this context is that however difficult the situation might be, this HEI seems deliberate in trying to transform its culture, through embracing a learning organisation posture.

5.3.2.3.2 Organisational Performance

Organisational performance emerged through the views of two participants, who both looked at it through the prism of talent management. Specifically, HEI-02-06 opted for a paradoxical stance, by seeing a risk embedded within the opportunity that came about because of the COVID-19 pandemic. That is, the flexibility of working remotely is an opportunity to delight staff. Yet, this participant saw a pertinent risk in the sense that other sectors can now implement the work from home concept as well. Thus, depriving universities of what was their competitive edge,

given that classes are not a whole day affair, everyday, for each academic. As such, the view is that the university will struggle to attract and/or retain critical skills, something that could curtail the performance of the university.

In concurrence, HEI-02-04 cited a stable performance management process within their university. She alluded to the fact that all executives normally sign off their upcoming year's performance agreements before the December break – and the rest of the university community by the end of February. Preceding that are strategic planning sessions in October and November that serve as a basis for those individual performance agreements. She highlights their next phase, which is infusing digitisation into the performance management process:

“So, last year we developed a Cloud-based system, but this year we are piloting the full automation of our performance management system, and we will roll it out across the university next year [2023]. But this year is for us to do the pilot, the change management, the communication, and the training around it.”

Given the fact that Section 2.3 pointed to various challenges being experienced at different HEIs, in relation to implementing the performance management system, it means this HEI is a step ahead.

5.3.2.3.3 Open Dialogue

Perhaps depictive of the area of expertise that he operates within, HEI-02-03 proceeded from the university's governance documents:

“But the articulation of what exists in the law, the national plan, the statutes of universities means that the articulation must be very, very clear And it's something that needs to be communicated unequivocally on all levels so that people understand that the university is not functioning in a vacuum.”

Stretching the narrative, this participant went on to highlight communication as one of the areas of risk within this HEI. Thus, effectively implying that there is room for

improvement within this HEI, in so far as open dialogue is concerned. On the other hand, HEI-02-01 held a different view, viz. that open communication is an integral element of the university's culture. She went on to cite the robust nature of conversations at governance platforms such as Senate, as well as those platforms aimed at giving student voices more space.

5.3.2.3.4 Vision, Mission and Values

Emerging in the context of how institutional culture integrates with structure, HEI-02-03 illuminated the imperative to dismantle the dominance of one group by another. In this context, this participant was referring both to racial groupings as well as the academic versus support staff:

“People think that the culture of the institution is a dominance of a particular racial group or domination by academics over support staff. I mean, what I find amusing is that sometimes academics think of support staff as lowly – referring to them as Clerks that should not be taken seriously; that they are merely paper-pushers. They believe they are the ones who pay the salaries of support staff.”

The seeming continued silos that border on a sense of superiority by some, in relation to others, could imply a culture that is relatively poor in terms of maturity within this institution?

5.3.2.4 Risk Culture

In this section, 15 aspects were debated by the participants.

5.3.2.4.1 Academic Offerings or Re-curriculation

The need to revisit academic offerings, to further reposition the value proposition of this HEI whilst also strengthening the relevance of its graduates to the market, emerged from one participant. Two additions need to be brought into the current

offerings, according to HEI-02-01 who alluded to the importance of environmental studies:

“Well, there might be a few things. But the one thing I can think about is the whole issue about environmental management as something a lot of universities have not been focusing on. Maybe there were other priorities, but I think that is one. And then how we incorporate that in our curriculum so that we can have more socially responsible citizens. So, it’s the environmental issues.”

Perhaps, this participant had the UNSDGs in mind, (refer to Section 2.3.1) – and particularly from their university. In addition, this participant went on to cite the importance of the 4-IR as another consideration for re-curriculation at their university. Yet, this participant was also quick to highlight the fact that emerging technologies serve only as a tool for the graduates. This means that being conversant with emerging technologies – AI, crypto currency, etc. – is not enough on its own. There is more that is required in terms of knowledge on their part as graduates.

5.3.2.4.2 Accountability or Sense of Ownership/Leadership

Emerging from HEI-02-02, accountability and leadership were articulated in the context of both hierarchy as well as what one could refer to as a sense of initiative. On hierarchy, this participant focused on the highest decision-making body of a typical university, and poked thus:

“Does Council exist? Does the Council exercise adequate oversight in terms of management’s commitment to realising the strategic plan and goals of this institution? And, is management proactive?”

On the other hand, this participant built onto the latter part of the statement, viz. proactive, stretching it further to both leadership and teamwork. In this context, the participant reflected on the notion that leadership is not about being at the forefront – thus, it is not a hierarchical positioning issue. Further, that in the context of a typical

university the existence of committees and decision-making is achieved more through consensus rather than hierarchical position power. Perhaps, HEI-02-02 was also trying to highlight the imperative of teamwork, coordination of interdependencies, as well as stakeholder-centricity in delivering on the strategy of a typical HEI.

5.3.2.4.3 Continuous Improvement

Indirectly referring to the importance of brand reputation, HEI-02-03 brought up the relevance of prioritising what he referred to as corporate social responsibility. He highlighted the need to tap onto Community Engagement activities as part of strengthening the competitiveness of a university. The more impactful the contribution of a HEI to the community the better illuminated its brand image and publicity is likely to be. Perhaps taking an integrative approach, this participant also called for the need to link Community Engagement initiatives with the other two focal areas of a typical HEI. In this regard the participant alluded thus:

“And the combination of those two begets your corporate social responsibility strategy because you want to be able to afford society the best possible solutions to the challenges that beset society. The combination of those three also indicates opportunities for developing the communities... I think there's an opportunity for sharpening, you know, the strategic aspects.”

Could it be that by referring to corporate social investment interchangeably with Community Engagements, HEI-02-03 was trying to illustrate the imperative to run a HEI like a business? Or, the rationale was to demonstrate the blurring of dividing lines between various sectors in the market? Particularly, given that this participant is an academic.

5.3.2.4.4 Open Dialogue

In illustrating the importance of contrarian views, HEI-02-02 opted to link this to what could be referred to as part of the ‘DNA’ of a typical university. Specifically singling out intellectual depth:

“So, I would say that universities, by their very nature, should be places where differences are entertained. ... and it’s not simply intellectual depth about a discipline. It’s intellectual depth about the institution, about the community, about the state and about the world in which we live.”

Clearly being pragmatic, this participant went on to highlight the fact that not enough of that intellectual deliberation occurs across the country. Seemingly moderating the latter view, HEI-02-01 brought up the matter of the COVID-19 vaccination which had become a bone of contention within organisations inside and outside the higher education sector. Pointing to how robust the deliberations were, this participant’s illustration stretched beyond her university, viz.:

“The whole vaccination issue that was also an area where we had robust discussions. We had webinars, we had meetings, and we’re still not agreeing. And, yeah, we even had some protest about it. We were not the only university. Others, UFS going to court; Rhodes University going to court. So, there were different universities that went for a legal opinion. We are not there yet, as we didn’t adopt the mandatory vaccination policy.”

Perhaps, the picture painted by HEI-02-01 talks directly to a culture of open dissent that preserves the smooth operation of organisational activities in pursuit of strategic objectives as debated in Section 3.2.2.3.

5.3.2.4.5 Enterprise Risk Management Linkage with Performance

The linkage of ERM with organisational performance, inherently implying personal performance too, emerged from two of the participants. HEI-02-04 highlighted the fact that their university had embraced the practice of incorporating ERM as a KPI for all staff at deputy director level and upwards. Elaborating, in concurrence, HEI-02-02 also reflected on the essence for updating the risk profile on an annual basis, the assignment of ownership of such risks, and the relevance of having them as KPIs. The picture painted by these two participants points towards a deepening risk culture within their university. Particularly relevant, in the context of this research

study, is the fact that the linkage between ERM and institutional performance and is referred to in Section 3.4.2.11.

5.3.2.4.6 Forward-Looking or Future-Oriented

Important to note is the fact that none of the participants from this university referred to Inward-Looking, the opposite of this aspect. HEI-02-01 reflected, on the latter, in the context of both the post-merger period as well as the stance adopted by an incoming VC in 2015. This VC had just taken over, as the second VC since the merger of this university, finding the approach being largely the same as it had been at the point of merger. Alluding to what this university refers to as a 'Dream', Participant HEI-02-01 reflected thus:

“When we got a new VC [in April 2014] we were still doing exactly what we did in 2004. That’s when, in 2015, we embarked on a new strategy, with new values, and a new success model – and that ‘Dream’. ... I haven’t seen how other universities do their strategies. But we said we’ve got the strategy, then the identity. The identity is our ‘Dream’, our purpose and our brand – the brand promise we have.”

Conceding that the journey was not an easy one, this participant does point out the broad consultations they embarked upon to secure buy-in from various stakeholders. That these included not just staff and students, but a broad range of other stakeholders too. Perhaps, it is the fact that this university had adopted a 'dream' rather than merely a strategy, that none of their participants to this study mentioned the words 'Inward-Looking'. In that context, perhaps this university directly addressed a concern which various researchers have attributed to the higher education sector, viz. that it is an inward-looking sector.

5.3.2.4.7 Graduates’ Relevance to the Market

A significant majority of the participants, viz. five of the six, raised views that talk directly to this aspect of graduate relevance to the market. For instance, HEI-02-03 mentioned recently receiving a call from a leader in the mining sector, who was

inviting the university to field postgraduate students who would be placed on a learning programme. It is in that context that this participant then called for a meeting of minds, by various role players, to refine and agree on the relevant competencies expected of a graduate. These would include experiential learning too, as offered by industry.

Looking towards the basic education system as a pipeline feed of students that are to become graduates, HEI-02-06 lamented the fact that the number of those students is low. This reference was focused on the STEM subjects, a priority area for any country, that has a significant impact on the enrolment planning of HEIs. Seemingly calling for an integrated view, this participant pondered thus:

“Then our enrolments are dependent on the results of the National Schooling System learners, especially the number of learners with math, sciences, accounting. And those numbers are constantly low and even dropping in the National Schooling System. So, the big thing is our strategy is not in isolation.”

Elevating the graduate attributes conversation, in pursuit of their relevance, HEI-02-01 illuminated the well-roundedness of graduates. The participant highlighted competencies such as ethical conduct, responsible social citizenry, and the co-curriculum:

“We always talk about co-curriculum. I don’t know what term other universities use; others talk about the hidden curriculum. We talk about co-curriculum. That is, that well roundedness that we do in terms of our students.”

Clearly contributing to the well-roundedness posture, HEI-02-04 pointed to the vibrancy of campus life, and expatiating:

“They want a good student value proposition. For them, it’s interacting and more face-to-face, and sporting and cultural activities, as well as all those things that are important to students.”

HEI-02-02 opted for looking closely at the university itself, through a strategic risk prism, placing the quality of education and the capacity of the university under scrutiny. Opting to premise the argument against the NDP aspirations, this interview further reflected thus:

“There’s this aspiration that, by 2030, we should have so many million enrolled in HEIs. It’s an aspiration, but the primary risk exists in relation to the capacity of institutions to deliver quality graduates and quality outputs. ... If you are not generating knowledge in a way that can contribute to society so that people can create work or get work....then you are at risk of creating a graduate class that is irrelevant to the society it works in.”

Perhaps, the reflections by all participants are seeking to address a perspective expressed in Section 2.1 that graduate skills and competencies must align with market needs.

5.3.2.4.8 Inter-dependencies and Coordination

This aspect emerged from four of the six participants. First, HEI-02-01 leaned towards the merger aspect as a point of departure. The participant reflected on the fact that the pursuit of superior academic excellence could only be achieved if their university became a unitary institution. Thus, the leadership team had to bring consistency in terms of culture, salary structures, and other aspects that define the ‘way of doing things’. Taking the narrative further, HEI-02-02 focused on interdependencies that revolve around enrolment planning, pointing to Teaching and Learning, which inextricably is linked to student throughput rates.

Similarly, it interconnects with DHET, who determine the optimal capacity necessary to sustain quality within the university’s value chain. Premising his argument on the essence of understanding the respective components of a university, HEI-02-03 pointed to such understanding as a basis for cultivating a proper strategy. The participant further highlighted that to achieve sustained performance it was

imperative to prioritise the coordination between the three primary focal areas of a typical HEI:

“But seeking public applause, as it were, for performance in one area and not the others would be shortsighted, because teaching and learning begets research, and vice versa. And the combination of those two begets your corporate social responsibility strategy, because you want to be able to afford society the best possible solutions to the challenges that beset society.”

HEI-02-04 cited the annual exercise of salary negotiations as an example of an opportunity for coordination of interdependencies. This participant cited two of their departments, viz. those dealing with finance as well as human capital, as the key role players that lead such coordination. Elevating this conversation HEI-02-02 focused on the fact that as a microcosm of society, the university must take into consideration what plays out in society when developing its institutional culture. Bringing an additional dimension, this same HEI-02-02 highlighted the interdependency between HEIs and DHET in relation to enrolment targets, with specific emphasis on the fact that failure to honour these DHET-set targets bares risks for HEIs. The extract below bares relevance:

“You will see that where institutions have exceeded enrolment, ...[a particular HEI].. is one such startling example of this, the impact of that can be quite devastating for the institution’s quality, reputation and also for the institution’s relationship to stakeholders such as the DHET, its primary funder and also the quality assurance council.”

Perhaps the pressure which HEIs often find themselves under, emanating from DHET, is an indication of not just institutional autonomy, but poor strategic planning by DHET.

5.3.2.4.9 Policies and/or Procedures

Only one participant referred directly to policies and/or procedures, in the context of this study. (This is in exclusion of those instances where participants were pointing

the researcher to any other documents that could broaden the researcher's perspective regarding the participant's responses.) HEI-02-05 pointed out that from an ERM point of view there is a Risk Management Policy that is approved by Council, and an internal guideline towards risk management. Perhaps, whilst it is a good indicator that there is a policy, it is a bit concerning that the other document is known only as a guideline. It could be that the participant does not work with that guideline regularly, or it could be a matter of ERM training and awareness not being done enough within this university.

5.3.2.4.10 Positive Outlook on Risk-taking

The perspective in relation to the prevalence or otherwise of a positive outlook on risk-taking emerged from only one participant. HEI-02-06 asserted that the university is not adequately entrepreneurial, nor is its risk appetite high enough to support an entrepreneurial flair:

“Then personally, I think the risk appetite of the HEI-02 is not very high. So, I don't think, on the financial management side, we have a good risk appetite. We know that, of the entrepreneurial activities, only very few succeed. You must have a certain level of risk appetite to be that type of university. And, I think it's not the university's fault for our poor risk appetite.”

Seeking to provide more context perhaps, this participant also highlighted constraints in relation to public-private-partnerships, citing the lack of legislation that supports it. The researcher wonders then how the third-stream income initiatives are ignited within this university given the seemingly low entrepreneurial drive. Would it be able to deliver a sizeable pool of students who initiate start-up businesses? Would such an environment be not stifling to academics, especially those whose area of specialisation is ERM?

5.3.2.4.11 Quality Assurance

HEI-02-06 highlighted the university's aspiration to preserve the prestige attached to their academic qualifications. In this regard, this participant cited the need to maintain academic quality, including the quality of students. Understandably, this is an abstract statement, but one that would be underpinned by some quality assurance measures instituted by the university itself.

5.3.2.4.12 Regulatory Compliance

Depictive of perhaps the strategic tilt of HEI-02-03, he opted for closer-linking regulation with both strategy and culture. In this regard, asserting that the Higher Education Act, No 101 of 1997 serves as a point of departure for any university strategy; that a university must espouse an institutional culture that is consistent with the law. Further reflecting, HEI-02-03 pointed to the essence of remaining mindful of the regulatory prescripts whenever one must utilise university resources, and that the risk culture of the university must be reflective of how the university undertakes its activities. Further, and perhaps as an illustration, this participant mentioned the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013, which came into effect recently.

Reflections on the merger of 2004 continue to be regarded as having been imposed on the university community. HEI-02-01 describes it as being "... forced by the Department of Higher Education in 2004". This matter keeps cropping up in the conversations. Stretching the narrative, in concurrence about the impact of regulation, HEI-02-02 brought up the perspective of agility in relation to the Programme and Qualification Mix. Closely linked, this participant highlighted the imperative to align with both professional bodies and the regulatory ones, to preserve the integrity of academic offerings. On the other hand, HEI-02-06 cited DHET as the underlying cause for the university to not be as risk-taking, viz.:

"Our funding model, the funding system, our reporting, including the escalation process, makes it difficult to be financially risk-taking."

5.3.2.4.13 Stakeholder-Centricity

Emerging from one participant, stakeholder-centricity was raised from both a risk as well as an opportunity perspective. For instance, HEI-02-01 seemed to be self-contradictory, though doing so deliberately. That is, the risk element which arises because of NSFAS related inefficiencies, was mentioned:

“I do know that stability of our campuses is a high risk – I think for all universities. That is something we looked at; and that we really need to look at. As I am speaking, we’ve got trouble on two of our campuses. ... Then I think safety of staff and students is an underlying risk to that one.”

Compounding the risk raised above is the reality that concerns around NSFAS are more a DHET problem than the university’s one – most of the time. The seeming contradiction comes in the form of results of a survey which this participant was reflecting on:

“In terms of accolades, last year, according to the StuDocu World University Ranking, our university was rated [amongst the top 5] safest in South Africa. That was quite a nice one to get. It was a survey that was done on students; so, we do take it seriously. It focused on aspects such as gender-based violence, residences, maintenance plans.”

Perhaps, this opportunity bodes well for this university, especially given that it is an opinion sourced by an external body, and without having been commissioned by the university itself.

5.3.2.4.14 Tone-at-the-Top

There are three participants whose reflections were focused on tone-at-the-top. HEI-02-02 spoke at length on it. Whilst the notion of leadership is known to be broader than hierarchical position, it was quite refreshing listening to how HEI-02-02 illustrated the same principle to (tone at the) top:

“I think about Jonathan Jansen and his very cutting and deep analyses of risk in relation to education, and it’s not only higher education but secondary and primary education too. I think of Raymond Parsons and his commitment to the identification of risks not only within the institution and the business school where he is based, but also more widely in terms of our economy. So, the top in terms of thought leadership is not simply an ivory tower top. It’s also self-referential with its PhD students as kind of the apex students in an institution. It’s not inward-looking; it’s profoundly outward-looking, and it has enormous social impact.”

Stretching the narrative of ‘top’ HEI-02-02 further looked at it within the context of academics. The participant pointed to A-rated and B-rated researchers as being top, rather than the VC or even Council Chairperson within the university. Thus, the latter’s ‘top’ is merely a matter of organisational hierarchy than igniting a thriving intellectual community.

Taking the hierarchical version of ‘top’, HEI-02-04 cited a survey that was commissioned by the university and focused on the leadership team – specifically executives and senior management. Aimed at sensitising them about unconscious bias, the outcomes of that survey led to enrolment on a coaching programme – as part of creating a unified culture. HEI-02-03 looked at the matter from the perspective of individual performance broadly and staff induction. In this context, the participant highlighted the significance of a properly structured and comprehensive induction programme. Thus, serving as a way of demonstrating how those at the hierarchical top set the tone for an enabling work environment.

5.3.2.4.15 Risk Maturity

The perspectives expressed by at least two of the participants pointed towards a relatively lower risk maturity within this university. HEI-02-05 highlighted the fact that although the IAF is a standing invitee to the highest management structure, the Executive Management Committee (EMC), they do not get involved in the strategic planning sessions. Similarly, until the recent External Quality Assurance Review on the IAF itself, the IAF did not sit at Senate meetings. These views point towards a

lower level of risk maturity on the part of this HEI. HEI-02-01 highlighted two interrelated factors. First, that this university has a total of 180 risks that are being managed. Second, that the risk profile is not current, nor is it available in the public domain. Perhaps, again, this points to a relatively lower level of risk maturity within this university.

5.3.3 Case Study 3

5.3.3.1 Competitive External Environment

In this section, four aspects are highlighted by the participants.

5.3.3.1.1 Financial Sustainability

Financial sustainability emerged from all four participants serving at this HEI, who all incorporated the NSFAS perspective into it. They all pointed to the fact that most students within the university come from families of a poor background, with an estimated of at least 75% of their students falling into this category. Citing it as one of the critical risks, HEI-03-03 highlighted that about 75% of their students are on NSFAS. As such, any dysfunctionality at NSFAS constitutes a business continuity management related implication for this HEI. Compounding this is historic student debt. Concurring, HEI-03-02 pointed to the shrinking trend of the NSFAS resources when viewed through the prism of an increasing demand from the student population across the country. HEI-03-04 highlighted the view that the funding system renders the universities dependent on government:

“The reason I’m saying that is really the current state of our government funding pot; the impact of the NSFAS. So, the creation of NSFAS had essentially just taken from the same pot of money that is supposed to be distributed to universities. And, what that is doing is it’s really making universities very reliant on government subsidies and NSFAS.”

Posing a challenge to the sector, HEI-03-04 called on HEIs to rethink how they see their student base and the strategies in response to the view they adopt in response to that student base. The second angle, through which financial sustainability was raised, emerged from HEI-03-01, viz. that this institution does not have alternative sources of funding:

“And we haven’t established alternative sources of funding at the moment. Our funding office has just been established, but they are still grappling. Considering the economic situation at the current moment, there are so many challenges for them to really start pushing and getting funds into this HEI.”

This participant went on to highlight, as reality, the fact that the university itself is in a geographic environment where there is relatively lower economic activity. That is, that whilst in the past the province in which this university was supported by [a particular industry] which served as the main driver of its economy, this is no longer the case. Instead, the community looks at the establishment of this university as a key source of economic activity.

Given that funding has for a long time been a key challenge for the sector in both the developed as well as developing economies, perhaps the view expressed above points to inadequate strategic foresight. Specifically, should this HEI not have been more entrepreneurial through ensuring that the fundraising office is established early on as part of the initial university structure?

5.3.3.1.2 Institutional Autonomy

Two participants brought up institutional autonomy, taking two perspectives, viz. government regulation as well as infiltration of the student movement which then shows up through undue levels of strike action. Lamenting, HEI-03-02 felt that as being part of the higher education sector, they are being highly policed and organised in a manner that is counterproductive to the academic project. Agreeing, HEI-03-03 cited, what he referred to as the uncertain political future of the country, which has an adverse impact on the operations of a university such as HEI-03. That such uncertainty compounds the instability within this university.

Extending the narrative, on institutional autonomy, HEI-03-03 further referred to national strikes. In this regard, the view expressed was that these are a spillover from organised labour and/or organised student bodies from other HEIs. Citing the example of the July 2021 national looting that occurred in parts of the country, although more prominent in certain areas, this participant indicated that it spilled over to their region.

5.3.3.1.3 Talent Mobility, Attraction, and Retention

Mindful of the significance of a talent management strategy in the context of an organisation, especially a HEI, two participants reflected on it. Looking at this factor from an attraction of scarce skills perspective, HEI-03-03 felt that the geographic location of their HEI impeded the optimal attraction of critical skills. Compounding that dilemma is the fact that they are in a town/city that is largely inefficient in relation to service delivery. In agreement, HEI-03-02 stretched the narrative and highlighted a higher mobility whereby, unlike in the past, academics are no longer as loyal to an institution. Instead, they gravitate towards any institutions which they believe would contribute towards enhancing their own professional credibility and personal brand – particularly senior academics.

5.3.3.1.4 Technology

Inevitably, given the nature of the sector, and its interconnection with the broader external environment, technology was bound to emerge. For instance, alluding to what is commonly referred to as an organisation that is born-digital, HEI-03-01, reflected thus:

“There are also opportunities which come with being new in the sense of saying, for example, we came in almost at the IT age. Meaning that we can actually take advantage of this, make ourselves digitally savvy and do everything, or differentiate ourselves, by actually using IT to our advantage. And, I think our institution is trying to do that, even though one would say there is still a lot of work to be done in that area. So, that is the opportunity.”

Concurring, HEI-03-04 stated that the future of higher education is set to be different, considering online teaching and learning and the broader digitisation that is gripping it.

5.3.3.2 Strategic Management Process

In this Section, four aspects were brought into conversation by the participants. Each are discussed below.

5.3.3.2.1 Phases of the Strategic Management Process

Articulating the actual phases of the strategic management process, HEI-03-04 referred to all three phases. For the planning phase, the participant pointed to the setting up of goals that constitute the over-arching strategic plan, as well as the pertinent risks that take into consideration the university's (risk) tolerance. Thus, leading to the university's five-year plan. For the operationalisation of the plan, the participant painted a good picture. Specifically, such picture includes both the cascading of the strategic plan to the various focal areas of the university, such as departments, and integrating these into the performance agreements of individual staff members. Thereafter, the participant highlighted the reporting and monitoring phase, in relation to the achievement or non-achievement of goals. This includes their assessment of progress in relation to risk mitigating actions, which indicates a good understanding of the strategic management process.

5.3.3.2.2 Planning

Thought leadership practitioners commonly point to this phase of strategy as a phase of dreamers, where lofty ideas, most of which are hard to implement, often emerge. Pointing towards an embrace of best practice, HEI-03-02 highlighted the fact that their five-year strategy was informed by an external environmental scanning that was undertaken by two retired-academics who are former DVCs/VPs (at HEIs other than HEI-03). She further stated that both the senior executive team,

together with middle management, heads of schools as well as other directors convened at the retreat that was focused on reviewing the past five years whilst formulating the next five-year horizon. Concurring, HEI-03-03 reflected thus:

“No, I’m reasonably confident because, as I have said, we have at least two strategic planning meetings per annum. At that strategic planning meeting we don’t just invite the executives but there are also people up to the fifth tier below the executive, that are invited. So, at least there is broader socialisation of this strategic plan which the executive have fully bought into.”

Acknowledging the challenge of involving as broad a portfolio of hierarchical levels as they are doing, HEI-03-03 further highlighted the fact that the lower-level staff tend to be too operational in their perspective. Taking the narrative a step further, HEI-03-01 mentioned physical infrastructure as one of the challenges they grapple with during strategic planning, given its impact on the student experience, also echoed by HEI-03-02.

5.3.3.2.3 Implementation

The participants’ perspectives on this phase of the strategic management process covered seven aspects.

- Academic Offerings

Clearly deliberate, in terms of positioning the academic offerings as a source of strategic competitive edge, the participants expressed views that were aligned and/or supplemented one another. These took geographic positioning of the university as well as its local realities into consideration. For instance, HEI-03-02 cited the fact that the university is named after a [prominent hero] as well as the climatic conditions that surround it. This served as a basis for prioritising heritage studies, African languages, creative writing, and anthropology and others. Thus, focusing on niche areas rather than taking the well-established HEIs head-on with a broader value-proposition of academic offerings. Further, that in natural sciences, their position is as follows:

“So, in the natural sciences, we cannot but take advantage of the arid zone that we’re in. A lot of the work is around climate change, arid zones, water-restricted environment. We were the first university on the African continent to offer a bachelor’s degree in [this specialist field of study]. We’re deliberate and very specific.”

Building onto the perspective above, HEI-03-04 described their value proposition in terms of academic offerings as “modest in range but ambitious in depth”. That is, that their strategic decision was to focus more on depth of knowledge, as a strategic opportunity in relation to their academic offerings. HEI-03-03 alluded to the fact that during a recent engagement, the Parliamentary Oversight Committee sang praises of them as an institution. This was in relation to, amongst others, the university’s academic offerings:

“As far as opportunities are concerned, as a new university, I think HEI-03 has a unique opportunity to develop a different model of education, which it has started to do. The university is very digitally advanced. It’s trying to focus on niche areas, informed by not only the society around us but also the challenges which South Africa, and the world, is facing.

Beyond the strategic opportunities highlighted above, there are also hurdles or risks that could impede strategy implementation. Specifically, HEI-03-02 cited the poor turnaround time for the accreditation of programmes by the Council on Higher Education and DHET. Waiting for a long time before knowing whether such programmes’ approval presents a challenge for HEIs. They are under pressure to offer relevant programmes to their students.

- Organisational Agility

Emphasizing the strategic significance of taking local context into consideration, HEI-03-04 highlighted what seemed to be a first-mover advantage. This was in the sense of being the first university to be established within [their locality]; that instead of seeking to position themselves against historically advantaged universities they should focus on advancing the province itself. Extending the local context narrative,

HEI-03-01 highlighted the location of the university presenting an opportunity to prioritise research on areas pertaining to this HIE's area of strength.

Building on the narrative further, HEI-03-02 cited the relevance of this HEI's period since its existence as an established university. For instance, that as a HEI they are not constrained by the burden that comes with legacy issues, inward-looking posture, and a need to re-position their university. Concurring, HEI-03-03 stretched the narrative and highlighted the opportunity to be nimbler in relation to processes and systems. That is, they have less bureaucratic practices in their service delivery value chain.

- Business Continuity Management

Taking a business continuity management perspective, HEI-03-03, viewed strategy implementation through the prism of online teaching and learning and blended learning. The underpinning driver of those was the COVID-19 pandemic, which the participant regarded as an opportunity. On the other hand, participant HEI-03-01 seemed to see the pandemic as having been more of a challenge than an opportunity.

- Entrepreneurial Posture

Pointing perhaps more towards a dampened form of entrepreneurial posture, HEI-03-04 highlighted the generation of third-stream income as an area of challenge for their university.

- Governance Structures

This area was raised from two perspectives. HEI-03-01 highlighted the blurring of lines between, on the one hand, oversight and, on the other hand, operational structures, which poses an independence and objectivity risk for external members.

- Research Outputs and/or Impact

Perhaps indicative of the challenge pertaining to the attraction of scarce skills, HEI-03-01 raised the matter of constrained research outputs and/or impact. In this context, the participant believed that due to the relatively short period of the

university's existence its research capacity is far from being able to serve as a leverage for generating meaningful income for the university.

- Socioeconomic Transformation

The implementation of strategy within this university should factor in the reality of poor service delivery by the city in which it is in, specifically the turnaround time, which impacts the university's interdependency with the local government. HEI-03-03 went on to highlight the imperative for their university to make an impact on the marginalised communities who constitute the bulk of their local society.

5.3.3.2.4 Reporting, Evaluation and Monitoring

A solo perspective was expressed by HEI-03-02 regarding this phase of the strategic management process, asserting that the Annual Performance Plan is monitored at an institutional level as well as lower-down levels. That is, given that targets would have been set at institutional level and cascaded across the university's hierarchical levels, the monitoring would take a similar approach. Such monitoring is undertaken on a quarterly basis.

5.3.3.3 Institutional Culture

HEI-03-01 believes that institutional culture of this university has not been built yet. HEI-03-02 took the performance angle in reflecting on the subject, asserting that for a business it is about profit maximisation, whereas for a HEI it is about student success and academic success. Perhaps the views expressed above point to a possibility of deliberate conversations about institutional culture at this university. In this Section, five aspects were raised by the participants.

5.3.3.3.1 Learning Organisation

Breaking this aspect into detail of the deliberations, two aspects emerged.

- Corporatisation or Managerialism

Lamenting about the workload, HEI-03-02 raised a concern about managerialism and some of the policing that occurs within the higher education sector:

“...and, I am glad that I’m getting out of the system that is highly policed and managerial, and that really takes away the joy of being an academic. I can remember when I was still a fulltime academic that there was nothing that was minimum or maximum. You just did what you needed to do to achieve your aspirations, in terms of promotion, teaching and learning.”

Perhaps one of the key messages embedded in the perspective above is that accountability, in the context of performance management, has not been adequately socialised within the sector. Alternatively, the increased competition for a progressively declining pot of resources is not sufficiently clear to some within the higher education sector.

- Change Management

HEI-03-03 raised the matter of change management through a twin-lens. First, that the establishment of this university arose through morphing a relatively smaller institution that had its own way of operating. Specifically, that there has been a misalignment in terms of expectations from some staff in relation to opportunities. Unfortunately, these were not realised for those who did not meet the minimum requirements for positions that were available to be filled. Secondly, the participant went on to indicate that there was an institutional culture survey underway. Expectedly, the report thereof would point the university to some areas of development, which would then form part of the change management initiative.

5.3.3.3.2 Organisational Performance

Breaking this aspect into detail of the deliberations, two aspects emerged.

- Competitiveness

Indicative of a university that perhaps sought to establish itself based on competitiveness, rather than merely government endorsement, HEI-03-02 reflected:

“Immediately we had to understand the national and international environment and the kinds of decisions that we needed to make in order to assert ourselves onto the higher education landscape. What is it that we were going to do that would separate us, making us visible and making us more competitive in some way. So, right from the outset we had to be very clear about our position in the national landscape, and to make it very intentional and deliberate.”

Moderating the view above, yet in concurrence, HEI-03-01 indicated that the journey towards such competitiveness was still under way. Whilst this could potentially imply not being part of the bigger picture, it could also be indicative of a university that is a learning organisation.

- Key Performance Indicators

Perhaps linking to the earlier point made in relation to managerialism, HEI-03-02 pointed out that performance management may work for positions such as VCs and the DVCs/VPs. However, that it would not work for academics as, according to the Participant, it was counterintuitive to other processes. Providing a broader perspective, HEI-03-01 pointed out that the performance management system was still in the process of being introduced within this university. That perhaps explains the reason why his counterpart (HEI-03-02) had reservations about its impact.

5.3.3.3.3 Open Dialogue

Articulate in expressing a view on institutional culture, HEI-03-04 asserted thus:

“So, a pillar of institutional culture would be the quality and frequency of communication between various divisions within the university. So, I would say communication and engagement between staff members is one very critical thing.”

5.3.3.3.4 Brand Reputation

Two of the participants referred to institutional brand reputation. HEI-03-01 raised it as an opportunity to tap on in enhancing the differentiator-posture of the university. On other hand, HEI-03-02 highlighted it as a risk, lamenting that sometimes factors that negatively impact the university's brand reputation fall outside the control of the university.

5.3.3.3.5. Vision, Mission and Values

Lamenting the embrace of values by some role players within the university, HEI-03-01 referred to the undue inflation of costs relating to tenders, viz.:

“So, you find that a project which is supposed to cost, maybe R100 million ends up costing about R150 million. And, ethically, I can say there has not been a proper ethics management. And, one lacks the guidance as to what is permissible versus what a person thinks is good for themselves.”

Explaining further, this participant cited the fact that the university does have a Code of Conduct. However, the participant believed there are individuals who tend to act in a manner that is contrary to that Code – yet remain immune to being subjected to consequence management. Further, that there seems to be collusion focused on misappropriating university resources. Citing another example, HEI-03-01 indicated that even for the same job for candidates with the same experience and qualifications, the race of the candidates determines who gets a higher remuneration within this HEI.

Broadening the perspective, HEI-03-04 highlighted the essence of ensuring that the quality of academic programmes must be informed by the values of the university. Perhaps, this participant was making the statement mindful of the fact that where, for example, Excellence or Student-Centricity are values

of the university, these should serve as a basis for developing the value proposition of academic programmes.

Taking the narrative a step further, HEI-03-02 focused on the students in relation to the NSFAS allowances, viz. that they tend to spend that allowance more on personal needs. Concerned, this participant also pointed to a 2019 survey which illuminated the fact that only 1% of NSFAS students spend their allowance on academic related activities. The relevance of the concern regarding students is perhaps informed by the view that the ethics posture or embrace of values, is directly related to the quality of graduates which universities deliver to the market.

5.3.3.4 Risk Culture

Under risk culture, 11 aspects emerged from the interviews with participants.

5.3.3.4.1 Accountability

HEI-03-04 lamented the fact that risk owners within the university tend to have a negative perception towards ERM. Thus, weakening their sense of responsibility when it comes to the mitigation of pertinent risks, and the efforts aimed at deepening the risk culture.

5.3.3.4.2 Open Dialogue

Raising it in the context of personality cult, HEI-03-01 believed that there are remnants of racial stereotypes at play within their university, specifically in the sense of one racial group being deemed superior to others. Thus, the participant provided an example:

“When it comes to issues around minority stance and standing your ground, I can say I feel there are few individuals within Council that, to a greater extent, control everything. I have experience in meetings where you can hear voices coming through and you know that if a certain voice says something that is almost treated as a final position on a matter; it gets adopted.”

Moderating the Council situation, HEI-03-01 voiced an admiration for the extent to which the VC of the university relishes a debate. However, this participant nonetheless believes there is no deliberate effort aimed at deepening the element of contrarian views within the university.

5.3.3.4.3 Integration with Strategy

Highlighting the hurdles initially experienced regarding the integration of ERM activities with the strategic management process, HEI-03-02 pointed to the instability of the Head of ERM position. That is, that after the position itself was established within the IAF, there was a relatively high turnover, with some incumbents' tenure lasting for as short as three months. However, the participant indicated that the university seems to have weathered that storm, to a point that it now has the top ten strategic risks that have been mapped to the strategic goals of the university. Perhaps an area worth exploring by this university is the organisational positioning of the ERM function. Subordinating it to the CAE might be a pointer to a relatively lower risk culture within the institution itself.

5.3.3.4.4 Inter-Dependencies and Coordination

Reflections on interdependencies were undertaken in the context of internal activities within the university, and how the university interacts with role-players that form part of its value chain externally. For instance, HEI-03-03 lamented the turnaround time in relation to the local municipality, which was cited as dysfunctional. Specifically, this has a negative impact when it comes to obtaining the regulatory approvals necessary to commence with the university's physical infrastructure projects. Thus, leading to escalation of project costs and poor delivery of services such as water and electricity.

Taking the narrative to the internal perspective, HEI-03-04 highlighted poor coordination between the academic and support function staff members within the university. Diagnosing ineffective communication internally, this participant cited the

challenge as affecting aspects such as infrastructure development, achievement of enrolment targets, the development of the strategic plan, and the mapping of pertinent risks to the strategic plan:

“So, let me explain integration or alignment. It’s difficult to ensure proper alignment because you will have several separate strategies, or Divisions doing several separate things that need to be integrated. For example, on infrastructure planning, the infrastructure obviously informs how many students we can accommodate, which in turn informs enrolment planning. So, it is very critical that all aspects that are having an impact on a particular initiative of the strategy be considered and aligned.”

Somehow moderating the challenge internally, HEI-03-01 highlighted the role that the ERM team played during a strategy retreat session. That is, that once the strategic plan had been developed, the ERM team facilitated a session on what the pertinent risks were to delivery of that strategic plan. Bringing an added dimension to the external interdependencies, HEI-03-02 reflected on the potential risk that could arise from delays by DHET and CHE – and the impact on enrolment targets. Adopting a solution-focused mode:

“So, I think in terms of interdependency, in the academic sphere, I have what I call an integrated approach to academic support. So, in career development, we have the Library, the Centre for Teaching and Learning, and the Research Office working synergistically. And then for student support, we have those three as well as Student Affairs working together. So, I think it’s seamless on one level, but it can improve. So, we try to work interdependently for the most part.”

Strengthening the view on exploring how to improve independencies, HEI-03-04 focused on the external dimension:

“I also think what one can do is to look at efficiencies and collaboration with other universities, where we share service providers, we share exchange information in an effort to collaborate and save financially.”

However, this approach would require sensitivity to the requirements of the Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013.

5.3.3.4.5 Policies and Procedures

Lamenting the governance posture of some officials within the university, HEI-03-01 highlighted a tendency by some to act in a manner that is not aligned with good governance principles. Specifically, this happens in those instances where the university does not have a formal policy or procedure guiding that process which the official would be engaged in. The participant believed that instead of tapping on their insight into best practice, and their prior professional working experience, such officials would rather take advantage of the university. Perhaps, this points towards the relative immaturity of this university's risk culture. That is, how could it be that some of the basic policies informing the governance texture of a university, are not yet in place?

5.3.3.4.6 Positive Outlook on Risk-taking

Perhaps indicative of a positive outlook on risk-taking, HEI-03-01 pointed out that this university is in a unique area. It was imperative to undertake a study aimed at exploring opportunities for organisations operating in such an environment. Thus, paving the way for this university to be of better value-add to its communities.

5.3.3.4.7 Hierarchical Positioning of Enterprise Risk Management and/or Internal Audit Function

Three of the four participants raised views in relation to the reporting structure of the ERM as well as the IAF. This includes, how such reporting impacts the way these functions operate. For instance, HEI-03-01 indicated that both these functions were established in 2017, with ERM reporting to the CAE. The participant felt that the IAF is not accorded the status it deserves in line with Global Internal Audit Standards. An example is that the CAE does not attend EMC meetings and is not part of the critical decisions taken by this meeting.

Compounding the challenge noted above, this participant also lamented the fact that despite internal auditors being fettered with authority to access any information from an organisation, this was not the case within this university. Citing an example, the participant asserted that they tend to be given access to only the specific resolution they might be looking for rather than the entire set of minutes. Perhaps, a point worth pondering on is whether the incumbent is a member of the IIA and subscribes to that professional body's view regarding the hierarchical positioning of the IAF? Further, whether the incumbent did pose questions around the concerns being raised by HEI-03-01? If so, and the incumbent accepted the position, then to what extent is the incumbent embracing of best practice within the IAF that (s)he leads?

HEI-03-02 painted a picture of a mutually beneficial partnership. That is, that whenever her area was to be audited, the participant would contribute towards enhancing the value-add of the audit. For instance, this could be done through broadening the scope of coverage, informed by the critical risks which the participants were privy to.

5.3.3.4.8 Regulatory Compliance

HEI-03-03 is the only one who raised the matter of the regulatory landscape, specifically a view that government regulation has an adverse impact on the university environment. Perhaps, this view is closer to the one expressed in Case Study 1, which was positioned more as an institutional autonomy challenge to the university.

5.3.3.4.9 Stakeholder-Centricity

Stakeholder-centricity arose from the perspective of students as well as the IAF. For instance, the student context was articulated by HEI-03-03 in the sense of a tension between how the community broadly operates, viz. being conservative, versus how the exploratory posture as preferred by the university. The fact that the university is in a predominantly [specific-industry] town was deemed to have an influence on how

the students prefer to behave and act. Seemingly concurring, HEI-03-02 raised the challenge of developing students to be in a self-directing mode, citing online teaching and learning as compounding the challenge. Further, that such an initiative becomes more difficult when teaching and learning activities are occurring online, as the academic is not able to identify the needs.

Taking the narrative further, HEI-03-02 viewed students through the protests that commonly occur at the university, which was said to have an impact on university operations, including the university calendar. Concurring, HEI-03-01 pointed out the fact that such protests usually revolve around student residences and physical infrastructure broadly. Effectively, the challenges being raised by these two participants, seem to talk to the graduate employability, with specific focus on their leadership skills and the calibre of those graduates.

The second aspect of stakeholder-centricity, viz. IAF, was raised by HEI-03-02, who cited the policing posture of the IAF rather than an assurance partner. That is, they were focused more on fault-finding than co-exploring solutions with management. However, this participant held a view that there is some improvement within the IAF itself in this regard. Encouraging the researcher to include the CAE in the pool of participants to be interviewed, HEI-03-02 asserted:

“I think when you speak to the Director of Internal Audit he might give you a sense of this shift. Maybe not at the strategic level like you’re talking about leadership. I don’t think that internal auditors think like that, but certainly I think there has been a shift towards seeing themselves as a partner rather than seeing themselves as an independent police.”

5.2.3.4.10 Tone-at-the-Top

One participant provided reflections that pertain to tone-at-the-top. Specifically, HEI-03-01 lamented what appeared to be a culture of impunity when it comes to high-ranking officials within this HEI. Citing examples, he pointed to the fact that some officials are doing business with the university, through renting property to

contractors of the university. Further, that despite repeated efforts to raise this concern there is no action taken by the leadership team of this university.

5.3.3.4.11 Risk Maturity

HEI-03-02 brought to light the improved synergy and stakeholder-centricity of the IAF, which now serves more as a support function rather than a policing one. That, in this regard, the IAF brings a value-add even in terms of preparing the university for other institutional audits – such as the statutory and the CHE audits, respectively. The fact that it is an in-sourced function was another pointer toward maturity. HEI-03-04, asserted that there is not enough emphasis on the positive aspect of risks. That is, institutional conversations talk more about risks than opportunities. This points towards relative immaturity, which may be understandable given factors such as the age of both the university and the ERM function, as well as the hierarchical positioning of the ERM function itself.

HEI-03-03 lamented the fact that awareness levels regarding the safety, health and environment related risks are low within the university's local communities. Naturally, this translates to the university staff and students having the same problem. As a result, interventions such as the Staff Wellness Programme, as well as elevating the importance of safety and security on-campus, have been introduced.

5.3.4 Case Study 4

5.3.4.1 Competitive External Environment

The participants who operate within this HEI looked at the competitive external environment from seven perspectives. An elaboration of the views is done further on in this section.

5.3.4.1.1 Emerging Technologies

Emerging technologies were raised in the context of the 4-IR by two participants. HEI-04-05 cited the fact that the VC of their university had infused the 4-IR element into this HEI's vision. In this regard, the university was responding to the emergence of 4-IR as an influential factor, which graduates need to be sensitive to in shaping their value proposition to the market. Concurring, HEI-04-02 cited the imperative to offer what she referred to as 'state-of-the-art knowledge' to students during an era where the 4-IR was becoming more prominent.

5.3.4.1.2 Financial Sustainability

HEI-04-01 premised the financial sustainability on the state of the economy, raising a concern about the fact that the higher education sector tends to depend on government subsidies and about 60% of their university students were on NSFAS. Concurring, HEI-04-03 indicated that more and more people are depending on a pot that is shrinking. This situation was compounded further by the COVID-19 pandemic which further drained the resources of the country. Extending the narrative, HEI-04-04 cited the fact that student debt continues to rise, despite the introduction of debt collecting measures introduced by the university, debating the cause:

"We were told that the DHET budget to NSFAS had not yet been finalised as yet. So, I would be very concerned if I was the Minister and I heard that. Because what I think is the deeper risk is the fact that there's a disconnect between these different role players within the higher education system."

Perhaps, the point being highlighted by HEI-04-04 talks also to the coordination of interdependencies, with specific focus on the external ones.

5.3.4.1.3 Institutional Autonomy

Taking a seemingly minority stance, in relation to a topical matter of institutional autonomy, HEI-04-02 challenged the management, particularly senior executives, of HEIs. Proceeding from a premise that seeks to focus internally as a starting point, this participant yearned thus:

“So, I think, my opinion, we need to completely go back to the drawing board and define what our identity is as a higher education institution in South Africa – including why we are in existence. We also need to redefine, for example, what it means to be a professor, or a dean, in this new world of work.”

Building onto the narrative, HEI-04-01 was more forthright and positioned the challenge as partly attributable to politics:

“I mean we are in a phase where politics have become messier than ever before. I mean, I have never liked politicians, but now I like them even less because one does not know who to trust. And what we see today is something totally different from what transpires tomorrow. So, there’s no certainty. I sometimes wonder whether politicians are still serving their constituencies or, just plain straight forward, themselves?”

5.3.4.1.4 Private Higher Education Institutions

Opting for the talent management perspective, HEI-04-02 highlighted the threat pertaining to the failure to attract and retain critical skills within public HEIs. Specifically, this participant highlighted the risk posed by the mushrooming private HEIs, which apparently pay more attractive salaries and offer a more conducive working environment for academics than public HEIs. Perhaps, the view expressed should be considered in conjunction with the possibility of government funding students who are pursuing their studies in private HEIs. If this view, as expressed in a World Bank study (refer to Section 3.5), were to materialise, it would constitute a business continuity risk to most HEIs within South Africa, given that most students they serve are on NSFAS.

5.3.4.1.5 University Rankings

Acknowledging that this university prioritises international university rankings, HEI-04-04 pointed out that such rankings contribute towards enhancing institutional brand image. That even though some universities may claim to be unconcerned with such rankings, but as soon as they receive a positive narrative regarding their ranking such universities would be quick to publish those stories. Similarly, parents take such rankings into consideration when deciding where to take their children for further education. The participant further pointed towards an informal form of university rankings that exists:

“It is a competitive environment where universities compete with one another. Now, what’s so fascinating about the South African higher education landscape is the categorisation of universities in different ways. So, you would get what people refer to as the historically more privileged universities, and then you would get the HDIs. And so, there is this type of informal ranking that generally happens – not the formal one where the ranking is achieved.”

This participant believes that such competitiveness contributes towards elevating the value proposition of universities. Further, she believes that the ambition of some HEIs may be unrealistic and thus lead to unintended negative consequences for those institutions. Perhaps concurring with the latter view, HEI-04-01 lamented what he referred to as only five universities in the country that are globally competitive. That is, that to have so few at that level implies that the higher education system is not functioning properly:

“And there’s nothing to be proud about. My concern is how do you actually - instead of building more universities - just make our current university system work better?”

5.3.4.1.6 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Participant HEI-04-01 is the only one that reflected on the UNSDGs, raising concern about the inadequate progress being made in relation to these. Citing some specifics:

“And this is obviously, for me, a big thing because we are almost close to the end of the cycle and not much has changed. So, you can just think about energy use, poverty, inequality, and respect for human dignity.”

Perhaps the view expressed above revolves around the criticism that the higher education sector continues to face, viz. that it is inward-looking and less agile.

5.3.4.1.7 Xenophobia

HEI-04-01 is the only one who raised the challenge of xenophobia as pertinent to the higher education sector. In this context, the participant called on the broader society to remember that this university is a cosmopolitan one, and that regardless of nationality everyone has contributed to its impact on society. Perhaps this also talks to not just the impact of internationalisation within the sector, but the extent to which institutional culture factors in inclusivity in the context of foreign nationals?

5.3.4.2 Strategic Management Process

In this section, three aspects were included in the debates with participants.

5.3.4.2.1 Planning Phase

Reflecting on some of the key initiatives that punctuate the strategic planning session at this university, HEI-04-01 proceeded on the external landscape, the role of Council, and the strategic plan. Specifically, he believes that an understanding of how the external environmental landscape and market trends look is important. Secondly, that this needs to be looked at in the context of the purpose and mission that a university has defined for itself. Thus, paving the way for the development of

a strategic plan. Thirdly, that contracting then occurs between the Council and the VC, which then cascades to the various departments across the university.

5.3.4.2.2 Implementation Phase

Five areas emerged as being of relevance regarding the implementation of university strategy, according to participants interviewed. Perhaps taking a sobering view, HEI-04-04 expressed a broad statement asserting:

“The implementation of the strategy is where the heart of failure is. Most of the failure happens when an organisation, like our university, goes through the feel-good situation of developing a strategy. And executives would feel good about such strategy. But when it comes to implementation that’s where challenges actually occur because the aspect that is sometimes overlooked in the planning and development of a strategy is the resource allocation. The strategy may be brilliant, but the budget limited.”

The perspective noted above aligns with Section 3.7 whereby there is consistency in terms of how thought leadership practitioners have raised as the key challenge with the strategic management process.

- Talent Management

Only one participant raised talent management, viz. HEI-04-02, specifically focusing on the challenge pertaining to the attraction and retention of scarce skills. She referred to it as ‘the war for talent’. This participant also went on to cite the other aspect of talent management, viz. how conducive the working environment is, given the prospect of suicidal tendencies within HEIs.

- Graduates’ Relevance to the Market

Taking a longer-term view to an issue that is topical within the higher education sector, HEI-04-01 reflected:

“And my job as I read out names at graduations, is to tell whether that graduate is a great graduate or not. And a great graduate isn’t somebody who can land their first or second job. I am actually concerned about how adaptable my graduates are, as human beings, in order to get to their third or fifth opportunity in their career journey.”

Perhaps this seemingly unique perspective points towards a deeper commitment which this participant has to the sector broadly, and the graduates.

- Integrity of Assessments

The integrity of assessments was raised by only one participant, viz. HEI-04-04, who asserted that the challenge of cheating on the part of students was discovered, and mechanisms put in place to mitigate against it. Coincidentally, this happens to be the same university that was referred to in CS1, was having been relied upon for a tool aimed at curbing online assessment cheating incidents, which this university had developed.

- Organisational Agility

Three of the participants reflected on matters pointing towards organisational strategic agility for this university. For instance, HEI-04-05 asserted that there is less red-tape or bureaucracy within their university, at least when comparing it with the public sector that the participant had operated in previously. Providing more context, or perhaps a disclaimer, this participant further reflected thus:

“I think strategic management has to be forward-looking, it has to be vision-oriented; it has to be in the context of the landscape that the university finds itself in. But it also must be realistic because that is how the university leadership can get the foot soldiers across the university aboard in terms of implementing the strategy and realizing strategic objectives.”

Building onto this narrative, and seeking to be even more specific, HEI-04-02 raised two aspects. First, the university needs to be more entrepreneurial in the sense of placing more emphasis on the raising of third-stream income. Secondly, that the

university needs to prioritise the improvement of its physical infrastructure in a manner that strengthens the university's readiness for the 4-IR. Concurring, HEI-04-01 stretched the narrative a step further by pointing out that universities can no longer rely on a ten-year strategic plan. That this has now shortened to even 18-month cycles, with universities having to think on their feet to remain competitive.

- Technology

Only one participant raised technology in the context of strategy implementation, viz. HEI-04-01, who viewed it through the research prism. That is, it has led to not just Open Access Journals, which are freely available to everyone on publication, but to research being undertaken through Facebook as well. The participant went onto reflect thus, in a broader sense:

“I have also seen the impact of technology on communities, on the development of people, on entrepreneurship, on logistical systems, with people being better connected in real-time, being able to improve business regardless of whether they are in rural or urban areas.”

Perhaps this participant was trying to sketch a picture that indicates that there are instances where it will be the university itself that must catch up with the community, in terms of digital transformation.

5.3.4.2.3 Reporting, Monitoring and Evaluation Phase

Most probably an academic, HEI-04-01 painted a picture of how the third phase of the strategic management process practically plays out, asserting thus:

“And then there is monitoring and evaluation that goes with in; all of these get signed-off. The discussions occur at a faculty level within the leadership team and cascading further down happens. Contracting, in terms of the performance management process, is done, following which regular tracking and monitoring is done. So, I think, a huge part of our university's success is its strong strategic framework.”

5.3.4.3 Institutional Culture

Perhaps intent on bringing more rigour to reflections on institutional culture, HEI-04-04 unpacked the concept in the context of a university asserting that there are different cultures within the broader culture. For instance, the academics culture, the support staff culture, the student culture. She went on to state that this phenomenon occurs in all HEIs, which sees not only a cross-pollination to some extent but also tension amongst the respective strata of the university community. Extending the reflections, this participant highlighted the distinctive element about a HEI's culture, viz.:

“One of the key skills within a university is to be able to criticise things, which makes for a pretty good sort of discussion. And I think that as much as academics might have their own areas of interest, they would also be open to learn new things. On the other hand, one aspect that poses a risk to that culture is when you have support staff who do not realize the importance of what they do to support the academics.”

Perhaps the views expressed by this participant point to the essence of any university being deliberate in exploring means through which silos could be collapsed and integration encouraged. To further the discussion five areas were highlighted by participants.

5.3.4.3.1 Learning Organisation

Implying that, despite being institutions of learning, the HEIs are not adequately embracive of a learning organisation posture, HEI-04-01 asserted thus:

“And when I look at the decisions, worldwide, we are making the same mistakes again, and again, and again. So, human behaviour doesn't change. But the manner in which we are open to inform ourselves and to study, and to read widely, is becoming a rare kind of occurrence.”

This is quite significant given the reality that HEIs are in fact a factory of new thinking, or intellectual pipeline, for society? That is, if the role players are not open to new ideas, then how could they be able to effectively impart that skill onto their students?

Emphasising the essence of gathering a team with the right skills in the right seats in the context of talent management, HEI-04-01 boasted that their faculty had a staff retention rate of 93%. Although this was the highest rate within the university, this participant went on to highlight the importance of talent management:

“Talent has become a challenge. You need to find people who are talented and who’ve got the hearts and the minds of a teacher, to join a university. And you need to mentor and develop them; you can’t just bring in somebody and just let them self-develop. For instance, in the past five years the art of teaching and learning has become a profession; it’s become an art – an apprenticeship where you have to be taught and shown how things work. The same applies to both research and community outreach.”

The picture painted above indicates that parts of this university’s community have recognised the talent war - and have taken a deliberate effort to positively engage in such war.

5.3.4.3.2 Organisational Performance

Deliberating on the matter of organisational performance, six aspects were highlighted.

- Distinctive Capabilities

Taking a distinctive capabilities perspective, HEI-04-04 pointed to a common thread amongst universities. This relates to their vision that tends to focus on being a world-class university, something that is done in response to the competitiveness within the sector. Yet, in reality, such aspirational Visions are often not underpinned by an articulation of what it is that actually distinguishes each university and thus positioning it to being a world-class university. Perhaps, this view points to

inadequacy of effort within HEIs in terms of thinking deeper and exploring wider, whilst strengthening their introspection, during strategic planning sessions. That is, undertaking such strategic planning in such a way as to illuminate that which will make each institution distinct based on its capabilities.

- Excellence Posture

Despite the aspirational posture contained in the Vision statements, HEI-04-03 raised concerns with regards to the performance management process at this university. She believes that, instead, it creates more burden and thus consuming more of the time that could otherwise be spent on a university's core service delivery initiatives. Comparing it with another university she previously worked at, this participant highlighted that the process there was more defensible, in that the performance criteria was predetermined and clearly defined, compared to this university.

- Competitive Advantage

Seemingly building onto the narrative about the ineffective performance management process within this university, HEI-04-01 took an aspirational perspective. Specifically, there was concern about the inadequacy of measures within this HEI, aimed at connecting with staff at an emotional level, thus paving the way for a longer-term commitment to the university itself. This is a big challenge being posed by this participant, when looked at from a view that academics have a direct responsibility to shape the minds of a country's future leadership. If their working environment is not sufficiently inspiring, how could they impart that sense to their students.

- Key Performance Indicators

Seeking to be more practical, perhaps, HEI-04-01 emphasised the importance of ensuring that KPIs are measurable. Being more realistic to constraints:

“And if you can't measure them, what are the other sources of information that you would use in order to see whether the whole puzzle eventually comes together. ... Unless you've got these dashboards and you can see how you're progressing every six months, you're fluttering around. That's my very straight forward view.”

It is interesting that this participant, despite being an academic, was so enthusiastic about KPIs, given the tendency by some to 'dismiss' these as a corporatisation burden.

- Research Output and/or Impact

Perhaps elevating the game, with regards to research outputs and impact, Participant HEI-04-01 pointed to the imperative of infusing multi-disciplinarity, inter-disciplinarity, and trans-disciplinarity into the university's research initiatives. He believed that this is a complex effort, yet worth exploring and implementing, as part of the evolution of the university's research journey. Reflecting with evident pride:

"We have specifically driven the faculty's focus towards the SDGs and this year, for example, we have contributed [over this number] research outputs as a faculty of which 96% are internationally recognised. And, when you actually analyse the titles and see what people wrote about you will realise that we have maintained academic freedom yet strongly focused on the SGDs."

- Student Retention or Dropout Rate

Lamenting the student throughput rate as a risk faced by HEIs, HEI-04-04 brought an added dimension to it. That is, the underlying cause is their tendency to prioritise social media and how they project themselves on this front rather than focus mainly on their studies. In that case, being a self-inflicted pain in a sense. However, with other students it is the destitute conditions they come from, due to poor socioeconomic conditions, that they battle to pull through academically once they get enrolled. Compounding this is the fact that there are those who are the first-generation to enter higher education within their families. Thus, they have no predecessors to look up to as role models.

Concurring, HEI-04-01 highlighted the reality that the bulge in the middle, viz. those students who are 'stuck' within the system are in fact blocking space for others to be registered or come in. This participant went on to articulate how the challenge should be dealt with, viz.:

“So, there needs to be a huge support system and it costs a lot of money to support the students. But eventually it’s worthwhile, if trade-offs are considered carefully, e.g. in relation to tutor support, senior student mento systems, extended programmes, support services, and health system, etc.”

5.3.4.3.3 Open-Dialogue

Three aspects were raised that fall within transparency and open dialogue.

- Bullying and Intimidation

Toxicity of the working environment, raised as a risk, emerged from two participants. For instance, HEI-04-02 felt that there is a lot of bullying and intimidation within HEIs, even though in some instances this occurs subtly. Yet, no organisation can operate optimally if it has a toxic culture. Concurring, HEI-04-01 linked toxicity to integrity. Specifically, that despite publication on integrity being on the rise, some leaders still do not embrace the unpalatable truth. Hence, they end up fuelling toxicity within their HEIs.

- Corporatisation (or Marketisation/Managerialism)

HEI-04-04 brought up the matter of corporatisation of higher education from the perspective of both support staff within a university as well as academic staff. Specifically, she cautioned support staff to be mindful of the importance of understanding the core business of the university as well as expectations of academic staff. Thus, mitigating against adopting too theoretical an approach in rendering their support. On the other hand, in the context of the academics, this participant felt that the bringing up of concepts like ERM, strategic management process, and KPIs tends to be viewed as managerialism. Whilst perhaps a reality, the picture painted by this participant is quite concerning as it points towards some within the academic fraternity being governance naïve, (refer to Section 2.3.2). If so, then how could they meaningfully interact with industry, funders, and other key stakeholders of a typical university?

- Co-ordination of Interdependencies

HEI-04-04 urged support staff within a HEI to have a deeper understanding of their importance to the academic project. She believes that as much as academics are experts in their respective domains, they could be open to new learnings. As such, if interactions between these two parties are undertaken with a mutually beneficial purpose, then the interdependency becomes more fruitful. This perspective might be a pointer to the essence of internal service level agreements between, in this context, the academics on the one hand as well as support staff on the other. Specifically, the priority could be on those support functions that are commonly viewed as problematic (refer to Section 3.4.2.5)

5.3.4.3.4 Brand Reputation

Seemingly mindful of the opportunity to market the university brand, yet concerned about how such opportunity is packaged, HEI-04-01 reflected:

“The second opportunity that I have seen, in terms of strategy, is our visual presence on the Internet, for lack of a better term. Let’s call it the metaverse, as that would be the kind of more relevant term now. And, if on your website you can’t find what you need in three clicks then you’re fooling around. And this is for us a big opportunity, but also a challenge because we battle to make sense of all the information contained thereon and distilling it.”

Perhaps this scenario talks to the inadequacy of stakeholder-centricity as well, on the part of this university’s marketing and communications team. Alternatively, it is about inadequacies around the coordination of interdependencies.

5.3.4.3.5 Vision, Mission and Values

Defining institutional culture, in the context of this university, HEI-04-05 placed emphasis on the values aspect. For instance, referring to a common set of practices, she pointed out that these are applied in relation to aspects such as oversight structures, student experience enhancement, staffing, to name a few. Though

asserting that the senior executive leadership team of the university drives the socialisation of such values, this participant highlighted the gap in terms of comparing what is on paper with actual practice on the ground. Illustrating, this participant further asserted:

“But I don’t think it’s a transversal effort because I suppose one has insight into the university’s fraud prevention process. For example, some of the investigations we’re privy to seem to revolve around the upliftment of the university values. At the core of most those investigations is a failure to embrace or subscribe to the university values.”

5.3.4.4 Risk Culture

Participants viewed risk culture from eight broad perspectives, each discussed below.

5.3.4.4.1 Accountability

Three participants raised accountability or sense of ownership, or leadership, in the context of the university. HEI-04-01 reflected on leadership not in the sense of a hierarchical position only but more in the posture which staff adopt in relation to their roles. Specifically emphasising the capability to learn or openness to new perspectives:

“And leadership is a very interesting thing. It comes from inside and works its way up; not the other way around. ... We have a lot of young leaders who are taking over the reigns, but nobody is born being a perfect leader; you can grow into it. But this depends on your susceptibility to the lessons of life.”

HEI-04-04 took the hierarchical positioning context of leadership and focused on the importance of creating an enabling environment. That is, she pointed towards their VC as having brought an appropriate change with this university, including a proper blending of ERM into the strategic management process of the university:

“So, it really takes leadership to group the institutional culture in this blended sort of moment, where academics feel valued; support staff feel like they have a purpose and there’s reason for doing their job. And students also feel like their voice is heard. It takes a special type of leader to be able to accomplish that. I can actually say that we have a VC.... who has brought about amazing change at HEI-04.”

Concurring, HEI-04-02 carried on with the hierarchical positioning focus and pointed out that the current era within higher education requires a different type of leadership. She cited aspects such as emotional intelligence, social intelligence, cross-cultural intelligence, and the ability to build team, as being some of the required core competencies.

Reflecting on technology-savvy, and understanding the business element of the university, she went on to raise a reminder that, when employees resign, it is often in a ‘people leave managers’ context. That is, regardless of what staff would say at the exit interviews the reality is that in most instances they would be leaving because of tension with their line managers. Hence, it is imperative to create an environment where burnout is prevented within the working environment.

5.3.4.4.2 Compliance or Regulation

On the impact of regulation within the working environment, HEI-04-02 referred to South Africa as having one of the most regulated environments. She believes that this impacts on the culture within organisations, HEIs included. Unfortunately, this view was, in a sense, neutral and did not clearly show regulation as perhaps bordering on institutional autonomy or stifling the global mobility of skills.

5.3.4.4.3 Continuous Improvement

Taking a seemingly paradoxical stance, HEI-04-01 underplayed the relevance of university rankings whilst on the other hand emphasising the importance of impactful work. This participant was concerned about the university community

being obsessed with improving their HEI's ranking, whereas the mere focus on service delivery priorities could naturally enhance such ranking. In concluding, the extract below is of relevance:

"I don't care a damn about the ranking system. My simple approach is that if you do your job as a teacher, as a researcher, as somebody who serves your community, the rest will happen in any case."

5.3.4.4.4 Data Analytics

Reflecting on one of the opportunities in relation to strategy implementation, HEI-04-01 lamented the lack of integration in terms of systems utilised within the university. That is, that the various systems do not talk to one another; thus, hindering the monitoring and evaluation process within the university. Given the seeming common nature of this challenge at various institutions across the higher education sector, one wonders about the extent to which it talks to ICT related technical skills shortage within universities. Alternatively, university leadership could be constrained by the costs already invested in their current platforms, to a point of constraining a courageous decision to abandon these and invest in a state-of-the-art ICT infrastructure.

5.3.4.4.5 Coordination of Inter-Dependencies

This aspect of risk culture emerged from at least two participants. Specifically, HEI-04-02 lamented the tendency to operate in silos, and called for prioritisation of research that is interdisciplinary, multi-disciplinary, and transdisciplinary in nature. Stretching the narrative, HEI-04-04 focused on the interdependencies in the context of South African Qualification Authority (SAQA), HEIs, and NSFAS. Specifically, this was relating to a common challenge whereby databases that do not talk to each other, lead to a misunderstanding that could disrupt HEIs' service delivery. Concluding, this participant asserted thus:

"And then we realized that it had to do with the SAQA information that NSFAS was tapping into. So, I think the disconnect is a huge risk in the system. And why these role players cannot in some way come together and work on some

process where each party is able to listen to the other and come up with processes that can support you know the universities."

5.3.4.4.6 Inward-Looking

Perhaps a matter that is more individual-specific rather than replicated across a broader pool of executives within this university, it was concerning to learn that HEI-04-05 had not adequately prioritised the tracking of developments/trends in the international landscape. Given that this participant serves as an invitee to some, if not all, the regular meetings of this university's highest management decision structure, one would have expected a different view. Nonetheless, the participant went on to raise the fact that she believed their university was lagging in the South African context:

"But certainly, from a South African context, I think there's a there's a lot that can be done to advance us and make us more relevant."

Interestingly though, this is considered as one of the forward-looking institutions within South Africa, with some of the participants having alluded as such.

5.3.4.4.7 Stakeholder-Centricity

This focal area in relation to risk culture emerged from HEI-04-03 who highlighted the imperative to prioritise transdisciplinary work. Her view was that this approach should be expanded to occur not just within their university but be undertaken across institutions. She emphasised this as a point of departure if HEIs are to derive optimal benefit from delivery of their core activities.

5.3.4.4.8 Risk Maturity

HEI-04-04 believes that reframing risks as opportunities was quite difficult to do, but that some universities could achieve this. She believes that their university was focused more on risks and that this led to what she referred to as 'saturation of

negativity'. Perhaps, this was a pointer to a relatively low level of maturity for this university. HEI-04-04 understood risk management as currently not adequately embedded into the strategic planning phase of the university, as would ideally be necessary. Thus, citing this as an area of improvement. HEI-04-05 lamented the fact that the ERM function reports to a level below a Tier-2 leader. The participant believes that this misaligned positioning was because of a poorly handled benchmarking process. That is, benchmarking was limited to the higher education sector, rather than expanded to include other industries and/or sectors as well. This participant pointed out that the risk maturity was relatively low, within this university. HEI-04-02 pointed to a gap in relation to training and awareness regarding ERM within the university. This participant believes that the ERM function is not adequately visible across the university; as such, most people do not even know what role it plays. She further asserted that even those who read documents emanating from the ERM function, do so with an inadequate level of comprehension.

5.3.5 Case Study 5

5.3.5.1 Competitive External Environment

In this section, eight aspects were mentioned by the participants and included in the discussion.

5.2.5.1.1 Emerging Technologies

The future-orientation of some universities was highlighted as an influential factor in the external environment, with HEI-05-04 asserting that South African HEIs are losing competitive ground. Specifically, this participant cited a much stronger focus on the jobs of the future, through academic programs focused on incorporating aspects such as the 4-IR, big data, and AI:

“Yet in South Africa, if you look at the majority of HEIs and their qualifications, very few HEIs offer any qualifications in any of those fields.”

This perhaps points to a risk faced by the majority of South African public HEIs, viz. that the competitiveness of graduates delivered to the market might be significantly curtailed in future. It could be also a pointer towards a dampened sense of organisational agility on the part of the country's universities.

5.3.5.1.2 Financial Sustainability

Informed by a view that the progressive decline in government subsidy drives the imperative to raise more third-stream income, perhaps, HEI-05-05 reflected at the challenge through the philanthropy angle. His view was that with the dawn of democracy in South Africa several organisations and governments that supported public HEIs in South Africa ceased with such support. The rationale being that the 'playing field has now been levelled', referring to historically disadvantaged universities no longer able to tap on some of the donors. Hence, measures aimed at attracting increased levels of third-stream income are less successful, curtailing HEIs' financial sustainability. It adversely affected the pool of scholarships available for overseas studying opportunities for South Africans.

Stretching the narrative, HEI-05-02 focused on the sustainability of NSFAS funding, particularly as informed by a public statement (viz. NSFAS Parliamentary Briefing) that had just been made, viz. that NSFAS had a R10 billion shortfall. In part, citing economic factors such as job losses for households, the expansion of the pool of households that qualify based on minimum threshold, which have placed strain on the country's fiscus.

In concurrence, yet broadening the conversation, HEI-05-04 lamented the lack of creativity in terms of the funding model for HEIs. For example, that even the notion of research subsidies has turned into a tool for money making by HEIs rather than encouraging impactful research. Could it be that this points to universities not learning enough from the international collaborations that they engage in? Specifically, in relation to exploring more entrepreneurial ways of funding their research?

5.3.5.1.3 Institutional Autonomy

Sounding an alarm bell, with specific reference to the broader fraud and corruption scourge that has gripped the country (refer Section 3.3.2.8), HEI-05-04 pondered the extent to which the HEIs might be affected by the state capture. Specifically, this participant was thinking about the Zondo Commission of Inquiry that was appointed in 2018 to investigate allegations of state capture, fraud and corruption within the public sector and other state organs. That is, that whilst the higher education sector itself did not feature in the final report of the Zondo Commission of Inquiry, there were nonetheless several public pronouncements questioning the integrity of university internal process (refer Section 3.4.2.8). Stretching the institutional autonomy narrative, this participant went on to assert that transformation has focused more on people rather than, with equal emphasis, structures, and policies/procedures. Further, that the bulk of what HEIs do is driven by DHET rather than from within the HEIs themselves; thus, curtailing their institutional autonomy.

On the other hand, HEI-05-02 reflected from the perspective of the students that feed into the HEIs, from basic education. She lamented the mediocrity, which is encouraged through lower pass marks, whilst on the other hand expecting HEIs to deliver graduates on the STEM fields. As such, through this poor synergy between these two education levels, the participant felt that institutional autonomy was being undermined.

5.3.5.1.4 Private Higher Education Institutions

Citing private HEIs as a definitive competitive factor within the external environment, HEI-05-03 raised the incomparability in terms of the quality of service as well as turnaround times. Further, that those HEIs have undertaken due diligence in terms of identifying the gaps in the value proposition of their public counterparts - and exploited it.

5.3.5.1.5 Socioeconomic Transformation

Taking a co-curricular perspective, HEI-05-06 lamented the lack of facilities to support sporting activities. Appearing to look at it beyond the higher education sector and focusing perhaps across the entire education value chain, this participant reflected:

“Okay, thousands of African children can run as fast, or faster than, Usain Bolt in terms of their natural talent. But none of them have running tracks. None of them have dieticians; none of them have running shoes; none of them have running shorts; none of them have running competitions to go to.”

Perhaps there is a relatively strong linkage between this scenario and the fact that there is so much student protesting that occurs across the sector in South Africa? Concurring, yet broadening the narrative, HEI-05-02 took the information-age perspective and lamented:

“And here we are, a country joined by roads and surface and yet certain areas do not have connectivity. Why? You know I think, for me, Africa needs to fight a fight aimed at connecting her people. There is no other way to give them access to information, and to news, if not through data – and, of course, devices.”

Conceding to a bigger challenge, HEI-05-02 went on to highlight a reality that funding, and availability of data and devices, are not all that is required. That is, the environment in which students operate at home is at times not conducive to learning. Thus, leading to challenges such as difficulty to score grades that will qualify some students to be admitted at university; where some have earned it, they then become victims of the high student dropout rate that rages on at universities. Further, this participant cited the fact that, compounding the dilemma of students from poor backgrounds is that they are the first-generation going the university. Concurring, HEI-05-04 pointed to the decision to introduce student funding, viz. NSFAS, as an illustration that where there is an implementation-will then a vision could be realised. Which means the socioeconomic challenges experienced could be improved too if there is a political will to do so.

5.3.5.1.6 Quality of Students

Clarifying or redefining the competitive landscape, HEI-05-02 asserted that competition is no longer just amongst universities themselves, but with students rather. That is, that some students opt not to pursue higher education at all, whilst others drop out before they even complete basic education – as pointed out, according to HEI-05-02, by Statistics SA. The view expressed above implies that HEIs must further define their value proposition to the market. In so doing, seek to articulate a unique distinctive competitive factor that distinguishes one university from the others. Seemingly disagreeing with the view of HEIs competing with students, HEI-05-05 cited the fact that, despite this, the higher education sector has inadequate space. That is, HEIs can accommodate 400 000 students per annum, yet there is an excess of 33 000 that qualify to enter universities.

HEI-05-02 went on to highlight the talent management dimension of competition, viz. that universities are competing for a limited pool of academic staff, specifically those with scarce skills. This same applies for the students whose calibre could make them quite strong from a researcher point of view, for the university that succeeds in attracting them.

5.3.5.1.7 Technology

Perhaps mindful of the impact which a deteriorating economy has on the finances of individuals, HEI-05-06 identified technology as an influential factor. Specifically, he looked at it as an enabler for a student based in South Africa yet able to enroll for a Harvard University programme, up to Master's level whilst remaining in South Africa. Elaborating, this participant went on to cite the value in terms of the brand reputation of the far-afield university, which the student would earn, whereas such qualification could at times be comparatively cheaper. In addition, even within the country, distance education is increasingly becoming a battle ground for many universities to compete in. Thus, potentially leading to a situation where even the University of South Africa, which used to be the only role player on this front, could now be challenged by other universities.

Concurring, HEI-05-02 pointed to technology being an influential factor in terms of determining how Teaching and Learning is undertaken. She further stated that, beyond teaching and learning, technology influences the future jobs landscape, and therefore could not be discounted by HEIs. Extending the narrative, HEI-05-04 highlighted the inadequate will to implement ICT related projects and/or the high failure rate of such projects within this HEI. Relatedly, this participant attributed this to vested interests by some in maintaining the status quo. Further, that there is not even a structured project management office within this HEI.

This participant stretched the narrative and cited the intransigence when it comes to letting go of venue-based student assessment. That is, there seems to be vested interests by some within this HEI in that despite technology being available the venue-based assessments continue. Perhaps the scenario painted by HEI-05-04 talks to the institutional culture risk, which includes competitive performance and the courage to embrace change.

5.2.5.1.8 Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity

Given the period within which this research was undertaken, viz. during the national lockdown because of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was inevitable that the notion of VUCA could be raised in that context too. For instance, HEI-05-04 poked thus:

“Now also, if you look at the pandemic and when it hit us. We started looking at research around vaccines and research around this matter. Where did the vaccines come from? Not from South Africa. And, again, you wonder why that was the case. What role did South Africa play in addressing the pandemic?”

With the pandemic having arisen unexpectedly, and calling for response measures that were to a significant degree of novelty, the view expressed by this participant does talk firmly to VUCA. It talks about the agility of HEIs when faced with complexity and ambiguity especially.

To, perhaps, frame the VUCA, HEI-05-05 asserted that there are essentially five risks that a typical HEI faces; these being financial risk, reputation risk, regulatory risk, cybersecurity risk, and environmental risk. Further, that the notion of the 'top ten risks' should be discarded. Whilst the notion of repacking risks and consolidating them is understandable, particularly when considering the reality that risks tend to be interconnected, perhaps five is taking the narrative a little too far. For instance, the talent management risk, the institutional culture risk, and the stakeholder-centricity risk, amongst others, could potentially lose impact if categorised under reputation risk? Besides, there is a school of thought that believes that brand reputation (risk) is the risk of risks, viz. the impact when other risks happen to materialise.

Raising a point like that raised in relation to technology above, HEI-05-02 highlighted the complexity that comes with the ease with which a Harvard University MBA degree could be done digitally. That is, that this now creates a situation where South African universities find themselves competing for the same pool of students with international universities. But in taking the narrative further, this participant also brought up the issues of strategic environmental scanning. In this context, she asserted that this should be facilitated by internal candidates, within the university, rather than outsourcing such facilitation to external consultants. That is, that there is potentially inadequate sense of ownership and/or an appetite to think outside the box within this HEI.

5.3.5.2 Strategic Management Process

Reflecting broadly, HEI-05-04 acknowledged the interdependency of the university strategy with the country's goals and objectives. In other words, that whilst there is a view on institutional autonomy this does not mean that universities are an island. The extract below is of relevance:

“So often when we look at HEIs and the strategy it's not an autonomous strategy. It's a strategy that needs to fit into the bigger system and address the national goals and the national objectives.”

A point to ponder on could be in relation to the extent that this acknowledgement would go towards moderating the concerns often raised about managerialism or corporatisation of universities. That is, accepting the view expressed above could potentially help the opponents of 'managerialism' to recognise the common ground between these two opposing extremes, viz. one being for the idea of managerialism whereas the other being against such an idea.

5.3.5.2.1 Phases of the Strategic Management Process

Reflecting on the phases of the strategic management process, HEI-05-04 encapsulated them in entirety, but then went on to raise reservations about the actual implementation in the context of this university. That is, that beyond the reality of strategy implementation being normally a challenge, there seems to be an added dilemma of confusion within this HEI when it comes to how to implement. Perhaps the challenges pertaining to the operationalisation of the strategy are an indication that there is a gap in terms of socialising the process itself. Alternatively, these point to the silos within this university, whereby the coordinators of strategy are fully alert to the need to bring everyone aboard what they do. It is quite interesting that this participant also brought up the activity of adjustments to the strategy to align with any changes in the external environment.

5.3.5.2.2 Planning Phase

Painting a broader, macro context, HEI-05-04 focused at a country level. That is, that the higher education sector is part of the broader macroeconomy, with DHET as the main driver of the sector. This participant went on to point out that strategic planning must be a long-term initiative that should not be subjected to frequent change. This view was based on an understanding that doing so could lead to undue disruption in the form of targets being changed frequently and thus complicating the tracking of performance or progress. That, in the context of their university the strategic planning process is problematic.

Citing further challenges regarding the strategic planning process, HEI-05-04 pointed to the fact that some of the senior executives meant to lead strategy have inadequate insights into that initiative. That is, they have constrained understanding to either strategic planning and development or the actual implementation phase. Concurring, HEI-05-02 seemed to be pointing to the root cause, viz. a tendency to appoint a strategic plan expert as an organisational strategist. That is, that such a person focuses institutional conversations on developing such a plan rather than relating it to the overall strategy of the university – and in relation to market trends. Raising another challenge, HEI-05-04 looked at the alignment between the overall strategic plan with the various other plans that cascade further down in support of it. On the other hand, HEI-05-05 focused on the mapping of risks to the strategy, asserting that these are an indication of what it is that prevents the achievement of objectives.

5.3.5.2.3 Implementation Phase

Painting a seemingly indecisive picture, in relation to how this university approaches matters pertaining to strategy, HEI-05-06 asserted their strategy has remained static. That is, that despite announcement of a revamp to the strategy, it not only remains unchanged, but accountability to its delivery is lacking within this HEI. The picture painted by this participant is concerning when viewed through the lens of a deteriorating economy, in a country whose resources are diminishing. That is, failure to hold the university community accountable for strategy implementation is equivalent to wasteful expenditure? It points to a weaker risk culture.

Apart from the general discussion of the implementation phase, eight specific points were highlighted by participants, each discussed below.

- Business Continuity Management

Clearly seeing a strategic misalignment, HEI-05-04 raised an alarm in relation to the continued investment by the university in print-production facilities. Specifically, with the increased intensity of advancements in technology, he believed it did not make sense for the university to prioritise the traditional way of work. Further, that it seems the focus is on safeguarding the current jobs instead of exploring ways in which the

current staff could be reskilled; thus, allowing this HEI to invest in advanced ICT systems/infrastructure. Perhaps, this scenario talks to the inadequacy of stakeholder-centricity, whereby the university is unable to find common ground with its labour force. Alternatively, it is about a university that fails to adequately engage in strategic forward-thinking, including a leadership that has the appetite to rally the university community around an inspirational vision.

- Core Business

Concerned about the lack of focus on the core mandate of a typical HEI, HEI-05-04 reflected in broad terms thus:

“Our political aspirations overtook our educational aspirations. And that has now meant that many of the opportunities are not being taken because of the political aspirations, rather than the academic aspirations.”

Progressing his narrative, this participant then went on to zero-in on the business school of this university. In this context, the participant believed that it is because of losing its focus that this was no longer one of the top business schools in the country. Specifically, that their business school has veered towards the broader public sector space, viz. leadership in government, leadership in parastatals, and political leadership. Taking a competitive posture, this participant further pointed out that leading business schools are focused on servicing the corporate clients.

Assuming this university’s business school has taken a strategic decision to focus on the public sector, then a point to ponder on could be how ready it is to do so. That is, to what extent has it analysed the market, identified it as a growth opportunity, and evaluated its own competitive capabilities in relation to servicing that target segment.

- Distinctive Capabilities

Seemingly addressing the view expressed in the section above, HEI-05-02 concurred that this university does not engage enough in conversations aimed at articulating its distinctive capabilities. That is, that their reflections do not adequately

focus on how this HEI could be more innovative and distinct from its counterparts in the market. Perhaps, a consideration to address this strategic dilemma could be for this university to encourage self-introspection. That is, to embark on a case-study-analysis competition focused on itself, by its students. Undertaken as part of the academic programme, and thus contributing towards credits for graduating, such an exercise could bring out the contrarian views necessary to extricate their business school onto the more competitive plane.

- Historically Disadvantaged Universities

Posing a challenge in relation to the alumni relations wing of historically black universities, HEI-05-05 lamented the fact that alumni seem to turn their back on those universities. That is, that their alumni tend to expect someone else to raise funds for their university, something that is in contrast with how alumni of traditionally white universities operate. Taking the narrative a step further, HEI-05-06 raised a red flag with regard to the extent to which these historically black universities cater for 'scarce skills'. Specifically, his focus was on engineering and a medical school.

- Organisational Agility

Painting a concerning picture, perhaps when particularly looked at from a VUCA context, some of the participants believed that this university is far from operating with agility. For instance, HEI-05-06 warned that the longer this university remained insensitive to changes in the external environment the higher the risk of being shunned by students. Given that this is a public HEI that has a significant portion of the country's student market share, the warning by this participant talks to the 'too-big-to-fail-trap'. That is, no organisation is too big to fail, particularly when looked at against the background of recent statements by DHET to downgrade some HEIs.

Citing specific examples of poor sense of agility, HEI-05-04 pointed towards the practice of working from home that arose because of the COVID-19 pandemic related decision. It appeared that the university had not learned much from the previous 22 months during which the country was in national lockdown. Despite a market trend whereby some organisations already had a 'work from anywhere'

policy, well before the COVID-19 era, this university was not awakened even by that pandemic. Stretching the narrative, this participant looked towards this university's academic qualifications and lamented the fact that these tend to focus on the past and the present rather than the anticipated market trends of the future:

“A big part of it is also our move towards real-world problems. So, if you look at the NDP, if you look at the [UN]SDGs, and the African Union Agenda 2063, these are real-world problems.”

Building further onto the academic qualifications of the future aspect, this same participant highlighted the lack of focus on multi-disciplinary qualifications. That is, that academic qualifications remain faculty specific and structured along functional lines. Further stifling to the implementation of strategy, according to HEI-05-04, is the failure by the university to coordinate the competing, and at times contradictory, stakeholder expectations. Citing the continued printing of study material yet the university claims to be focused largely on distance education. The seeming contradiction in this context is that whilst the strategy is focused on digitisation on the one hand, there are staff members whose jobs revolve around the printing of study materials.

Taking the narrative a step further, HEI-05-03 raised a concern about bureaucratic governance processes within the HEIs, which is in direct contrast to the private sector. This creates blockage when it comes to critical decision-making. Clearly agreeing, HEI-05-04 cited a practical example with identified timeframes:

“So, in many instances, you know, to create a new position or to create a new unit within the university takes up to five years. Now, when you're dealing with matters of strategy you can't wait that long to have capacity.”

As if to dramatise the agility aspect, this participant pointed towards this university's recruitment posture. That is, that despite clarity regarding its mode of delivery – in terms of teaching and learning – there is sometimes a misalignment with its recruitment strategy. Specifically, this talks to rigidity in relation to geographic location of a candidate being recruited. Perhaps, what makes this view even more

interesting is the fact that one of the values of this university talks to innovation. A point to ponder is to what extent such values get socialised across the university, and the extent to which their practical implementation is continually tracked.

Looking at the organisational agility matter still, HEI-05-02 focused on the supply chain management process, with specific focus on the acquisition of laptops. This participant found it somehow inconsistent that reliance, for the manufacturing of such devices, is on international suppliers rather than South African based ones. Thus, suggesting inadequate coordination between the HEIs, the Department of Trade and Industry, local manufacturers, and DHET.

- Graduates' Relevance to the Market

Given the importance of graduates as, in a sense, the ambassadors of universities in society, it was not surprising that some participants raised this matter as part of strategy implementation. Taking a massification of higher education perspective, HEI-05-04 raised a red flag about how the market would then be able to absorb those massive students. Compounding this challenge was also the fact that HEIs are not adequately prioritising entrepreneurship so that graduates could start their own businesses. Concurring, HEI-05-02 cited what she referred to as systemic challenges within the country's education landscape. Further, that such challenges affect the quality of academics attracted to the system, particularly when viewed from delivering graduates that are of relevance to the market. Adding his voice to the same concern, HEI-05-03 lamented:

“Our education system does not teach students to be self-sufficient as graduates. Rather, it creates dependency; it creates academic workers and not academic entrepreneurs.”

This participant went on to cite private HEIs as being better in terms of delivering graduates that are of relevance to the market.

- Research Outputs and/or Impact

Given the imperative that university research must have both relevance and impact, HEI-05-04 raised a concern regarding this area. Specifically, he lamented the fact that although there were articles published in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic, their university missed an opportunity. That is, its researchers did not make a significant contribution, despite having also been affected by the pandemic:

“Why are universities still funded in exactly the same way as 20 years ago? Why do we still have research output subsidies, for that matter? The current system seems to have inadvertently encouraged more and more perverse behaviour and gamification, just to make more money from DHET, you know.”

Similarly, whilst it is natural, in the context of continual improvement to increase the research outputs, according to this participant, there is nonetheless a challenge. That is, that institutional reflections during strategic planning and target setting do not go far enough or focus on how implementation is going to be undertaken. Instead, the decision is imposed at times because Council has insisted on those research outputs being increased.

- Student Dropout Rate or Student Throughput

Reflecting from an ethical paradox point of view, HEI-05-04 lamented the poor student throughput rate, or high student dropout rate within universities. Compounding this is the paradox of subsidies attached to throughputs, on the one hand, and the quality assurance imperative, in relation to graduates' market readiness, on the other. Elaborating, this participant highlighted some of the underpinning drivers to the risk of poor student throughput rate. These being a failed schooling system at basic education level as well as ineffectiveness of the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges that are meant to be part of the Post-School Education and Training (PSET), supplementing the HEIs. Illustrating further, this participant pointed towards the actual assessment itself:

“So now you find yourself in a situation where there is a first assessment, and a second assessment, and a third assessment, and a portfolio assessment. Eventually, you get to the point where you give the student so many opportunities that it is almost impossible to fail.”

Perhaps this links directly to the criticism that HEIs face, viz. that of delivering graduates that are not of relevance to the market. In this context it is more about inadequacy of knowledge pertaining to the subject matter as well as motivation and resilience – as referred to in Section 2.3.3.1.

5.3.5.2.4 Monitoring, Evaluation, and Reporting Phase

For this item, participants elaborated on two aspects.

- Key Performance Indicators

Lamenting the university's failure to achieve on a significant proportion of the annual targets, HEI-05-06 pointed to a concern that accountability was lacking within this HEI. Specifically, that even though barely 60% of performance targets are achieved, (performance) bonuses do get paid to executives and senior managers. Yet had this HEI been a private sector organisation they would have been fired.

Broadening the perspective above, HEI-05-04 pointed to a potential underlying cause for targets not being achieved. That is, that targets get set without necessarily adequately reflecting on what it will require for the relevant implementing units to be able to deliver on that target. Elaborating further, he believed that some of the targets are set without insight into what those targets are about, citing an example, such as Africanisation of knowledge, which he believed has no mechanism that could be used to measure it. If a university is unable to perform at an optimal level, as painted by this participant, to what extent would it be able to deliver students of a good quality, ready to serve the market?

- Graduates' Relevance to the Market

Taking a two-dimensional view to the challenge of graduate employability or relevance to the market, HEI-05-04 faulted the university itself in this regard. Firstly, through allowing a situation where, despite going through disruptions pertaining to the COVID-19 pandemic, the online assessment results pointed to a significant increase in the pass rate of students. Secondly, reflecting on the university-industry partnerships context, this participant raised a concern about the misalignment between the industry needs and academic offerings by this HEI. Could it be that part of the root cause underpinning this university's challenge is the large market share that it commands within South Africa? That is, that its leadership team, including Council, is being lulled into a false sense of security, strategically speaking? Have they thought far enough about the potential impact on the quality of alumni base/pool that the university is building, perhaps with third-stream income generation in future years?

5.3.5.3 Institutional Culture

Believing that much needs to be understood about institutional culture within this university, HEI-05-05 proposed that there be a paper crafted that is focused on the subject. Taking the narrative a step further, HEI-05-02 pointed out that culture is not necessarily uniform across the university. That there are sub-cultures, informed by uniqueness within each stratum of the university community, e.g., academics, or support staff, or specific departments within each stratum. Thus, leading to a unique approach to problem-solving. For this Section, four aspects were debated by participants.

5.3.5.3.1 Learning Organisation

Three participants responded within the context of a learning organisation, taking different perspectives, yet concurring that this university falls short in this regard. For instance, HEI-05-01 lamented the fact that university management was recently held hostage by the SRC, whilst holding an executive meeting. This occurrence was a pointer that this university does not learn lessons from its experiences. Being so inward-looking that its executives do not adequately engage with students as a key

stakeholder. Taking, perhaps, an entrepreneurial flair perspective, HEI-05-04 raised a concern regarding failure to seize opportunities and thus leading to the university being unable to become more competitive. He believed that the reasons for such failure are not clear. Stretching the narrative, this participant went on to look at the talent management posture of the university and raised a red flag regarding the training budget that has been cut for the previous three years, and thus:

"My opinion is that the budget should be positioned such that it supports development. Because when you do a master's or a doctorate degree, it's not just about the subject that you study. It's about developing your thinking, your understanding, your articulation, your problem solving, and your world view."

Perhaps, HEI-05-04 had the aspirations of the NDP in mind when making the assertion above. That is, that the target of 75% of academics holding doctoral degrees by 2030 should not just be just about the certificate obtained but the quality of those graduates and academics. Building onto this perspective, HEI-05-05 challenged the university, from a talent management perspective. Specifically, that it should demonstrate a capability to attract skills, the capacity to create an enabling environment that enhances performance, and the strength to retain critical skills in the face of competition for those in the market.

Concluding this learning organisation matter on a different note, HEI-05-04 wondered about the proactiveness of the university in terms of adopting a forward-outlook. Specifically, whether HEIs broadly, and this university, have revisited their business model following the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. Perhaps, this talks to the point made by HEI-05-02 elsewhere in this case study, when asserting that strategists must be brought aboard the university structure rather than being mere planners.

Taking a seemingly pessimistic view in the sense that the university does not adequately prioritise consequence management, Participant HEI-05-04 focused on a report recently published about this HEI. Its focus was on the state of administrative governance. Veering onto a solution-seeking mode, this participant

emphasised the need to read through various reports that highlighted governance challenges within this HEI. Further, that there should be the appetite for implementing consequence management and ridding this university of any bad apples – also as part of setting the right tone-at-the-top. Concurring, HEI-05-06 focused on the commercialisation of research within this HEI and lamented that there had been no significant strides in this regard. This participant believed that three key role players in this regard – the DVC/VP, the Executive Director, and the Director - should thus ideally have been fired already if this HEI prioritised consequence management. Similarly illustrating, this participant pointed to facilities and asserted that the state of such facilities across the universities is appalling. In terms of both cleanliness and physical condition of the facilities, these are below expectation.

Perhaps this view above points to an HEI that does not prioritise the preservation of its institutional brand image. This is quite paradoxical given that there is a sub-committee of Council that is focused on branding and communications? Equally concerning is the fact that this participant went on to highlight the fact that in terms of the annual performance management process, an inordinate proportion of staff members get a rating that accords them a bonus award.

5.3.5.3.2 Organisational Performance

To guard against what seems to be toxicity within the workplace, HEI-05-03 highlighted the fact that this university has integrated a KPI relating to the values of the university. That is, this serves to minimise a situation where some individuals, particularly what he referred to as high-flyers, would achieve extraordinary results whilst trampling on the souls of their colleagues through that process. Perhaps, concurring on the aspect of toxicity, HEI-05-04 lamented a tendency by some individuals to unfairly impose specific KPIs or targets, largely because of their proximity with the VC's Office. That is, targets that might be impractical to implement given the realities of context of the university. This approach, unilateralism, is applied even on how personal development is undertaken within the university. Adding further, he cited the scourge of cronyism within this HEI, whereby there is a

‘network’ that supports some individuals to take up specific positions, with an expectation for favours in return. Thus, compromising institutional performance in the medium to long-term.

Further compounding the toxicity, within the institutional performance context, is the tendency by staff to take the university to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA). Due to the high number of such cases the university ends up running out of capacity to handle these, particularly since some of these cases drag on for up to two years before finalisation. Ultimately, this adversely impacts the work ethic across the university. Taking the narrative to a different dimension, HEI-05-02 focused on the IAF, claiming that it is constrained in terms of specific skills and competencies. Yet, besides the size of this HEI, which compounds this gap, skills in areas such as ICT, analytics, and forensics are an emerging imperative for an IAF.

Given that the stature of a typical IAF hinges, to a large degree on its expertise, to what extent does the situation painted above hinder this HEI’s internal audit team? That is, the team seems to be lacking on those skills that tend to be regarded as a source of competitive edge for a typical IAF. What did not come out clearly is whether the co-sourcing decision of this HEI adequately addresses this gap.

5.3.5.3.3 Open Dialogue

Three of the participants reflected on this constituent element of institutional culture. For instance, HEI-05-05 raised the importance of being mindful about how communication occurs across the university. That is, that the leadership needs to keep the broader university abreast with developments and initiatives that pertain to the university. Yet, the other two participants seemed to fault this HEI in this regard. Specifically, HEI-05-02 looked at it through the lens of support functions versus academics, whereby some call for controls to be in place whereas the others are focused on ‘getting things done on time’ without due consideration of controls. Thus, leading to an unnecessary tension sustaining within this university. Perhaps informed by one of this university’s values, Innovation and Excellence, HEI-05-04 lamented the fact that executives were not given the space to explore

creative/innovative solutions. He cited, as an example, changes that were proposed to an institutional process that was not working effectively. Such proposal was opposed outright, without its merits considered, with its originator regarded as being not a team-player.

5.3.5.3.4 Brand Reputation

Concerned about the impact of institutional brand image of the university, HEI-05-01 lamented the fact that there were students camping on-campus, demanding to be registered. Specifically, this participant was concerned about the fact that despite this HEI's primary mode of teaching and learning delivery, the implementation of that part of strategy remains a challenge. That, in this regard, the university leadership tends to not adhere to university policies either. Perhaps, this talks to institutional autonomy in the sense of pressure that gets exerted from government for HEIs to register more than what they believe themselves to be capable of doing in a particular year?

5.3.5.3.5 Vision, Mission, and Values

Four of the Participants referred to this element of institutional culture in their reflections. Specifically, HEI-05-01 cited COVID-19 as an opportunity for this university to refocus its Vision, which is about its distance education service provider. This may also talk to the online learning which had been reinforced by the new normal during the country's national lockdown.

HEI-05-05 premised his understanding of institutional culture on the Mission of the university, believing that this served as a point of departure. Further on, that it provides clarity where the university is destined for, its future, and how it should navigate the path into that future. Taking the narrative to a somehow different, yet related dimension, HEI-05-03 focused on the identity of the university too. However, instead of illuminating the Mission, he prioritised the values of the university, which he believed should be appreciated by the university community. Concurring, HEI-05-02 highlighted the fact that values influence the way the university community

behaves. And that such behaviours would also be informed by both the Vision and the Mission of the university. Thus, determining the practices of such (university) community as well.

5.3.5.4 Risk Culture

In this section, 16 aspects were raised by participants, each being discussed below.

5.3.5.4.1 Academic Offerings

Three participants reflected on academic offerings. Specifically, HEI-05-04 took the competitiveness lens and painted a picture that portrays the South African public universities as trailing behind. Specifically, unlike other HEIs which are focused on jobs for the future (including emerging technologies, the 4-IR, and whether there is a need for higher education), this HEI's focus was not yet on that space. Contrasting the picture he sees of international universities; this participant further raised a red flag regarding the state of the South African economy. Specifically, the seeming reduction in the number of available jobs visa vis the volume of job seekers – and the resultant increase in terms of unemployment levels in the country. That, unless universities adapt through a radical review of their academic offerings, there is likely to be a crisis a decade or so ahead. Further pointing to another trend, that is not related to emerging technologies yet still contributing towards enhancing the career prospect of graduates, this participant reflected thus:

"And I think you know, in the United States with their liberal arts degrees where they've allowed students for many years to, you know, almost put together their own qualification. You know you take subjects out of engineering some out of social sciences, some kind of accounting, and you mix and match and do whatever you like and you get a unique qualification you know that is going to position you for the future."

Concurring, HEI-05-02 also questioned the relevance of South African HEIs to the job market, including the adequacy of their futuristic posture, and concluded thus:

"I do think that there needs to be more collaboration in designing qualifications with industry. We tend to be very territorial, as HEIs."

Continuing, this participant went on to bring up another dimension to academic offerings, other than emerging technologies, viz. entrepreneurship. That is, asserting that this is not adequately infused into the curriculum, and specifically with regards to it, as hands-on-entrepreneurship, which is something beyond mere research. Building onto this element of the narrative, HEI-05-04 raised the strategic dilemma of failing to cap the student enrolment numbers. That is, that this compounds the unemployment rate when entrepreneurship is not adequately brought into the curriculum. Coining another term for it, HEI-05-03 lamented thus:

"Our education system does not teach people to be self-sufficient from a graduate. It creates individual dependence, it creates academic worker, not academic entrepreneurs."

Given that an integral element of a typical HEI business model entails international collaborations, could it be that these are not structured properly? For instance, in choosing the specific universities to collaborate with, is there enough effort placed on identifying areas for significant lessons learned? If so, once the collaboration tenure has expired, is there a structured method implemented with a view to tracking the impact of such lessons learned? Perhaps the results thereof could inform how changes, if any, could be made in future collaboration agreements and choice of partnering universities.

5.3.5.4.2 Accountability or Sense of Ownership or Leadership

HEI-05-02 lamented the seeming inadequacy in terms of the sense of accountability within this HEI. Elaborating, this participant pointed to the positive element within this HEI, viz. that of deliberations exploring ways of improving the processes. However, that actual implementation tends to lag, thus pointing to a lacking sense

of accountability. Concurring, HEI-05-06 also raised a red-flag with regards to a tendency by this HEI to not hold staff accountable. Citing the student complaints that seem endemic, this participant felt that someone, within the hierarchy or chain of command, ought to have been held accountable already.

Stretching the narrative, HEI-05-04 focused his attention on ERM accountability and raised the issues pertaining to training and awareness. That is, that as part of induction, executives need to include an ERM related session. Broadening the perspective, the participant raised a concern regarding the rate at which labour relations related cases at the CCMA tend to end up being settled out-of-court. That is, that such an approach potentially points to the leadership team within this university not doing enough to manage employee relations related matters. That, perhaps, they are quicker to suspend staff, some of which remain on paid leave for up to 24 months, than create a conducive working environment.

5.3.5.4.3 Bureaucracy

At least two of the participants pointed to the bureaucratic nature of this university's internal processes, with one of them labelling it as even more so than a typical government organisation. Concurring, in terms of bureaucratic processes, HEI-05-03 made a comparison with private HEIs. In this context, he highlighted the fact that such institutions tap on the flexibility of their governance processes as a form of competitive advantage.

5.3.5.4.4 Continuous Improvement

Pointing to a lacking appetite for continual change within this university, HEI-05-04 cited the stagnancy when it comes to the institution's digitisation journey. In this regard, he highlighted the inadequacy of investment in ICT related projects, despite this area having long been identified as risky:

“Now, since I started at this university the risk of inadequate project management capabilities, and skills to manage the ICT projects. That's why

so many of the ICT projects fail. Yet we don't do anything about it; we don't have that competence."

The assertion above seems to be paradoxical given how this university articulates the core of its value proposition in terms of their Teaching and Learning mode of delivery.

In addition, HEI-05-06 also raised a concern about the inadequacy of fresh ideas within the university. He attributed that mainly to the long tenure on the part of those who hold influential positions within the university. That is, those who would leverage on their experience and seeming expertise to discourage new ideas:

"You don't have a good solid number of young professors in their 20s or 30s who can challenge the status quo. ... Rather, we're having that pool of knowledge sitting with people who say I am the smartest and the oldest in the room, and I am the most qualified and you better not disagree with me. So, it's structural; it's cultural; it's an organisational issue within HEIs."

Given that this university has innovation as part of its values, one wonders how frequently they administer an institutional climate survey. If they do so regularly, whether there are adequate means of tracking the extent to which values are practically lived throughout the university.

5.3.5.4.6 Open Dialogue

There were at least two participants who reflected on this aspect of contrarian views, with different views. HEI-05-02 believes that when appropriately communicated, contrarian views are welcomed within this university. However, where these are raised inappropriately then this HEI tends to not embrace the ideas being proposed. This participant went on to highlight the fact that, as part of tone-at-the-top, the university ought to create an environment that is conducive to conversations on uncomfortable subjects. Another dimension raised was that the diversity of stakeholders could imply the imperative to raise specific views in separate platforms, to secure buy-in. Examples of such platforms include the bargaining

forums where employer-employee issues are discussed, and the Senate where academic matters are deliberated upon.

On the other hand, HEI-05-04 believes that the environment is not conducive for minority view. Rather, it is matter of how loud the minority can shout during the deliberations. That is, that this university seems to yield based not on the quality of deliberations by minority stance views, but rather on how loud their voices may be. In a sense, this talks to the university tending to inadvertently encourage bullies or aggression within its ranks, with sections of the students' movement being cited as an example. Broadening the narrative, he went on to focus on conversations amongst staff, in the various platforms within the university. Specifically, the key point was that one is often viewed as being not a team player, when raising a minority stance. The concluding remarks was thus:

“So, those that are not in support of those decisions often find themselves being very quickly marginalised and, you know, removed from the system. So, the institutional culture is not one where speaking up from a minority point of view is really tolerated.”

The above scenario sounds like hierarchical-position-driven decision making, where exploration of options is not encouraged enough.

5.3.5.4.7 Forward Outlook or Future-Orientation

HEI-05-04 reflected on the extent to which this university embraces a forward-outlook, and the overall picture that emerged is that it does not do so adequately. For instance, he viewed this university as being more focused on current realities than on re-imagining the future, viz.:

“So, I think strategy has almost, you know, been put on a backburner for the moment while we are dealing with the realities right now. ... So, it's not about what's going to happen in five years. It's how we deal with things right now, and all resources are channelled towards dealing with the operations of today rather than the 'University of the Future' as such.”

If the perspective above prevails, what does it imply about those involved in the strategic planning team of this university? Further, could it be that Council, who are the custodians of strategy, have abandoned it for a while too, and if so, then what is it that dominates their prescheduled meetings – if it is not the future of the university? Or, perhaps this explains the following view by the same participant:

“Also what we find is that strategic objectives of the university are strongly influenced by certain stakeholder groups as opposed to the university determining those and deciding where it needs to go.”

Citing another example, he referred to a digitisation or technology informed explorative view:

“But in an ideal world, and in the future, we should have a system – an online system – that sets our strategic objectives or targets and everything. That is, this would be a central system where all of this links. It’s got risks associated with it so that when you complete information on a risk it gets pulled through to the quarterly report on your strategic plan. It should also be linked to business intelligence that can make those predictions, those forecasts to say given where we are here are a few things to be considered.”

Perhaps seeking to moderate the challenge, this participant went on to cite a similar challenge at country level, viz. across South Africa. In this regard, he highlighted the fact that, instead of figuring out how to make a quantum leap into the future, the country’s leadership is preoccupied with catching up on what could not be done about five years ago or so.

5.3.5.4.8 Inward-Looking

The views expressed by at least two of the participants seemed to highlight an inward-looking posture within this university. For instance, HEI-05-05 approached this matter from a competition point of view and highlighted that this university does not really face competition:

“Yes, competition may come in that your best students are taken by the likes of [other HEIs]. So, that’s where competition may generally come from but generally there is no competition, because we can’t even make the demand. ... So, we don’t compete with anyone; it is important that we understand that. But, of course, we always have to look at where competition might come from and be able to define it appropriately and deal with it. That’s how I think about the competitive environment in the higher education sector.”

The perspective expressed above is quite interesting. For instance, could it be that the leadership team at this university do not place priority on international university rankings? Could it be that attracting the best academics, in comparison to other HEIs, is not a priority; nor is being regarded as the best when it comes to ground-breaking research? On the other hand, stretching the narrative on the inward-looking posture, HEI-05-06 focused on the change management prism and the appetite for exploration:

“It is the painful realities that many are not willing to accept. In my assessment, for instance, at [HEI-05] and other institutions – but I will use [HEI-05] – the employee turnover is 0.5%; the average age is 45 years and average employee tenure is 15 years. Chances of these people accepting, understanding and implementing decisions that respond to an external environment are very slim. The resistance is very, very, high.”

This participant went on to compare this university, and its counterparts across the higher education sector, with his previous employer, viz. a business consulting firm. Specifically, that consulting firm had set itself a target of 25% in terms of staff attrition rate. The objective was to open space for new ideas within its midst.

5.3.5.4.9 Hierarchical Positioning of Enterprise Risk Management and Internal Auditing

Whilst believing that both the IAF and the ERM function are positioned properly in terms of the hierarchical reporting, HEI-05-06 faulted the university's Council on its view regarding a risk-focused sub-committee. Specifically, he bemoaned the fact that there is currently no stand-alone Council Committee focused on ERM. Concurring, HEI-05-02 expressed satisfaction with the fact that the IAF reports directly to the audit committee, which is a governance posture aligned with the fourth King Report on Corporate Governance. Such reporting posture aligns with the IIA Standards too, as mentioned in Section 3.2.2.6. Further, with regards to the potential involvement of the IAF in the university's strategic planning session, she cautioned that the current approach whereby the IAF serve merely as observers bares the benefit of preserving the IAF's independence. Thus, affording them an opportunity to later undertake an audit of that strategic planning process. This participant went on to reflect on ERM within the university, asserting that there is improvement in how that function operates; that its reporting line to a DVC/VP is proper.

Stretching the latter assertion a step further HEI-05-03 highlighted what is perhaps a grey area, in terms of who the CRO is within this university. Adopting a best practice view, he asserted:

“Look, my understanding is that the Director and the Executive Director are an just auxiliary support function in making sure that the risks in the university are being managed. If anyone were to ask who the Chief Risk Officer is, my understanding is that the Vice Chancellor is in fact the Chief Risk Officer.”

This is quite an encouraging view, particularly given that it was coming from a Tier-2 senior executive within this institution. That is, it implies that despite governance inconsistencies, as highlighted by participants, there is still an understanding that ERM accountability lies with the highest office.

5.3.5.4.10 Coordination of Interdependencies

Understandably, the dividing line is quite thin between interdependencies and integrated posture, as can be noted from the two participants' reflections in this section. HEI-05-02 reflected on the inadequacy of measures by HEIs in their attempts to involve TVET colleges as part of their key activities. That is, that TVET colleges tend to be regarded as a foster-child, to the higher education context, who offers sub-standard qualification:

“That needs to be fixed because the solution to our unemployment issues resides with TVET colleges to a large extent – not so much with higher education institutions, the universities.”

Perhaps one way to strengthen the coordination of this interdependency is to devise a mechanism by which the impact of these two PSET phases could be tracked. In addition, a national campaign, backed by a wide communication strategy, aimed at illuminating the unique value proposition of TVET colleges should be embarked upon.

Taking the conversation further, this same participant lamented the inadequacy of coordination between academic and non-academic staff within the university. Specifically, that the synergy between these two strata is not sufficiently in place, leading to a situation where the value-add of each stratum is not properly leveraged on. Concurring, HEI-05-04 zoomed in on the coordination of strategic planning with strategy implementation:

“And I think, you know, as I have also stated, because of different stakeholder groups, you find that for a strategic objective a target is being set for something without people necessarily understanding what it means or what it will take to achieve that particular target.”

Interestingly though, this participant indicated that this challenge arises not only at their university but across the higher education sector. He further believes that this

situation is compounded by the complex nature of a typical university business model or value chain.

5.3.5.4.11 Integrated Posture

Taking a holistic picture, in the context of infrastructure surrounding a university, HEI-05-06 referred to a poorly coordinated socioeconomic development plan. Citing aspects such as sound basic education schooling facilities and recreational/sporting facilities in the community, he pointed to these as hurdles to attracting high calibre skills to some HEIs. Similarly, he believes that to speak of ‘an ocean economy’ when the local communities do not even have a sustained service of running water for basic household needs, was of concern. So, effectively, what this participant was pointing to is a reality that this university is attracting students who are disadvantaged. Thus, they are likely to perform poorly in their academic studies due to government and the universities being unable to coordinate and create conditions that are conducive for optimal student academic performance.

Concurring, and bringing that same message closer to this university, HEI-05-04 cited a lacking alignment between strategic planning, institutional performance, and associated risks. Elaborating, this participant pointed to the Business Intelligence Unit which does not get involved in either strategic planning or the strategic risk profiling of this HEI, nor its environmental scanning. He pointed out that tone-at-the-top, within this university, seems to be more about compliance, in terms of risk management, rather than elevating this initiative. Specifically, it is not about the integration of ERM into every activity that is undertaken across the university. As such, the attitude of the leadership team tends to be simply providing some information for the reports, rather than first reflecting deeply on the critical risks and related mitigating actions – with delivery on strategy in mind. Citing a further example, this participant reflected thus:

“So, if we start-off with the process and I think unfortunately [HEI-05] is not very strong on this. We’ve got processes that don’t make sense, which very few people seem to understand, and a sort of insistence on keeping things in silos, despite the fact that it doesn’t work. We restructure, but we only

reached a restructure from one silo structure to another silo structure, and we are unable to find a way of really integrating the different parts to this.”

This perspective is quite concerning given that this is a public institution that is funded, to a significant extent, through taxpayer funds. Within the context of integrated posture, and thus looking towards the higher echelons of this university, he further asserted:

“I think another big challenge is that our resourcing of the strategy is completely misaligned with the strategy itself. If you look at the cycle, the budgeting cycle, we need to submit our budgets by the end of September and then we do strategy only in November.

As closing remark, this participant highlighted the fact that even reporting occurs separately, and that the consolidation of such disparate reports is not undertaken adequately, despite there being a DVC/VP accountable for that.

5.3.5.4.12 Policies and Procedures

Despite universities being centres of learning and this institution embracing responsiveness, innovation, and excellence, HEI-05-03 felt the policies were not aligned with that posture. For instance, the review process for those very policies tends to be protracted and once approved, they tend to be inhibitive of creativity and innovative thinking. The same applies with delegations of authority, which tend to not create flexibility within service delivery.

Perhaps talking directly to excellence, HEI-05-04 referred to a point that could also be linked to institutional autonomy. He asserts that politics tend to come into play when it comes to the filling of positions within the university structures. That is, that some candidates get offered specific positions not because they meet the pre-set criteria, but rather because of transformation related agendas. Citing, as an example, he pointed to one of the faculties which has a dean that does not hold a Doctoral degree, yet this is a pre-requisite for holding that position.

Similarly, where policies are found to be preventing the undertaking of specific activities in pursuit of operational service delivery, changes get made haphazardly. That is, there is no holistic view taken on how the planned changes will impact on the very reason that informed the formulation of that policy. Illustrating this point further, on a slightly different note, asserted:

“Where you see something being submitted, a proposal being submitted to the EMC, then it gets referred back to say on the basis that it supposedly still needs to be further consulted on. Then you consult further and take it back [to EMC]; there is no additional information, you know. It just goes round and round so it almost gets stuck in this infinite loop; it never moves forward no matter what is presented; it never reaches a point of being approved. Eventually, it dies of starvation because people just get frustrated and tired of banging their heads against the wall.”

Perhaps the view expressed above points to a risk pertaining to the quality of deliberations being undertaken at governance platforms within this university. Particularly when viewed against the background that the effectiveness of decisions adopted, and impact of actions taken, is linked with the quality of analysis contained in reports that serves as a basis for those decisions.

Clearly frustrated by the seeming bureaucracy within the university, HEI-05-01 raised a concern regarding the pettiness adopted by some functions within the university, and reflected thus:

“And sometimes we comply to a point where we just lose sight of the bigger picture. Last Friday we lost R5 million all because we wanted to tick all the boxes and yet all the funder was more interested in was delivery and at least the signing of the documents so as to ensure we get the funding. But the long and short of it is that we then ultimately get the core business of the university compromised.”

Stretching the conversation to a softer issue, HEI-05-05 raised the matter of dress code within the university, in the context of culture and policies. That is, whether the

university community understands these and practically lives them. An example cited was that of the dress code of senior executives, which was believed, at times, to be misaligned with the image of this university. This went on to illustrate the point with female colleagues as well, viz. that they sometimes take the notion of a right to wear as they wish a little too far. His concluding view was that perhaps there needs to be deliberation around dress code at the university so that should it be necessary the related policies could be amended.

Believing that there are aspects of the policies and procedures that need to be upheld, HEI-05-04 looked at a potential solution from a consequence management perspective. Specifically, this participant focused on good governance, believing that it was lacking, and proposed thus:

“Clean up the system. You need to actually go and look at those reports. Look at what they say. Where there are problems then start formal investigations, start formal proceedings to get rid of the bad apples and bring in good leadership at the top so that you can start fixing these things. But without doing that it will very difficult, if not impossible, to change the risk culture in an organisation, because it is determined at the top.”

Perhaps, the view expressed above links strongly with the perspective raised regarding the failure of this university to achieve on the bulk of its annual performance targets.

5.3.5.4.13 Positive Outlook on Risk-taking

Taking a perspective that there remains a need for training and awareness, HEI-05-02 believes there is room in terms of adopting a positive outlook on risk-taking:

“I think people really struggle to grasp the concept of risk. When we start talking risk, they often think, ‘oh, something's wrong, are you saying that particular thing is wrong?’. You know, so I think there needs to be a lot more education around when we talk risk.”

Adopting a solution-seeking posture, he proposed that when individuals are being promoted into leadership roles, part of their induction should include ERM. That is, that for them to be able to take a broader view of the function they lead there should also be an ERM element in that perspective. Perhaps this points to HEIs tend to be relatively immature when it comes to ERM (refer to Section 3.2.2.10).

5.3.5.4.14 Regulatory Compliance

HEI-05-03 raised a red-flag with regards to failure of the regulatory environment to curb the mushrooming of private HEIs. Pointing to the fact that these intensified the competitiveness of the external environment and posed a threat to the public HEIs, he acknowledges that regulation was subsequently strengthened, viz.:

“Afterwards, clearly afterwards, they were regulated and they had to go through some accreditation process. And those who survived that scrutiny made it and they have identified that our government failed to create an environment in which higher education becomes fully functional.”

Taking the internationalisation and university rankings perspective, HEI-05-04 raised a concern regarding hurdles faced with trying to employ a foreign national. That is, that the country’s regulations make it difficult to recruit foreign nationals. Concurring, HEI-05-01 reflected on the so-called free education:

“The policy of the land says there’s free education, whatever that means although, of course, depending on where you stand, there is no free education. Someone will have to pay for it.”

Based on views expressed by these three participants there remains room for improvement within South Africa’s regulatory framework. It does need to be better informed when it comes to the realities faced by HEIs on the ground.

5.3.5.4.15 Tone-at-the-Top

Depictive of what is perhaps at the heart of the challenges faced by this university, HEI-05-04 pointed to the highest decision-making structure of the university, viz. Council. Referring to a report that had been released in recent times:

“The report that I spoke about earlier highlighted that a number of Council members were considered incompetent, considered to be unable to perform their duties. Further, that there’s been a number of decisions by Council that border on unethical ground, and a few things that seem to be criminal.”

He highlighted the fact that there were a significant number of executives and managers that were appointed within this university, yet they did not meet the minimum criteria set for those positions. Believing that this was perhaps in preparation for favours that were to be returned at a later stage, he pointed to toxicity within the university environment as inevitable. Furthermore, there was purging of some staff members shortly after the current VCs tenure began, with some structures being unduly changed.

5.3.5.4.16 Risk Maturity

Noted below are some additional perspectives expressed by three of the participants, which point towards a relatively immature level in terms of ERM. HEI-05-05 highlighted the need to consolidate identified risks. That is, that instead of seeking to have a risk for each of the 20 objectives per the strategic plan, such risks should instead be consolidated. Perhaps, this participant was pointing to a need for the ERM function to elevate itself beyond data capturers and embrace a strategic advisor posture to the university’s leadership team. HEI-05-06 reflected on the role played by the ERM function in relation to the strategy of the university. He raised the concern that although there is a strategic risk register, there is no indication of an active involvement in the strategic planning session, whereby the ERM function would also contribute to the development of targets (or KPIs) whilst learning more about the strategy of this HEI. In addition, he lamented the fact that there is a lack

of discipline to ensuring adherence to commitments made at the strategic planning of the university.

HEI-05-02 acknowledged the strides made by this HEI, in terms of ERM, with specific reference to the development of risk appetite and risk tolerance levels. However, she lamented the tendency, by the ERM function, to overly focus on the technical terminology rather than the application of ERM concepts. That is, that there is inadequate emphasis on exploring the options the university faces in terms of critical risks and opportunities. HEI-05-02 further highlighted the need to focus on the layers of management that fall below the senior executives. That is, that whilst risk culture is set and driven from the top, it is in fact the mood in the middle that determines the extent to which such risk culture becomes sustainable. Hence, the need to focus on that 'middle' to deepen risk culture.

HEI-05-02 further highlighted the fact that the IAF does not get involved in the strategic planning process of the university, other than being merely observers. That is, to preserve their independence, the IAF does not contribute to deliberations. This seems contrary to the stance of the professional body, viz. the IIA. Current thinking has been that the IAF ought to win a seat at the table – how could that be if the IAF is merely coming through to listen rather than contribute?

5.3.6 Case Study 6

5.3.6.1 Competitive External Environment

For this section, six aspects were highlighted by participants. Each debated below.

5.3.6.1.1 Financial Sustainability

Financial sustainability emerged from two of the participants, who both looked at it from an institutional viability perspective. HEI-06-04 raised financial constraints in relation to recruitment for some of the key positions, viz. new and current positions. However, the organisational redesign initiative that was underway would mitigate

against the financial constraint. Further, that the quality of leadership is also another factor that enabled this university to weather the financial storm. She was raising the red flag mindful that one of the other HEIs in the same province was considering retrenching some staff members, in response to financial sustainability constraints.

Concurring, HEI-06-03, focused on third stream income as an influential factor to the external environment:

“The funding of universities, and the whole question about third stream income and how universities can basically reinvent themselves to become more business driven also, you know and not just rely on government, is a factor. For a university like ours, and other historically disadvantaged universities is that most of our income comes from fees and subsidy. About 80% of our fees comes from funded students, Government funded students, government bursary. So the fact is that almost all of our income is funded by government and we are trying to reconfigure ourselves but it is not easy.”

Perhaps the fact that this HEI has embarked on a journey towards a new business model, or a redesigned model, is a positive move. Its leadership team seems to have adopted a posture that seeks to be ready for a future that may arise because of a further weakening of the economy, to a point where the NSFAS collapses.

5.3.6.1.2 Emerging Technologies

Emerging technologies, with specific emphasis on the 4-IR, was raised by HEI-06-02, who believed that although another university seems to have taken the lead, others are slowly following suite. He also highlighted the reality that it is because of the digital transformation wave that has gripped the market that HEIs need to embrace 4-IR. Interestingly, this participant did not mention how far their HEI is in relation to the 4-IR.

5.3.6.1.3 Institutional Autonomy

Perhaps one could look at the perspective more as a stakeholder-centricity issue, but it also talks to institutional autonomy. HEI-06-01 acknowledged this HEI's commitment to scholarly freedom and the pursuit of the objective reality, but they have to remain sensitive to their locality:

" For example, where I am, the name of this university or the identity of this university tells you which group will have an influence on how we do things and how we behave as an organisation. We, because of being a HEI, are influenced by the freedom of scholarship and pursuit of objective realities and their truth. But it's very difficult to change and steer to a different direction since we are premised on the pursuit of objective truth through knowledge generation."

5.3.6.1.4 Socioeconomic Transformation

HEI-06-02 raised the socioeconomic transformation conditions as an influential factor within the competitive external environment, taking a political sphere context:

"I think competition is influenced both by the political sphere as well as the socioeconomic sphere because for some institutions it is known that they will just take the middle class [students] in most cases. The majority of their students come from the middle class."

Perhaps, as part of the institutional design, which was referred to earlier by this participant, this university needs to explore ways in which it could attract students from more affluent communities too. Alternatively, even a risk culture maturity framework, which study is about, could be used as a basis for mapping out that journey. Thus, enabling other HEIs, including the Historically Disadvantage Universities (HDUs), to consider applying it?

5.3.6.1.5 University Rankings

HEI-06-02 indicated university rankings as one of the influential factors within the competitive external environment. That is, that HEIs find themselves seeking to locate their target spot in relation to the upcoming year(s) rankings when these get published on an annual basis.

5.3.6.1.6 Technology

Taking a geographic distance context, HEI-06-02 raised the question of technology as having accelerated the rate at which local students are now able to enrol with distance HEIs. Thus, intensifying the competition for the best students between South African based HEIs and those abroad. Extending the narrative, he indicated online teaching and learning as a competitive opportunity:

"OK. You know, I think as the entire sector, we've got a great opportunity emanating, of course, from the COVID-19 pandemic to say that now, whether you are HDU, or a well to do institution, there is a great opportunity now in terms of digitizing, as well as teaching and learning generally. And we have also a great opportunity of establishing our visibility across the globe. Whether you are an HDU or you are in former white institution."

On the other hand, perhaps sobering up to the current reality, this participant further alluded to the fact that the ICT infrastructure has not yet stabilised enough to support online teaching and learning. That its impact extends onto research and innovation activities as well as other aspects of the HEI value chain. Concurring, HEI-06-04 highlighted the fact that even though there is constant interaction between the academics and the ICT experts within the university there remains an expectation gap.

5.3.6.2 Strategic Management Process

Providing context about the institution, in relation to the strategic management process, HEI-06-01 highlighted the fact that this HEI had been under administration in previous years. That it has also just commenced with its second five-year strategic plan effective 2022, which continues to be punctuated by fewer strategic goals than the 12 that occurred during the period under administration. Pointing to a potential inadequacy in term of roles and responsibilities, at the time, this participant reflected thus:

"So, for me there was an exaggeration or too much emphasis on what the Administrator of the time thought should be a strategic direction of this university. But, as for where we are standing now, we are now on the second move to for 2022 new strategic plan."

Perhaps, the above view implies that when an institution is under administration, its senior executives could find themselves overly deferring to the Administrator? For this item, four aspects were highlighted by participants.

5.3.6.2.1 Phases of the Strategic Management Process

Only one participant reflected on the phases of a typical strategic management within a HEI, viz. HEI-06-03, whose focus seemed restricted to the first phase. The extract below bares reference:

"Obviously, the Annual Performance Plan is the start and that rolls into performance agreements with each executive, and that rolls into performance agreements with directors reporting to executives, viz. the directors and deans, and so on."

5.3.6.2.2 Planning Phase

Three of the participants reflected on this phase of the strategic management process. For instance, HEI-06-02 referred to the fact that in developing such a strategy the university must first refresh its understanding of its present reality:

"Hence, you'll find that when whenever you're developing a strategic plan, you must do the SWOT analysis as well. Then I think that will now map out what we have achieved, what could be learned for the lessons that could be learned, and then that process can lead you into your new vision, what you want to achieve in the future, bearing in mind your path and where you are currently."

Effectively, this participant brought in the higher aspiration of the university, which relates the strategic planning to both the vision and the future direction of the university. Thus, implying that, potentially, the conversations take a deeper reflective posture. Concurring, HEI-06-01 focused on the five-year cycles which the strategic plans are developed for as well as the composition of the team. That is, that although the deans are not part of the executive leadership team, they are incorporated in the strategic planning deliberations focused on the strategic plan development. Taking the narrative, a step further, HEI-06-03 brought up the Annual Performance Plan that is submitted at DHET and is a more dynamic version of the strategic plan. He also pointed to the mapping of pertinent risks to the Annual Performance Plan.

5.3.6.2.3 Implementation Phase

Generic remarks from two of the participants were noted in the context of the implementation phase of the strategic management process. HEI-06-02 reflected thus:

"And then now that you've developed the strategy, of importance is that it must not remain just on paper; it must be implemented. So that's when now you will have to develop some action plans. It could be short term, mid-term or a long-term-action plans, to manage your strategic plan."

Concurring, HEI-06-03 referred to the action plans as the operationalisation of the Annual Performance Plan, including assigning a single point of accountability, for each of those, to members of the executive team. Seven focal areas which participants prioritised in terms of reflecting on the strategy implementation phase, are debated below.

- Agility

HEI-06-01 seemed to take pride in highlighting the fact that the current phase of their strategic plan, which started in 2022 was in fact conceived in 2020 already. That is, a year earlier than the 2016-2021 one was to expire, illustrative of their HEI's organisational agility posture:

"And then at the end of your strategy, you still have to go back and say what is it that we've achieved? What is it that we're taking forward? What have been the areas of vulnerability, the new weaknesses, and the opportunities that we should be looking at, as a university? So, it's more like we're juggling with this ball, and saying universities by their nature, like any organisations, are evolving and dynamic."

It is quite encouraging that, despite being part of the HDUs, this HEI seems to engage quite deeply in strategic deliberations. Thus, perhaps, pointing towards a need for these HEIs to start becoming more explorative of what their distinctive capabilities might be rather than simply being constrained by their historical inadequacies.

- Distinctive Capabilities

Perhaps validating the concluding remark in Section 5.3.9.3.2, HEI-06-02 cited the cultural heritage of this university, together with its rural location and surrounding industries, as sources of distinctive edge. He viewed these from a curriculum repositioning point of view:

"The university can capitalize on in terms of enriching its curricula, and in terms of its research, because if we can tap on that, there is no other comparable or similar research. I mean there is no other institution that has what we have here."

Concurring, HEI-06-04 also cited the industries surrounding this HEI as a source of competitive capability. That this also presents opportunities for students to undertake more relevant research that talks to such industries.

- Entrepreneurial

The entrepreneurial posture emerged from HEI-06-03 who pointed to the essence of broadening the third-stream income pool. Because it comes with a specific condition to be spent in a particular focal area, it provides the HEI with more flexibility. In taking the narrative a step further, this participant referred to the fact that their IAF is outsourced. In illuminating the advantage with this approach, he focused on the breadth of skills base which this national firm has. However, perhaps it is imperative to indicate that the IIA prefers the in-house model of an IAF (refer Section 3.2.2.6).

- Graduates' Relevance to the Market

HEI-06-04 cited the priority of making their graduates more relevant to the market through, amongst others, engaging in agricultural oriented projects. In this context, she pointed to this as being part of their university strategy, which places emphasis on the rural African initiatives rather than the Western ones.

- Historically Disadvantaged Universities

HEI-06-02 lamented the historical trajectory of their university, which is directly linked to the social class of students they tend to attract. That is, that because it falls under the category of HDUs it tends to be overshadowed by the other HEIs. As such, in delivering on their strategy they face such competition.

- Internationalisation

HEI-06-02 cited internationalisation as a contributory factor to this university's research outputs and inevitably to the brand image of the university and its staff. Worth noting is that the other participants did not mention internationalisation, despite this being an integral part of a typical HEI's priorities.

- Research Outputs and/or Impact

HEI-06-03 looked at the opportunity of expanding research outputs and/or impact through the attraction of more students for this HEI. That is, that as students register with this HEI, they are likely to prefer pursuing post-graduate studies with it as well. Providing more context to this aspiration, HEI-06-02 lamented a recent publication which portrayed this university as ranking lower in terms of research outputs in the country. She went on to elaborate thus:

"Because I regard a university as an intellectual space, it therefore doesn't sit well with me; it is a risk in terms of the research outputs. It links also to the reputation of the institution. And it also talks to who we are able to attract to the institution, in terms of this staff as well as the students."

Taking the narrative a step further, HEI-06-04 highlighted the challenge that sometimes arises with regards to the cooperation of the community when it comes to the undertaking of community-related research. In the event of failing to navigate through that challenge, the research output will be curtailed. Thus, condemning this HEI to lower ranking in terms of research outputs.

5.3.6.2.4 Monitoring, Review and Reporting Phase

HEI-06-02 described this phase of the strategic management process as entailing the tracking of risks to the strategy implementation. Citing examples of those, he referred to physical infrastructure risks that impede delivery of Teaching and Learning through a digital era. Similarly, poorly skilled staff would require training to deliver more effectively on their key performance areas, respectively. Reflecting on the shortfall of the strategic management process broadly, this participant lamented the fact that the rollout tends to focus on the higher echelons of the university. That, as such, when it comes to monitoring the implementation, the university leadership tends struggle to track progress made at lower levels. Despite that the participant pointed also to the essence of aligning the strategic plan with values of the university, the scenario of inadequate consultation seems to contradict the values. Specifically, the values pertaining to both the transparency as well as teamwork?

Taking the monitoring and reporting narrative a step further, HEI-06-03 took the combined assurance perspective. He raised a red flag with regards to delays in delivering the annual internal audit plan. Thus, leading to a situation where the opportunity for external auditors to rely on the work of the internal auditors is curtailed.

5.3.6.3 Institutional Culture

For this section, five aspects were brought into the conversation by the participants.

5.3.6.3.1 Learning Organisation

HEI-06-04 reflected on a tendency by the surrounding community to see the university as more of a source of employment rather than a centre of learning for their children, viewing this as their right which the university must prioritise. Given this HEI's many years of existence, with its leadership's extensive experience, should this expectation gap still be there? In other words, should their experience, which stretches over various HEIs, not have contributed towards repositioning the learning orientation of this HEI, in this context?

5.3.6.3.2 Organisational Performance

In this section, nine sub-sections were indicated as a priority by participants.

- Business Continuity Management

HEI-06-04 raised the issue of the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically how it served to not only test the resilience of the university, from a business continuity perspective, but served to rally the university community too. Further, that despite being a novelty, placing everyone in unfamiliar territory, aspects such as blended learning, online teaching and learning, virtual meetings, remote working, became a reality.

- Community Engagement

Perhaps building onto the perspective raised by HEI-06-02 regarding the rural location as a source of uniqueness, Participant HEI-06-04 highlighted Community Engagement. The participant indicated that the university's approach is driven more by local responsiveness in their research activities. That is, that they prioritise the peculiarities of the communities they serve, when undertaking research that is focused on those communities.

- Competitive Advantage

Perhaps re-emphasising an earlier point made, HEI-06-02 raised the essence of tapping on the uniqueness of the local community they serve in the university's efforts to redesign its curriculum. Citing the richness of the unique culture of this indigenous community, this participant felt that through collaboration, the university's research output and/or impact, and its reputation, could be enhanced. The consistency of the message regarding the local community talks also to the notion of African solutions to African problems. The embrace of the local community's cultural richness could potentially turn this HEI into a source of lessons learned for other HEIs.

- Competitive or Excellence Posture

Citing a specific field as a relatively new area of academic offerings for them, HEI-06-03 pointed out that the university is intent to turn this into another pocket of excellence. This decision was taken in response to how the university read trends in the competitive external environment. Taking the competitive posture, a step further, HEI-06-01 described it as toxic. Such toxicity plays out in the form of some of the HEIs being staffed with more 'talkers or noise-makers' than 'doers'. This participant went on to cite, as an example, the way various HEIs responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. That is, that although the senior executive leadership of this HEI ensured that no student was left behind, they did not make noise about the strides they made in this regard.

Taking the narrative a step further, HEI-06-02 pointed to both the quality of students that the university is seeking to attract as well as quality of staff. Perhaps talking to

another form of competitive posture, HEI-06-02 went on to illustrate the quest for quality staff. That is, that high-profile professors tend to prefer being associated with specific brands of HEIs, which unfortunately are not those whose majority of students would be coming from poor communities.

- Governance

As part of this university's efforts to strengthening its governance posture, HEI-06-01 pointed to the existence of a performance management process that applies across all levels within the university. This includes the linking of performance agreements with the Annual Performance Plan of the university as well as operational plans of the respective departments. Citing specific structures that deliberate on institutional risks within this HEI, this participant pointed to EMC, faculty boards, the Audit and Risk Committee, as well as Council. HEI-06-03 reminded that this HEI was in the past briefly under administration, followed by a transitional period of about three years, a new VC being appointed, which led to governance being stabilised further within the university itself.

- Organisational Structure

According to HEI-06-03, the outsourced IAF reports functionally to the Audit and Risk Committee, whilst being administratively accountable to the VC. At the same time, the CFO serves as the senior manager that coordinates the activities of such IAF, on a day-to-day basis, on behalf of the VC. In terms of best practice as guided by the professional body, viz. the IIA, this hierarchical positioning is acceptable.

- Key Performance Indicators

Highlighting this university's approach towards sustaining high levels of organisational performance, HEI-06-01 pointed out that this begins with a solid strategic plan, viz. the five-yearly plan. Further, the development of the Annual Performance Plan by both the EMC and the deans, containing KPIs and targets, gets socialised across the university.

- Staff-Student Ratio or Supervisor-Student Ratio

HEI-06-03 raised a red flag around the challenge of attracting supervisors and appropriately skilled researchers into the university. Further, that failure to do so will have a ripple effect on this HEI's ability to attract quality students both at undergraduate and post-graduate levels, respectively.

- Student-Centricity

Student-centricity emerged in two contexts, viz. from the context of attracting a larger number into registering with the institution, as well as the quality of support granted to them. Specifically, HEI-06-03 felt that with their current enrolment numbers being low, that it becomes difficult to carry some of the operational costs relating to running the university. Enrolment numbers should be doubled but was concerned at the university's seeming difficulty in doing so. Taking the narrative further, HEI-06-04 commended the teaching and learning fraternity of this university, particularly in terms of the support given to students. However, she acknowledged that there remains room for improvement.

5.3.6.3.3 Open Dialogue

Open dialogue emerged in the context of how the university engages with the community that it serves, both in terms of educating its students as well as conducting research. HEI-06-04 illuminated the imperative to properly engage with such community and understand the sensitivities around its culture. A question to perhaps to ponder on is whether this university undertakes an induction that is comprehensive enough for, especially, those staff members that come from outside the province? The relevance of this being that a university would typically be staffed by various nationalities, from different cultural backgrounds.

5.3.6.3.4 Brand Reputation

HEI-06-03 viewed the preservation of institutional brand image through the infrastructure maintenance perspective. Specifically, he raised a concern regarding some of the leadership team members who tend to take basic operational matters

to the university's EMC. That if those matters were raised directly with the physical infrastructure or maintenance/facilities lead they could be resolved well before they brand image of the university got compromised. Stretching the narrative, HEI-06-04 focused on the co-curricula activities, citing the positive impact which resulted from strides made by their students, which is about the activities that take place outside the classroom but serve to reinforce the Teaching and Learning outcomes (refer Terminology). She also concurred with HEI-06-03 regarding infrastructural challenges, pointing to a common mistake of sourcing the services of suppliers that were not of good quality.

HEI-06-02 raised a matter similar to the one that was mentioned by HEI-06-01, viz. the toxicity of competition within the higher education sector. Specifically, this participant was concerned about the fact that assertions emanating from allegedly reputable HEIs are taken at face value, without probing to understand their authenticity:

"You find that particular institutions will be regarded as the best, without in fact-checking, or probing, in terms of what exactly is happening within those institutions. Because, at a superficial level, they might seem to be doing best, but it's about how do they do that, who gets included, and who gets excluded. That's something that we do not interrogate in our higher education sector."

On the other hand, this participant felt that the HEI that she works at tends to be regarded as inferior, without undertaking due diligence, yet the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee commended this university when its leadership team recently attended Parliament.

5.3.6.3.5 Vision, Mission and Values

Describing her understanding of institutional culture, in the context of their university, HEI-06-01 referred to the values and beliefs shared by the university community, highlighting that such institutional culture is a complex phenomenon.

5.3.6.4 Risk Culture

Under risk culture, 15 aspects were raised by the participants.

5.3.6.4.1 Academic Offerings

Academic offerings emerged from HEI-06-02, as an area worth further exploring, not just for this university but the broader sector as well. Describing curriculum broadly as including all three focal areas of a typical HEI, this participant felt that HEIs are not keeping up with the rapid changes that are occurring in the market.

5.3.6.4.2 Accountability and Leadership

Two of the participants reflected on this element of accountability. HEI-06-01 placed the responsibility firmly at the doorstep of the senior executive leadership, asserting thus:

"In terms of risk culture, firm leadership is essential in determining the direction of enterprise risk management in a university. The culture of accountability and strategic leadership creates a tone for enterprise risk management across the board. If the Vice Chancellor goes loose on this, there will be lack of direction for the institution."

Citing two illustrative examples, this participant pointed to the essence of tracking key risks pertaining to the strategy of the university as well as the common complaint about the quality of students entering the higher education sector. In this latter context, the view held by this participant was that universities ought to shape these students into industry/market ready graduates. The idea being that when graduates fail to live up to expectations, the industry will point a finger at HEIs rather than the basic education system. Part of the reason for this is that the latter system never claimed to be preparing students to get into university.

Concurring, HEI-06-02 adopted the broader version of leadership, viz. the type of leadership that rallies the team towards the achievement of common purpose of the HEI, which was amiss. That is, regardless of how good the university strategy may

be, effective leadership would remain the definitive factor. Such a factor would be informed by elements that include the adoption of a bottom-up style, refraining from micro-management, as well as being more empowering and trusting. Citing a practical example, this participant pointed to the process that should be followed in developing and socialising the strategic plan of the university, viz. that everyone should be involved.

5.3.6.4.3 Collaboration

Stretching the leadership narrative, HEI-06-02 cited the response to risks that impact the university, viz. that the senior management should collaborate with the broader university community in mitigating such risks. Further, that it is through such approach that risk culture of this HEI could be deepened. Concurring on the significance of collaboration, HEI-06-04 cited the example of responding to system challenges, viz. that these tend to be resolved quicker when there is collaboration between the academics and support staff. Perhaps this example highlights the need to explore internal service level agreements between various role players within the university, especially the functions of HR, ICT, Procurement, and ERM, as complaints are often directed at those functions.

5.3.6.4.4 Open Dialogue

There was a mixed reaction emerging in relation to the encouragement of contrarian views within this university. For instance, HEI-06-02 asserted that there is a trend of initiatives being driven from the top, with no evidence of efforts aimed at encouraging contrarian views within this HEI. This being so despite an awareness of the need to change that trend. Elaborating, this participant referred to personalities and characters within this HEI whose impact could be to have others become withdrawn during institutional deliberations. Expressing a somehow differing perspective, HEI-06-01 cited the process followed in socialising the strategic plan. That is, that there are broad consultations with faculty boards, the SRC, the Institutional Forum, the Senate, outcomes of which are then tabled to Council for approval. Perhaps, what this participant was painting as a process does

not touch on the texture of deliberations, which is what HEI-06-02 referred to as top-down. Similarly, consultation could happen even if it leaves some members of the audience withdrawn. HEI-06-03 also pointed to the top-down element.

5.3.6.4.5 Future-Oriented

Raising a sobering question, HEI-06-03 reflected strategically on a matter that should be dominating conversations at both Council and executive leadership platforms. That is, the question of whether HEIs would still be of relevance about 20 years into the future. Concurring, HEI-06-02 felt that there is a need for this university community to reflect on ways that could improve the way both students and staff are being prepared for the new world. In other words, that there might be trends in the market which this university may not be alert to, or not agile enough in terms of responding to those.

5.3.6.4.6 Governance

HEI-06-03 reflected on the governance structures of this university, commending them for playing a constructive role. These included the fact that Council and its sub-committees do convene regularly to deliberate on pertinent strategic matters and provide oversight. Similarly, they strike a balance between maintaining the strategic distance from operational activities on the one hand, with appraising themselves of the university environment on the other.

5.3.6.4.7 Integrative Posture

EI-06-04 illuminated their university's integrative posture in terms of enhancing the commercialisation of research. That, in this regard, they are seeking to further strengthen the university-industry partnerships, through taking advantage of the industries surrounding their geographic locality. Bringing another dimension to this integrative posture, HEI-06-03 highlighted the way in which combined assurance is socialised or implemented. Specifically, how the ERM function, the IAF, and

external auditing work with management as well as oversight structures in terms of tracking progress in risk mitigation.

5.3.6.4.8 Coordination of Interdependencies

HEI-06-02 reflected on the importance of tapping on interdependencies in the pursuit of the noble greater good of the university, including its Vision and Mission. Citing the sense of ownership and accountability, this participant asserted that these should not be delivered through individuals but rather through a community of practice.

5.3.6.4.9 Institutional Performance

Perhaps seeking to illustrate the commitment of this university to enhanced performance, HEI-06-03 cited the various awards ceremonies that take place at this university, aimed at celebrating success and achievements by the university and its community. This same participant stretched the narrative towards audit findings broadly and the implementation rate of recommendations emanating therefrom. In this regard, he cited the fact that in some instances it would take up to four years for such recommendations to be implemented. This has, however, now improved. Elaborating further, this participant pointed out that the VC also prioritised the monitoring of audit findings, in support of the Audit and Risk Committee resolution. Thus, leading to a significant improvement in this regard, including the enhancement of the control environment within the university.

5.3.6.4.10 Policies and Procedures

Perhaps indicative of the reality that this HEI's recent emergence from being under administration, three of the participants reflected on the significance of policies and procedures as well as rules. Specifically, they all saw these as an integral part of the culture of the university, with HEI-06-01 asserting thus:

"Institutional culture, therefore, includes formal and informal rules or guidelines, including policies and procedures, regarding how people relate to each other and how things are done in the organisation."

Concurring, HEI-06-02 went on to cite, as an example, the Online Assessment Policy as one of those that underpin the functioning of this HEI. HEI-06-03 brought up the aspect of a 'new management', viz. that this is how they refer to themselves in building a culture of accountability. Whilst it is commendable that firm leadership seems to be exercised within this HEI, it is surprising that they still refer to themselves as the 'new management'. This could have unintended consequences on the sense of ownership by the broader university community. That is, a misconception could be that everyone else was not doing a good job until the 'new management' came aboard; besides the current leadership has already completed their first five-year cycle of the strategic plan.

5.3.6.4.11 Regulatory Compliance

Three of the participants reflected in the context of regulatory compliance, providing a mixed reaction. For instance, HEI-06-04 expressed satisfaction at the confidence expressed by DHET on how the leadership team was running this HEI – appreciating the improvement at this HEI. On the other hand, HEI-06-03 raised a red flag around the formula used for allocating the Block Grant by DHET. That is, that some HEIs end up unfairly receiving a disproportionately larger piece of the pie – but did not elaborate. HEI-06-01 focused their concerns on the long-term impact of free education, pointing to the risk of NSFAS resources potentially drying up. Further, that this concept was not well thought through by the government. Illustrating the viewpoint, this participant went on to cite the fact that despite the notion of free education HEIs remain with rising student debt that is proving difficult to manage.

5.3.6.4.12 Silos

Lamenting the tendency to operate in silos within this HEI, HEI-06-02 attributed this to egos amongst academics. This participant believed that this is because of the university community failing to handle competition amongst its staff – especially academics - in a more productive way. Projects are coordinated poorly largely because staff within this HEI are not tapping onto one another's strengths. HEI-06-03 focused on the ERM function, lamenting the fact that, despite various efforts aimed at inculcating it, there has not been a university-wide communique. That is, there is no concerted effort aimed at marketing the ERM function through elevating its initiatives and impact on the university community. This points to a missed opportunity given the strategic significance of ERM in any organisation, including HEIs.

5.3.6.4.13 Stakeholder-Centricity

Citing maintenance of facilities or infrastructure, as an example, HEI-06-04 painted a picture that points to poor stakeholder-centricity within this HEI. Specifically, the classrooms had been in a poor state of maintenance for quite some time, despite students being the primary stakeholder of a HEI. Similarly, by 'allowing' such a situation to continue for some time, the university was staking the safety of its staff, and thus risking penalties from another stakeholders, viz. the Department of Employment and Labour, from an occupational health and safety perspective.

5.3.6.4.14 Tone-at-the-Top

Pointing to the tone-at-the-top posture of this university, HEI-06-03 cited the approach adopted in developing a strategic risk profile for the upcoming year. That is, that the senior executive leadership team would convene a workshop in the fourth quarter of the year, which aims to develop the following year's risk profile. Thus, setting the tone in terms of accountability on matters pertaining to risk ownership across the university.

5.3.6.4.15 Risk Maturity

There were comments made by at least two of the participants, which could be categorised as referring to broader risk maturity of this HEI. HEI-06-01 highlighted a recent decision to separate the reporting lines for their ERM function from the IAF Function. She further stated that divisional risk profiles were now being tracked and reported upon. Perhaps this scenario is related also to the fact that the ERM function within this HEI has only recently been established. Thus, pointing to relative immaturity of the ERM. HEI-06-01 also pointed out that the process aimed at launching the concept of risk appetite within this HEI has been shelved. Similarly, a project aimed at assessing risk maturity has been placed on hold; she also highlighted the imperative to be mindful of how these are communicated to the Council. HEI-06-02 pointed to the need to infuse a SWOT analysis into strategic planning deliberations. She believed that this would contribute towards illuminating the key strategic risks pertaining to this university. This may constitute a step in the right direction, given that threats often translate to risks that are driven from externally, whereas weakness talks to internally driven ones.

5.3.7 External Group of Practitioners

5.3.7.1 Competitive External Environment

Ten aspects were highlighted under this heading by the participants.

5.3.7.1.1 Financial Sustainability

Four of the participants talked directly to financial sustainability. Specifically, EGP-03 highlighted a common weakness with HDUs. That is, that these HEIs tend to struggle when it comes to raising funding since most of their alumni do not have adequate access to resources. Stretching the narrative, this participant focused on the NSFAS model as a source of debt that universities sustain. That is, that such model leads to a situation where the amount paid by NSFAS is lower than what the student owes to the university, with students failing to pay that shortfall to the

university. Staying with the NSFAS narrative, EGP-06 brought a slightly different dimension. That is, that the largest higher education service provider in the country, viz. UNISA, also plays into NSFAS despite its model supposedly being distance education. As such, its students further deplete the NSFAS pool rather than being self-sufficient.

Stretching the narrative EGP-07 focused on infrastructure and asserted that part of the reason HEIs need to be financially viable is so that they can raise capital for physical infrastructure. Taking an economist perspective EGP-04 reflected on the seeming contradiction between an attempt to contain inflation, on the one hand, whilst contending with high costs pertaining to imports, on the other:

"So, you drive inflation rate at a specific target because you're actually importing your resources like books, like instruments that you use in the laboratories. They are nowhere in South Africa; you have to import them from somewhere. You pay export tax or import tax on them; you pay a particular currency which is 15 times what you would have spent in South Africa - or 20 times depending on where you get these from. So, these are the things that create challenges to university strategies because then you have to say where do I trade off, where do I compromise?"

5.3.7.1.2 Institutional Autonomy

Institutional autonomy emerged from four of the external expert participants. Challenging universities, whilst at the same time conceding to their reality, EGP-01 highlighted the fact that HEIs are a microcosm of society. Reminding of how HEIs should position their value proposition, he asserted thus:

"But universities ought to be working on a way of escaping this so that they begin to be the beacon lines of hope, they begin to be the laser beams that point to the future, the north star. But once they become part of the problem, they become a replication of the problem, then their reason for existence is challenged. Society has become an anti-intellectual space; in fact, it hates and resents curious thinking, and intellectual rigor."

Continuing the narrative, EGP-04 felt that despite numerous deliberations on the subject of institutional autonomy, including the White Paper 3, there is still no consensus or common understanding on it. Concurring, EGP-06 focused on what he referred to as strategic political influence by DHET, which he believed unfortunately contributes towards student unrest. Perhaps expanding on the same view, EGP-03 lamented the prominence of personal agendas over the university's broader agenda, to a point that the free contestation of ideas, within a politically neutral space, ceases. The following extract bears relevance:

“But unfortunately, the political landscape is such that there are political parties that work with students inside the university. So VCs end up being seen to be non-progressive and get attacked politically. And that tends to interfere a lot with the work that the university does.”

This participant went on to lament the fact that this situation inevitably compromises the quality of services rendered by HEIs.

5.3.7.1.3 Fourth Industrial Revolution

EGP-06 raised the matter of the 4-IR in the context of rendering academic programmes more relevant to the needs of the market. He felt that skills depth, in terms of human capital, that universities deliver to the market depends also on the extent to which both students and staff can embrace technology broadly, in addition to the 4-IR. Broadening the context, EGP-02 lamented the lower proportion of students emerging from the basic education system who qualify to enter the higher education sector. Pointing to this as a meagre 28% of such students entering the higher education sector, this participant was perhaps implying that even those we 'catch' within the HEIs are so few that that 4-IR would be of minimal impact to the market.

5.3.7.1.4 Influential Factors

Challenging the HEIs for their inadequate focus on value-based leadership, EGP-01 pointed out that market failures were often engineered by graduates coming from the best HEIs. Further, that even in South Africa, it is academically equipped people, with MBAs or Chartered Accountancy qualifications, that have been at the centre of fraud and corruption:

“The external environment has shown us people who go through business schools, who go through Harvard and Oxford, YALE, Princeton and so forth, and many other leading institutions in Europe, are the ones who have been responsible for unethical conduct which led to the financial crisis of 2008, the global financial crisis which the world is still reeling from.”

This participant cautioned that even the artificial intelligence, which so many aspire towards, remains lacking in terms of ethical considerations.

5.3.7.1.5 International Students

EGP-02 raised the matter of international students, taking an against-the-trend view to it. That is, despite the popular view that these serve as a source of increased revenue, this participant pointed to the brain-drain that the initiative tends to constitute to home countries. Citing an instance where he raised in a UK platform and context, which is equally relevant in the South African context, he asserted thus:

“So, what you're doing, by having a model that recruits people with scholarships to the UK, is you're weakening universities in Africa. And more importantly, you're accelerating the brain drain. Now, I argued, that is dangerous, not only for Africa, but also for the UK. Because if you take our global challenge at the moment, whether it's this pandemic, whether it's climate change, or whether it's inequality, you are going to need institutional capacity and human capabilities around the world. By draining these skills, you are weakening the ability of other parts of the world to address these global challenges.”

Perhaps what this perspective implies is that the increasing trend with regards to international students, which was referred to as having taken-off in China as well, needs to be embraced with caution.

5.3.7.1.6 Socioeconomic Transformation

Perhaps a socioeconomic transformation landscape dilemma, or alternatively an occupational health and safety hazard, EGP-03 lamented the student residences overcrowding in some HEIs. In this regard, he cited one particular university whereby students demand being registered, on the understanding that they would find themselves residence outside the university. Thereafter, once registered they start sharing rooms with other students, leading to situations where there would be up to eight students in one room. Such overcrowding not only adversely impacts the student success rate but has tended to attract criminality, including rape, within student residences, at times by students themselves.

Stretching this narrative of socioeconomic transformation, EGP-01 pointed out that the South African society has become the most unequal in the world in human history. He felt that such a situation could have been averted had there been a more deliberate effort in mitigating against it. Broadening the perspective in this regard, EGP-02 highlighted the fact that the competitive external environment has become destructive. That is, through bringing about two pools of HEIs, viz. those that attract students from poorer communities, and those that attract students from more affluent communities. He further lamented that even in terms of infrastructure or facilities, the HEIs fall into those categories, respectively.

5.3.7.1.7 Stakeholder-Centricity

An expectation gap, between the university and its community, was cited by EGP-03. That is, that instead of taking a view of how to contribute to the enhancement of the university's value proposition, the community tends to explore how they could benefit from their university. However, this participant believed that this mentality is

not directly linked to the HDUs; that there are variations in terms of expectations from one community to the other. Taking this stakeholder perspective, a step further, this participant referred to the poor coordination between the two phases of education in the country, which adversely impacts the student success rate, especially at first year level.

5.3.7.1.8 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Challenging the HEIs, EGP-01 cited some of the priorities in the external environment, which should be of attention to the higher education sector. These include climate change and environmental degradation, refugees, food security, the wars raging within some countries' borders as well as between various countries:

“Universities should be seized with those issues in the quest for answers. Those to me are the most fundamental issues because for any meaningful scholar of a university, it should demonstrate a meaningful dialogue between ideas and reality. In the absence of that, then their existence is in vain. So, to me, my starting point in terms of the external environment would be just that. What are institutions doing about that?”

5.3.7.1.9 Technology

Perhaps in a true entrepreneurial spirit, EGP-02 illuminated the positive element that emerged from the COVID-19 pandemic, which is the prominence of technology:

“Now that everybody is using digitized technologies, don't be surprised if these players start saying, ‘I will offer you a degree from the UK, online. That's going to change the game plan in quite fundamental ways, and we have just not understood this.”

Stretching the narrative, EGP-06 cited the largest distance learning HEI in the country as having failed to leverage on technology, despite this being part of its strategy value proposition. As such, this participant felt that HEI's competitive edge

is curtailed by such failure. Broadening the narrative, EGP-07 illuminated the risks that tend to punctuate the technology infused environment, viz. data security as well as cybersecurity.

5.3.7.1.10 Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity

The VUCA notion was raised from a three-dimensional context by participants. Specifically, EGP-01 focused on strategic agility and the forward-outlook posture. That is, that HEIs' curriculum tends to be informed by the past rather than what is anticipated to be trends of the future, doing so to curb rising unemployment. He also believed that such an approach would strengthen the entrepreneurship activities, whilst also increasing revenue-generated:

“In volatility, to be resilient and responsive to it, you need agility and creative innovation, adaptability and a dispersion of changes so that you are gyroscopic in your responses. You don't lose balance in trying to respond to those. And that has been the biggest challenge for many universities.”

Building on the unemployment perspective, EGP-03 lamented the seeming oblivion posture, of the country's youth, to advancements in the external environment. Specifically citing the endemic levels of fraud and corruption, the protracted strike action by students and the widening gap between seasoned professors and the incoming ones:

“We as a country, by the time we wake up, other countries will be way ahead of us, and it will be very difficult, again, to close that gap. So in every sphere, because our focus is not in the right place, we are forever increasing the gap between us and those that we are competing against. And we will find it difficult to compete in the market that our students are being prepared for and being sought after as good skills that can be imported, even by other countries to work across the globe. So I'm very worried about that aspect of it and the level of innovation and even just the awareness of the changes that are happening.”

5.3.7.2 Strategic Management Process

Reflecting broadly, on the strategic management process, EGP-05 described it as entailing the SWOT analysis of an organisation. She believed that in so doing a HEI would be best positioned to deepen its risk culture. The participants' focus was on two main phases, viz. strategic planning and the strategy implementation, which are included in this discussion.

5.3.7.2.1 Planning Phase

Clearly challenging the senior executive leadership team at South African public HEIs, EGP-02 lamented the inadequacy of distinctiveness amongst the strategic plans of these HEIs, when compared to one another. Believing that such a strategic plan is owned by the VC, rather than a DVC/VP or even a head of planning, he lamented the fact that despite respective deliberations such plans lacked distinctiveness.

5.3.7.2.2 Implementation Process

Five aspects were mentioned by the participants, as discussed below.

- Organisational Agility

Taking the physical infrastructure perspective, EGP-04 raised a concern about the continued entanglement in unnecessary terms and conditions of funders. Citing the example of disabilities, he felt that at times buildings are regarded as heritage, which means they may not be reconfigured to suit emerging needs, such as accommodating people with disabilities. Stretching that stifled sense of agility to the teaching and learning facilities, this participant believed that as a result there are students who end up leaving for better resourced HEIs.

Pondering on an issue that could be controversial given the socioeconomic dynamics of the country, EGP-03 challenged the HEIs to become more agile. In this context, he felt that academic offerings should be relatively fluid in the sense that

where the HEI finds itself without enough depth in terms of academic skills then the portfolio of academic offerings should be revisited. Thus, better suiting the capabilities of the HEIs, in line with available expertise within the academic staff. Stretching the narrative, this participant lamented the fact that despite rainfall trends becoming more favourable, from an agricultural activity point of view in the eastern parts of the Eastern Cape, the HEIs in the province do not take advantage of this.

- Distinctive Capabilities

Responding to a question as to why it is that HEIs are said to be inward-looking, yet they engage in international collaborations as an integral part of their business model, EGP-07 took a distinctive-capabilities view. In this regard he asserted that, as a point of departure, a typical HEI ought to look towards its own capabilities first, and seek to further strengthen those. Illustrating through the focal areas, in terms of the curriculum, this participant asserted thus:

"You must also invest in your own capacity and also design programmes that suit your particular circumstances. For example, I think Kwa-Zulu-Natal is probably bigger on tourism, Gauteng is bigger on mining and other things, Cape Town is bigger around marine status. Which is relevant there, I would think. So, I accept that international collaborations are important - and I'm not an academic - but in my view, you also need to offer something to the world."

Elaborating further, this participant pointed to the essence of asking the right questions, from a strategy point of view, to formulate a distinctive value proposition to the market:

"Look, I think strategic management should involve deliberating on pertinent deeper-level questions, which applies to a university too. It should ask itself. What kind of institution do we want to build? I mean, your content of subjects will follow what you want the institution to look like. One of the important areas, I mean, in strategy to a HEI is to say, "What kind of graduates do we want to produce?" and "these graduates, what are the important factors that we want to distinguish them with from, say, a graduate from University of Zululand?"

Elevating the narrative, EGP-02 pointed out the need for HEIs in South Africa to be more deliberate in terms of their distinctive mandates. Citing, as an example, the Birkbeck University of London, whose target market is working students, this participant proposed the same for University of South Africa. Thus, avoiding the current situation whereby University of South Africa tends to compete with HEIs like the University of Cape Town or the University of the Witwatersrand. Further, this participant felt that there is a need for differentiation, with some HEIs focused on undergraduate studies, whereas others prioritise research and post-graduate studies. The last consideration for this participant was on strategic plans of the HEIs, on which he reflected thus:

"The second, it seems to me at the heart of that strategic plan, is what do you want to be as a HEI? Or how are you different from anybody else? Because if all you are is exactly the same as somebody else, then you'll always be a pale imitation of the other. It is your distinctiveness that gives you your uniqueness, it is your uniqueness that gives you your competitive dynamic, not your similarity with somebody else."

Concurring, and yet broadening the perspective, EGP-03 focused on the distinctiveness that could emerge from TVET colleges. He believed that this could be nurtured through ensuring an articulate progression from TVET colleges to HEIs and ultimately the market. That way, ensuring that those who go the TVET colleges route are not confined to it.

- Graduates' Relevance to the Market

Concerns were raised with regards to the relevance of graduates, by EGP-07, who believed that academic programmes tend to be different from the needs of the market. He further believed that the solution lies in HEIs doing an introspection and refining the purpose of their existence. Concurring, EGP-05, felt that graduates are not equally impacted by the unemployment challenges in the market. That is, that those from higher-ranked universities are somehow shielded from the unemployment scourge.

Adopting a solution-seeking posture to this dilemma, EGP-04 identified an opportunity for HEIs to create job openings for their own graduates. Given the graduate employability dilemma, each HEI could create opportunities internally, e.g. in the form of student advisor vacancies within those universities. Otherwise, there is a risk of a graduates' movement uprising, rallying around '*#We Are Good Enough to Graduate from You But Not Good Enough To Be Your Employees*'.

Compounding the risk is the fact that some of these graduates are blacklisted in the credit bureau due to their failure to settle student fees. Similarly exploring another solution to this dilemma, EGP-03 cited the need to review the curriculum, with a view to aligning it with the changing needs of industry or the labour market. Broadening the perspective further, this participant identified two contributory factors to the challenge of graduate employability, viz.:

- Undue pressure on HEIs to deliver higher student throughput rates, which could lead to some students graduating without adequately acquiring the basic skills.
- The endemic trend of student protests, to a point where employers question the quality of graduates that such students become on graduation.

This participant also mentioned the fact that assessments end up being postponed repeatedly, due to student disruptions. That, at times, occurs so protractedly that everybody ends up being allowed access to write exams, even if they did not meet the minimum entry requirements to sit for such exams.

- International Students

EGP-02 took a somehow contrarian stance on a matter that has been raised commonly amongst most HEIs in South Africa, viz. that of international students. He reflected on a conversation he had with a fellow VC in the UK, whereby the view was that the UK's higher education sector is doing very well in attracting international students. Challenging his colleagues, he illustrated the brain-drain which arises, particularly within emerging economies, viz. that most of those students do not return to their home country after completing their studies. Demonstrative of how a true academic should carry herself/himself in an intellectual conversation, this participant went on to tap into data/evidence to illustrate his point. Specifically, he cited thus:

“Let me give you an example of the numbers. We don't have data for Africa in South Africa, sufficient data. But we do have data for other parts of the world, including India. More than 80% of students who leave India to come to the UK or the USA never go back. More than 80%. And, I can tell you, that number is probably even worse in the case of Africa.”

- Student Dropout/ and Throughput Rate

Student dropout rate, as a factor during strategy implementation within a HEI, emerged from EGP-03, who compared those students who came in with high-flyer grades against the average ones. Doing his comparison, based on experience at various HEIs, this participant pointed out that the average performers, during basic education phase, tend to adjust with more ease at university. This relates to the student dropout and/or throughput rate as well. Perhaps, this point to potential area for further research, by academics, within higher education?

5.3.7.3 Institutional Culture

EGP-02 provided some broad pointers on what institutional culture is, or is not, about. Firstly, he dismissed the notion that in a fully functional scenario there should be complete agreement amongst the university community on key matters. Rather, productivity in pursuit of the university's mandate should arise from a mutually supportive working environment than through a 'paradise on Earth' scenario.

Secondly, he raised a reminder that universities are not operating on an island, but are more an integral part of society. That, as such, the dynamics of society tend to play out within the universities. Citing the violence that tends to play out in society, this participant believed that it would be impossible to create and sustain a culture within universities that is different from that. Perhaps this perspective points to a need for HEIs to be part of the broader efforts aimed at shaping society rather than opting to become side-line critics. This could be undertaken as part of their Community Engagement efforts as well as university-industry partnership initiatives. Thirdly, this participant went on to look at institutional culture through the punitive lens. That is, that as much as it focuses on acculturation or infusing the values of

the university into its staff and students, it is also about implementing consequence management for those who disregard such values and principles.

Apart from the general discussion on the matter, five aspects were specifically mentioned.

5.3.7.3.1 Learning Organisation

Comparing public organisations broadly, and HEIs in particular, EGP-05 pointed out that these organisations tend to be laid back. Specifically, she cited the context of continual scanning of the external environment, tracking emerging trends, and formulating responsive strategies. That is, that HEIs tend to be laid back when it comes to adopting a posture that seeks to strengthen their competitiveness.

This is concerning, given that these HEIs are centres of learning who are the source of graduates that serve the market. How would they infuse cutting-edge knowledge if they do not embrace as much of the learning organisation posture? Of course, this is not to challenge the view expressed by this participant, given that it aligns with a view expressed by some of the thought leadership practitioners, as stated in Section 3.4 of this study.

Apart from the introduction remarks, a further two aspects were mentioned under this section.

- Business Continuity Management

EGP-06 raised the matter of business continuity-related lessons that emerged from the COVID-19 era HEIs had to embrace online learning more than ever before which served to also collapse the barriers further between distance education and face-to-face education. For instance, all 25 other HEIs engaged in the space that has traditionally been deemed to be the forte of the University of South Africa, the country's only formal distance learning HEIs. Stretching the narrative, this participant also cited a tendency by some executives to ignore professional advice emanating from functions such as IAF and ERM. This being the case particularly on matters pertaining to ethical governance.

- Change Management

Reflecting on the mergers that occurred across the country, EGP-04 believed there are deep-seated culture-related risks faced. In addition, despite milestones achieved within that institution, particularly by [a particular HEI's] immediate predecessor VC, there remains some work to be done. Concurring, EGP-05 cited what appeared to be one of the causes behind the risk of change resistance. In this regard, she pointed to the relatively long-tenure amongst staff within HEIs, which she believed leads to what she termed "in-bred perspectives that are hard to change". Concurring as well, EGP-01 cited the top brand in Africa (viz. University of Cape Town), according to the Times Higher Education rankings (refer to Section 2.3.1). Despite often leading, based on the annual international university rankings, she pointed to it as having an equally toxic culture. Elaborating, she cited resistance to transformation, in the context of both change and inclusivity, whilst embracing the notion of elite-collusions.

5.3.7.3.2 Organisational Performance

In this section, nine aspects were highlighted by the participants, as discussed below.

- Community Engagement

EGP-03 brought up a unique dynamic to the concept of Community Engagement; unique in the sense that it has not emerged from most other participants to this study. Focusing on mineral resources and, specifically, the case of the Xolobeni community in the Eastern Cape, this participant lamented the fact the economic potential of this community is being frustrated. In this regard, he cited the possibility of some within the community having been potentially bribed to drive a narrative that discourages the mining exploration for titanium. Thus, leading to not only the prohibition of mining initiatives, but the potential for research-focused collaboration between HEIs and that community.

- Corporatisation

Sounding a warning bell to those who regard ERM as a corporatisation of higher education tool, or an unnecessary initiative, EGP-02 drew a parallel with some of the revolutionaries in the world. Clearly deliberate, perhaps, in playing into that space, in challenging these 'revolutionary' corporatisation critics:

"Corporatisation does not mean you can't do management. How did you think Lenin managed to succeed in the Bolshevik Revolution? How do you think Caporale actually built the military to defend themselves? How do you think Kwame Nkrumah actually built the Ghanaian State, without management?"

This participant further pointed out that corporatisation was necessary to ensure that the social goals are effectively pursued by HEIs. Perhaps this poses a pertinent question to those who raise concerns about being held accountable, viz. whether or not their argument is sufficiently informed by context.

- Core Business

Sounding a warning bell as well, EGP-01 urged HEIs to focus on their core business, which is that of being thought leaders, lest they lose competitiveness. Pointing to this as one of the areas to be prioritised during the induction of academics, researchers and students, this participant went on to highlight a stakeholder contestation risk as the underlying cause of the shift from core mandate:

"It's how stakeholder contestation has removed the focus from the core mandate of a university, which is knowledge production, training, innovation and community outreach. It has moved it away, politicised that, corrupted that, diluted that because everything is subsumed under the stakeholder wars. Who gets what, when and how. And that, to me, is the greatest tragedy that, in a political sense, we have seen. Because then students are used as a pawn, lecturers are used as a pawn, employment becomes a proxy for some of these stakeholder wars. Every other thing gets undermined in that process because that has become a dominant culture."

- Competence

Four of the external experts raised concerns regarding the challenge of competence within HEIs in terms of both academics and non-academics. Specifically, EGP-07 asserted that unless academics are of high quality there is unlikely to be high calibre graduates emerging from a HEI. Concurring, EGP-04 wondered if the generational gap was not a factor. That is, that some of the professors who are nearing retirement still apply tools such as transparencies on an overhead projector rather than the latest digital tools. Thus, widening the knowledge gap between them and the students, rather than bridging it. Perhaps trying to diagnose this challenge of competence, EGP-03 raised two elements. There is a common problem of academics looking at universities more as sources of employment rather than centres of excellence. As a result, where they are recruited based on meeting the minimum requirements, once aboard, they do not prioritise their self-development; thus, rendering themselves incompetent over time, with the underlying cause:

“And given the way HEIs are run and how they are exposed to the union environment, it becomes very difficult to get rid of deadwood. You will find yourself with a sub-standard lecturer with sub-substandard output, because then those lecturers can't compete at the same level as their counterparts who are more advanced than them.”

Perhaps then, this talks to the point made by EGP-01, who seemed to be pointing to one of the solutions, viz.:

“You should have a very strong HR unit that can provide solid support without fear, favour nor prejudice to the employed entity. That is, an HR unit which is very clear about succession, promotion, talent development, talent identification, well being of the institution - understanding what is needed. If you have an HR unit whose greatest knowledge is to calculate leave days and beyond that, they do not assign themselves to the strategic outlook of the institution, they will forever be producing and misfiring in the production of that process.”

Building onto the support function competency narrative, EGP-07 illustrated based on the finance function. He warned against elevating a bookkeeper into a CFO role.

A final reflection, in this regard came from EGP-02 who broadened the challenge of competence onto an institutional culture space. The extract below bares reference:

"In the South African context, I worry about meritocracy being no longer an element of our organizational culture, because they correctly argue that meritocracy is racially defined. So the answer is to de-racialize notions of meritocracy, not to get rid of it. And that's the other debate that has become completely crazy in the South African context. And frankly, we haven't had the organizational maturity and the political maturity to have a serious discussion of it. We're in serious trouble."

- Competitive Advantage

Participant EGP-05 provided a historical perspective to the competitive advantage element, asserting thus:

"This competitiveness trend is influenced by long held views by the public about the nature of these institutions as well as the historical divide that existed under apartheid. The schooling system feeds into this, parental guidance feeds into this, as well as the labour market."

Lamenting the seeming widening gap between the HDUs, on the one hand, and the well-to-do ones on the other hand, EGP-07 cited the University of Fort Hare as an example. That is, that there was a point in time when it had the best academic-professors in veterinary science and was able to attract high calibre students – even at post-graduate level. Elaborating, this participant felt that, at the heart of this challenge, is not just the lack of resources, but mainly the lacklustre implementation drive on the part of the university leadership. And, that includes lack of a strong will to explore what it is that needs to be in the curriculum in order for students to be ready for the future market landscape. Contrasting that scenario, this participant pointed to a specific HEI:

"At one stage the [particular HEI] was looking to expand its offerings in health, thinking about starting a medical school. They already have other disciplines in the health sciences like podiatry and others. And, the big thing was that

the province backed them on the initiative to have another teaching institution that will provide for the people of Gauteng. ... So, that's my view about the competitiveness within the higher education area. Some of these universities are moving at great speed, but others are just not. I don't think they have grasped the basics of belonging into a global competitive space."

The scenario painted by this participant perhaps supports the view expressed by thought leadership practitioners as discussed in Section 2.3.1. Specifically, an assertion that HEIs ought to embrace international university rankings even if it is largely to energise themselves towards being more competitive. A further assertion, as mentioned under Section 3.5, is for HEIs to ensure the ERM function plays a more prominent role in the university's strategic management process.

- Competitive and Excellence Posture

This competitive/excellence posture emerged from at least two participants who, in their reflections, pointed out both the forces that drive it as well as those forces that seek to counter it within HEIs. For instance, EGP-02 cited a scenario that is counter to the excellence posture, illustrating partly thus:

"This idea that if we don't get something, we can burn the institution and somebody will have to make it possible, this is nonsensical behaviour. And frankly, we are indulging it to the point where it's become destructive to the nation. There is, that kind of behaviour does more destruction to the South African nation than anything the counter revolutionaries can do. ...We need to say this, we need the political courage to say this openly, and hold people accountable. And we don't. VCs don't do it, government ministers don't do it, the presidency doesn't do it."

Bringing up a different dimension to the counter-excellence posture, EGP-03 cited a common mistake by those in the leadership team within HEIs. That is, a tendency to retaliate against those whom they view as having been an irritation to their leadership tenure. Such retaliation shows through unduly preventing those from

ascending to specific positions to realise career aspirations. Correct in his conclusion, this participant asserted thus:

“And I think academics should really be neutral when it comes to that and if a person is competent and has got what it takes to fulfil a role, and they should be given a chance.”

In terms of illustrating scenarios that point to the excellence posture, EGP-02 cited the competition that exists amongst HEIs within South Africa. He stratified the competition three-fold, viz.:

- Amongst the top institutions which he mentioned as University of Cape Town, University of the Witwatersrand, Stellenbosch University, and the University of Pretoria.
- Amongst the second-tier institutions such as University of Johannesburg, University of Free State, University of KwaZulu-Natal, and others.
- Amongst the third-tier universities, which he referred to as the historically black universities.

Stretching the narrative, this participant further stated that, in addition to the specific KPIs, such competition focuses on the attraction of top black students. In this regard, he asserted partly thus:

“But for that 28% of matriculants coming out [of Basic Education System], there's become quite a major competition. this competition is also for top black students, because that has become an indicator for success, and for managing the politics around us. And so, there's a lot of that even Stellenbosch pushes for top black students, those were with capabilities. So, there's a lot of competition.”

Continuing with that narrative focused on shaping the excellence posture, EGP-03 remained with the talent management initiative of HEIs. Specifically advising HEIs on how to respond to the war for talent and scarce skills, he partly asserted thus:

“There needs to be a deliberate thought that where you've got people that you have developed and who have responded to the call for them to improve themselves, then they those ones get the preference to be placed ahead of the ones where they are competent to the same level and they are qualified to the same level then your own timber becomes much more important for you to place before anyone else that comes from outside.”

- Governance

Two of the participants focused on the Council structure of HEIs, whereas the third looked at governance through the ERM integration with strategy. Specifically, EGP-01 raised two issues with regards to Council, viz. integrity as well as expertise. In this regard, he believed that the strength of any HEI's Council depends largely on its insights into the complexities of the higher education sector. As such, they must take the due effort in terms of applying that knowledge to the university's process rather than seek to super-impose their experience in the business consulting space:

“Once you have that strategic Council, you are able to have a visionary Council that looks for an inspiring leadership. But if that Council is flat and has no experience of higher education and what is needed, then you might as well forget it because they are going to assert their muscle to the endangerment of the institution. And if they have a limited understanding of the university, they may use a hammer instead of a screwdriver. .. The secret cultures and the secret societies that exist around formal processes, that is where the rot is. And that is where strategic leadership is cannibalised.”

An additional dimension brought by this participant was that of integrity; that the Council should be inspired by integrity rather than rhetoric in guiding the university and deciding on a course of action. Concurring, EGP-07 believed that the Council must pride itself in terms of good governance. Citing the imperative to focus Council work on strategic matters, this participant also warned against engaging in the practice of unnecessarily multiple special/additional meetings.

- Organisational Structure

EGP-03 felt, reflecting with specific focus on one HEI where he served as a Council member, that this HEI was not able to manage a geographically dispersed campus model. Perhaps this points to a potential failure to adequately plan before strategic decisions are taken. For instance, a pre-study on the relationship between the head office and its satellite entities could potentially provide meaningful lessons learned? Alternatively, it is quite common within the higher education sector to have a multi-campus university. So, could it not be practical to tap onto the international collaborations, identify specific sister HEIs, and benchmark against them?

- Student-Centricity

Student-centricity emerged from at least three of the participants. For instance, EGP-07 looked at it through the integrity of assessments prism. In this regard, he highlighted the importance to involve the IAF in auditing the marks awarded to students for assessments, particularly for final year students. The purpose being to ensure quality graduates are delivered in the market. Concurring, EGP-05 articulated this priority thus:

"It is important that each institution, as it plans, it keeps in mind the destinations of the students served. This would entail keeping to the highest standard in the academic field, whilst preparing for the students for a softer landing in the labour market."

Stretching the narrative, EGP-03 focused on the challenges that tend to face a HEI that has geographically dispersed campuses. In this regard, he cited a situation where one such HEI had students disregarding 'local authority' and demanding to see the VC. Concluding on this matter, this participant felt that such a challenge is unique to such HEIs.

5.3.7.3.3 Open Dialogue

Reflecting on the aspect of personality cult and/or cronyism, EGP-01 cited a trend whereby the notion of excellence is being suppressed within the sector. Instead, a candidate that is deemed incompetent would be offered a position of influence, on

the understanding that that person would progress the agenda of his/her masters. Explaining further, this participant reflected, in part, thus:

“This starts reinforcing mediocrity, and celebrating mediocrity and thuggerism, and some few warlords move around throwing their weight to say, ‘we are in power’. In the end you have patronage systems. In such situations, forget about strategic leadership, it’s patronage networks for self-preservation. They are guided by their greed and stomachs, their self-interest and nothing else. They resent excellence and they cloud it out and chase it away wherever they see it because it threatens them. So, you can forget about innovation of anything because in that space, any excellence is seen as a threat, any independent thinking as an individual is seen as a threat.”

If universities are said to be microcosms of society, then one wonders to what extent this dilemma could be resolved within HEIs. In the context of threatened institutional autonomy, how practical is it for HEIs to, nonetheless, assert themselves and become centres of excellence?

5.3.7.3.4 Brand Reputation

Institutional brand reputation emerged as one of the factors that determine the extent to which a typical HEI would attract the best in terms of both students and academic staff. EGP-03 articulated this scenario, in part, thus:

“What we see is that, especially in the academic space where people are highly competitive, when they see that within university there is not much research activity and other things that stimulate them as academics, they abandon it. That is, they tend to move to those institutions that are well advanced in terms of research and other KPIs. And therefore you find a particular university that’s poor in terms of research outputs remains disadvantaged mainly because the good candidates or the good researchers don’t want to align themselves with it.”

He further asserted that this leads to an unequitable distribution of resources in terms of, especially, researchers and academics across the country's HEIs. Thus, leaving some HEIs in a perpetually constrained situation. Concurring, EGP-05 pointed out that this scenario applies within those HEIs within South Africa as well as in relation to international institutions. That is, that the competition for talent extends beyond the country's border. Perhaps international collaborations play some role, indirectly, in compounding this competition, viz. through exposing staff to other HEIs, making them attractive.

Taking a socioeconomic perspective, EGP-03 focused on the way student residences have been allowed to deteriorate within some HEIs, citing Walter Sisulu University – which is not amongst the sampled six case studies - as an example. In so doing, this participant was mindful of the fact that this detail is in the public domain already. Clearly with an adverse impact on institutional brand reputation, the following extract bares reference:

“There are people who steal other people’s personal belongings; they break into other people’s rooms at the student residences. It’s just the overcrowding, it’s a squatter camp type of setup. And that lends itself to those challenges where when someone from outside the university comes and looks at how these students are staying, questions arise as to whether management is cognisant of the human rights element. Yet, it’s not out of management’s own making, it’s not the university putting people into that space to stay like that. It allocates the room to only one person or two people, but they themselves actually create the environment because of other motives. So there is that problem.”

5.3.7.3.5 Vision, Mission and Values

In painting a picture of how institutional culture plays out, EGP-02 made a comparison between two HEIs he had been involved in within the country, during the early 2000s. At one HEI he had been a Council member, whereas later at another one he was part of the senior executive leadership team. The situation was, in making his point during a Council meeting deliberation, a student leader had

jumped onto the table. Thus, effectively seeking to intimidate those who held a view different from his. Yet a few years later, at the other HEI that same student leader's approach was more measured and composed, even though he remained a student activist:

“If he had behaved in any way, like he behaved in the [previous HEI], he would have been out of [the other HEI] in ten minutes. And he knew that. And he therefore adjusted his behaviour accordingly. Now, there's no rule that says at that [previous HEI] you can jump onto the table and threaten the VC, and at [the other HEI] it says you can't. It's a subliminal message. Internally, within the organization, there is an understanding about what is acceptable conduct and what isn't. And when you tolerate certain types of conduct, it gets entrenched; otherwise, it doesn't get entrenched.”

Perhaps, this talks more to both the tone-at-the-top as well as the extent to which the values of an organisation are practically socialised or lived within that organisation. That is, going beyond paying lip-service. Painting a scenario that is similar to the then-Durban University of Technology one, EGP-04 spoke of another university of technology within South Africa where nepotism was rife when it comes to employment opportunities within that HEI. He even went to an extent of referring to it as an ethnic problem.

Comprehending those challenges, two of the participants adopted a solution-seeking mode. For instance, EGP-07 pointed out the imperative to ensuring that the Council Chairperson, and the VC, are persons of integrity. Expectedly, that would then filter through the entire leadership team and the broader university community. Expanding on the potential solutions, participant EGP-01 pointed out that a university is not only a cognitive development space but a character moulding space too:

“The question is how to dismantle those cultures, how to identify those cultures, because they don't self-advertise, and then replace them with the positive culture. Because you still need an institutional culture, but that which is in line with the ethos of a knowledge institution. That is, the ethos of an innovative, cutting edge, responsive institution; the ethos of an ethical valued-based institution.”

5.3.7.4 Risk Culture

The participants mentioned 16 aspects during their interviews, each discussed below.

5.3.7.4.1 Academic Offerings

Raising the issue of academic offerings as an opportunity, EGP-07 highlighted the importance of these in terms of not only attracting sponsored students to the HEIs but graduates that are in demand by the market. He also reflected on a matter that points to collaborations amongst HEIs, whereby the [particular HEI] partnered with some of the HDUs. The idea was to help those improve on their academic offering for particularly those students that were keen on the chartered accountancy stream. Concurring, EGP-05 also raised the essence of revisiting academic offerings, particularly the curriculum, to making it more relevant for students.

Broadening the conversation, EGP-04 lamented the extent to which HEIs fail to prioritise the strategic imperative of academic offerings. Citing an example, he pointed to an opportunity for these HEIs to collaborate in offering some of the degrees. For instance, one university could be particularly strong in a specific module; it should be possible for students to enrol for that specific module at that HEI, whilst registered at a different HEI for their degree. Another example, a concern related to curriculum transformation, which he believed is happening at an appalling slow pace. Thus, impeding the development of scarce skills, by HEIs, for the market.

Perhaps taking an entrepreneur stance, EGP-03 raised the fact that modules do not attract the same amount of government subsidy. That is, the STEM ones are more attractive from a revenue generation standpoint, compared to the social sciences ones. So, his controversial, yet business-sense-making proposal was that universities need to be deliberate on the proportion of students in-take for social sciences intake, as compared with the STEM intake. Elevating his narrative, this participant then looked at the geographic location of HEIs as a source that should inform academic offerings, and reflected thus:

“And how do we adapt as a nation to things that are coming? And what can we do or change? And how can we respond to opportunities that are coming our way? For instance, we have got a coastline here that is untamed, all the way from Port Edward to East London. So you'd expect a university that sits on a coastal strip, like WSU [Walter Sisulu University], to have some kind of programs that are focused on responding to that issue; we need to be harvesting that ocean.”

5.3.7.4.2 Tone-at-the-Top

EGP-07 singled out integrity as a decisive factor in terms of setting the tone-at-the-top. He went on to link the organisational scandals and investigations that get conducted, to the lack of integrity amongst some within the top leadership. Concurring, EGP-05 asserted that those at the middle and lower ranks will merely adopt an ostrich approach and deal with what is within their sphere of operation.

5.3.7.4.3 Accountability

Taking a macro perspective, EGP-07 looked at accountability from a country level. In this regard, he felt that there is hope, based on the commitment expressed by the current President, in relation to fighting corruption. That, of course, it is through prosecution of those alleged to have engaged in corruption which will provide a sense as to whether the current tenure is not tolerant like the predecessor one was. Bringing the narrative a level down, to HEIs, this participant pointed out that such sense-of-accountability requires that governance bodies, like Council, are strengthened. That is, doing so in a manner that makes it difficult, if not impossible, for any Council member to condone actions that constitute an ethical breach. Concurring, EGP-03 cited a reality that at times Council deliberations veer-off the core mandate, leading to a situation where the agenda includes operational matters and/or factional issues. He attributed this to a tendency by some Council members serving at that structure at the mercy of those who deployed them. Thus, they focus on protecting themselves rather than serving the HEI.

Stretching the narrative, EGP-02 highlighted two issues, viz. the destruction of university property as well as the ownership of the university strategic plan. Firstly, he believed that a culture of entitlement has gone to a point where the demands people make and how they pursue them has gone too far. That is, gone to a point where these seeming progressive people engage in behaviour which even the 'far-right', within South Africa, had never gone to. Unfortunately, he further believed, the voices against this trend are not enough, nor are they vocal enough to make an impact. Secondly, on the strategic plan, this participant reflected, in part, thus:

"The second, and here I am different, is that the strategic plan should be led by the VC. Yes, you have a backroom office that does all of the data analysis, that does all of that, but the leadership of a strategic plan has to fundamentally come from the VC. You have to be at the very heart of determining and negotiating that plan with the key stakeholders."

5.3.7.4.4 Collaboration

Seemingly pointing to a need for collaboration amongst various role players, viz. society, industry, and the PSET, EGP-03 lamented the continued negative perception about TVET colleges. He believed that the overcrowding at HEIs, including at times stampedes during registration periods is due to poor communication. That is, the critical role of TVET colleges, including a career path that could lead to one being a university graduate, is not adequately articulated by key role players. Stretching the narrative to a global stage of HEIs, EGP-02 raised what strategy thought leadership practitioners often refer to as cooperation. Perhaps this is because he currently operates outside South Africa, after having been a VC to at least two local HEIs. In this context, he believed that HEIs should be partnering with one another, across countries and across geographic regions, reflecting, in part, thus:

"So, my argument has been international, viz. that we need to change the game plan. Our institution [in the UK] is not to compete with Wits

[Witwatersrand University] or UCT [University of Cape Town], our institution is to partner with them to offer joint degrees and joint research - to do joint credentials. Because you can't teach an Africa, an Asia, and a Middle East from London. You must partner with them. So that's the argument we have. But I'll be honest with you, we're a lone voice and not a dominant voice."

5.3.7.4.5 Open Dialogue

The only one to, in a sense, challenge the notion of contrarian views, EGP-01 questioned the basis on which such could be expressed, thus broadening the context for this research study in this regard. Specifically, he pointed out the importance of context, given that even dictators who lead a country or an organisation are in fact standing against popular view or majority view. He further highlighted the fact that whilst debate may occur, there is often a possibility of decisions having already been taken prior to the governance meetings. That is, that some of the role-players tend to decide in smaller groups on what the decision should be on a specific critical matter. Thus, this is another way of stifling debate within HEIs.

Painting a differing context across the higher education sector, EGP-04 narrated an experience he had through the various roles he played in different HEIs. Specifically, that two of the universities of technology he served were intolerant of debate, particularly contrarian views. The VCs at both these HEIs were autocratic. He then contrasted that with two other HEIs that he served where even deeply contentious issues could be debated openly and without fear of reprisal. Unfortunately, some of those debates go even to an extent of seeking to challenge the need for a policy that is being developed. Thus, leading to poor turnaround times in the approval process for such policies. EGP-05 expressed a strong view against any attempt to stifle debate within a HEI, asserting that this would stifle its 'DNA' as a questioning organisation and render it stagnant.

In addition, this participant (viz. EGP-01) raised a concern about the difficulty experienced by ERM practitioners in highlighting concerns pertaining to Council, viz.:

“Many risk managers also would fear highlighting that the composition of Council may create a risk down the line, because they fear being told that now you are undermining your bosses and employers. And sometimes even the risk of top management being at war with each other, factionalism. Many people would say, ‘I see this thing, but I don’t want to give it a name. it’s too big for me and I hope one day somebody will say it.’”

There are other scenarios that tend to pose a risk to HEIs, but which rarely find their way onto the institutional risk registers, viz. ERM practitioners are reluctant to raise these. For instance, the risk of fragmented leadership within a HEI, the risk of a foreign national who, once employed, brings in more fellow (foreign) nationals. Alternatively, research focus that tends to align with the nationality of a researcher within a HEI rather than the HEI’s priority areas, which would naturally be linked with the country’s priorities.

5.3.7.4.6 Future-Oriented

EGP-06 pointed to the 4-IR as one of the pointers to a HEI’s commitment to being future-oriented. Citing the largest distance education provider in the country, this participant felt that that HEI has not geared itself up to embrace the 4-IR. Broadening the narrative, EGP-07 called on HEIs to infuse benchmarking into their value proposition. In this regard, he felt that failure to do so is part of the reason that those parents who can afford, financially, tend to take their children to those HEIs that are believed to be more future-oriented. Elaborating further, this participant went on to cite the University of Fort Hare as having failed to consistently invest in agriculture, yet this was an area of its competitive edge. Concurring, EGP-01 believed that the notion of being future oriented is even more imperative for HEIs than it is for other organisations:

“Well, I do think that HEIs ought to be most innovative and responsive. They should, therefore, not only change, but anticipate change; analyze trends and have future foresights on a higher degree than other entities. Because by their very nature, they are knowledge generating institutions; they are knowledge management institutions; they are training institutions.”

5.3.7.4.7 Hierarchical Positioning of Enterprise Risk Management and Internal Auditing

Illuminating the significance of the candidacy profile, as priority over the actual hierarchical positioning of a role, EGP-01 looked at both the technical competence and the personal touch of the incumbent. Specifically, with regards to the CRO:

“To me, one, it would have to be a person of a particular character and personality attributes. Because being a Chief Risk Officer, you're compressed between many role players who may be upset when you start highlighting certain risks. You must also be a person who can persuade and influence different role players to be risk owners so that you don't hog into that space of being the one who highlights the risks, who develops the response, who does everything. Some people think that being a chief risk officer, you are a chief risk custodian as well. and that prevents the permeation, the infusion, the mainstreaming of risk into all different spaces of the university itself. So that to me, is the personality.”

Perhaps, the picture painted above indictates one way to arrest the tendency for IAF and ERM functions, respectively, being overly concerned about their hierarchical positioning. That is, they would then understand the reality that the extent of their impact on the organisational environment depends, to a large degree, on their personal profile as well.

5.3.7.4.8 Coordination of Interdependencies

Looking at interdependency through the prism of how the two phases of education, viz. basic education and the higher education environments, EGP-02 brought up the proportion of high school qualifiers that qualify to register at HEIs. Specifically citing this proportion to be a meagre 28%, he asserted that this was too low particularly given the number of those in the schooling system. Stretching the narrative, EGP-04 looked at the university-community type of interdependency. In this regard, he cited a seeming inconsistency in that whilst universities talk about decolonisation of higher education, the elitist agenda which forms their foundation continues. For example, HEIs encourage students to pursue the highest possible qualifications, and insurance companies grant attractive discounts on premiums for those. Yet, this does not bode well from a university-community partnership perspective, particularly given the literacy rate across South Africa at this stage.

5.3.7.4.9 Integrated Posture

Painting the integrative posture, with strategy as a rallying point, EGP-06 brought up the various elements within a HEI that must be pieced together with strategy. In this context, he highlighted the notion that 'structure follows strategy', the importance of ensuring alignment of systems and processes, and the calibre of staff that serve at the HEI. Stretching the narrative onto a broader context, EGP-04 brought up the need to practically integrate the PSET. The idea being to make it feasible for TVET colleges to serve as a bridge to HEIs for those who did not meet the entry requirements to enter HEIs the first-time. Perhaps, what this perspective implies is that as a country, despite having a collective term, viz. PSET, there have not been adequate measures in place to integrate the three phases of PSET.

Stretching the narrative to institutional response to organisational risks, EGP-02 pointed out the importance of deliberating on mitigating actions. Elaborating, he went on to assert that these must take place at not only an institutional level but be cascaded down, through to departmental level within the HEI.

5.3.7.4.10 Failure as Source of Innovation

In the context of innovation-informed research, which is one of the primary focal areas of HEIs, as well as broader innovation as a source of competitive edge, EGP-04 commented. Specifically taking the university-industry partnerships perspective, this participant pointed out that South African HEIs have fallen behind. In this context, he cited not only exemplary countries but also one other intervention some countries implement, asserting thus:

"So, the collaboration between universities and industry is not at its best. The German model is characterized by closer collaboration between industries and universities, with interest in focused skills development. If you go to Norwegian countries, you will find the same, and that's where, when I registered for a Doctoral degree, I'd have two supervisors. One which is an academic supervisor and the other being a supervisor from industry, a very renowned businessman whose purpose actually is to make sure that this piece of paper that I developed would give some kind of a patent that companies could apply. So, the university gets the copyright, but the industry gets the patent."

Concluding, he pointed out that this is how the initiative of entrepreneurship, which is gripping some HEIs, could be inculcated within South Africa.

5.3.7.4.11 Inward-Looking

Perhaps demonstrating the extent to which HEIs could become inward-looking, EGP-03 cited situations where VCs would get personal in responding to challenges. That is, they lose focus on the broader university priorities as outlined in the strategic plan. Concurring, EGP-05 also asserted that HEIs are generally inward-looking organisations. Paradoxically though, she attributed this posture, in part, to the fact that decision-making is driven through committees, viz. Senate and Senex. Elevating this narrative onto a country level, EGP-02 pointed to the brain-drain that occurs because of international students. That is, that South African universities

tend to be overly consumed with competing amongst themselves yet losing focus on the bigger picture. Illustrating, this participant went on to poke thus:

"Watch the number of doctors we're losing, watch the number of nurses we're losing, watch the number of accountants we're losing. And these are not white accountants, white doctors. I walk in London. I'm seeing black South African nurses working here. And so, there's a fundamental shift that is happening globally. London by the way, has 44% people of colour. 46% of people are from outside the UK, in London alone. So, what you see is a fundamental shift."

5.3.7.4.12 Quality Assurance

Reflecting on a matter that links up strongly with the relevance of graduates to the market, EGP-03 highlighted a concerning practice in some institutions. That is, a tendency to allow all students 'free' access to sitting for exams, viz. regardless of whether they met the minimum requirements in relation to continual assessments during the year. Worse still, some of those students would seek audience with Council and point to non-admittance to exams as a discriminatory act by the university. Thus, touching on academic integrity too.

5.3.7.4.13 Risk Appetite

Referring to the importance of risk management, EGP-07 illuminated the concept of risk appetite. In this regard, he pointed out the importance of HEIs being aware of how much risk they should be taking. Further, that to fully implement such concept there should be an ERM framework that guides the ERM process, including the risk appetite. Concurring, EGP-06 also pointed out the relevance risk appetite in the pursuit of the overall university strategy.

5.3.7.4.14 Stakeholder-Centricity

EGP-01 pointed to the fierce nature of stakeholder-centricity, referring to HEIs as stakeholder contestation zones rather than an intellectual space. That this happens

to a point where even Councils have become infested with personal interest rather than the delivery of university strategy. Similarly, student leaders end up being offered a job within the same HEI they were leading unjustified protests in – in the name of ‘growing our own timber’. Yet, according to this participant, they are decomposing such timber, or making it rotten. Looking at the stakeholder-centricity posture from a different angle, EGP-04 focused on Community Engagement, which is another HEIs’ priority area. He raised the importance of this being a mutually beneficial partnership, viz. much as HEIs support communities there should be some benefit for HEIs emanating from such partnerships.

5.3.7.4.15 Risk Maturity

Two comments that talk to risk maturity of HEIs were made by two participants, respectively. EGP-07 pointed to the existence of the ERM framework, including its implementation as part of processes aimed at mitigating risks as being of relevance. He believed that this provides guidance as to what level of risk a HEI could take. EGP-02 pointed to the common tendency for HEIs to have many risks that they are managing. Citing the example of a HEI that he leads, in the UK, which initially had just over one hundred risks, he referred to those as a moan-list. He went on to assert that most HEIs tend to view ERM as a tick box exercise. Perhaps, this explains the reason why DHET now calls for the ‘top ten risks’, which aligns with a thought leadership view, viz. that the further beyond ten, the less strategic some of those risks would be.

5.4 Triangulation of Case Studies’ Findings

Depicted in Figure 5.2 below is a graph that reflects on the six case studies’ findings, laying the foundation for developing the Risk Culture Maturity Framework that is the main research objective of this study. The detail of the information on Sections 5.4.1 to 5.4.4 is presented in Annexure 4. The calculation of the scores above was done in a basic manner, based on the colour coding as per Annexure 3, viz. High-Level Summary of Risk Culture Maturity Assessment per Case Study. Each colour code

carries a weight, ranging from 0 to 5. These were then simply added, and an average score determined.

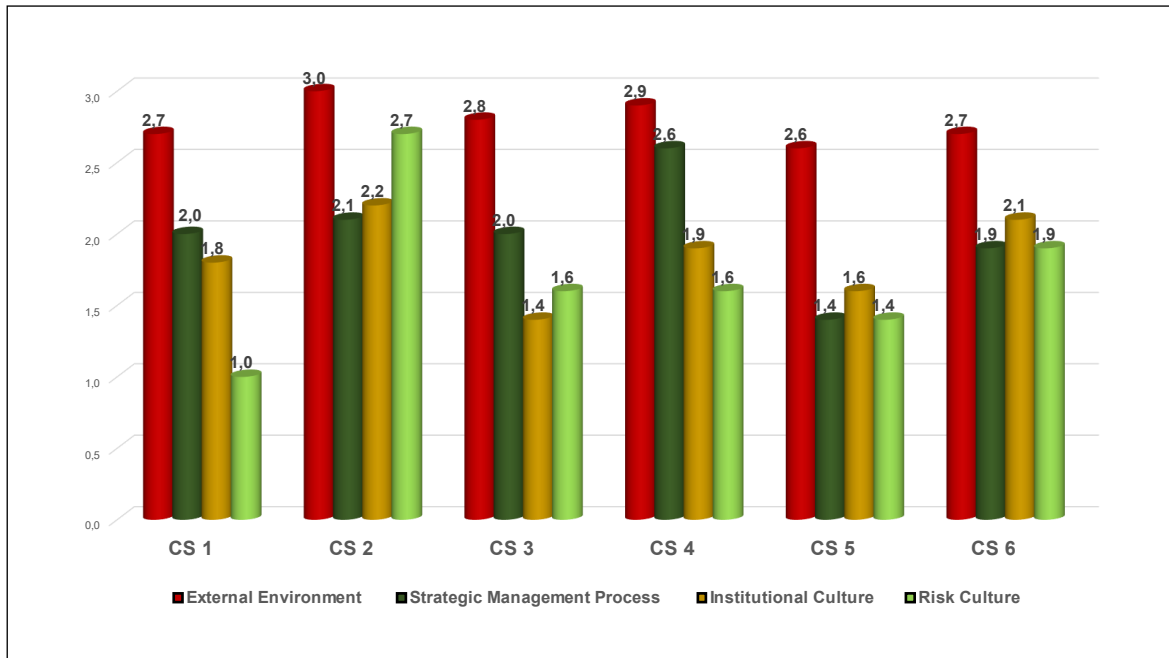


Figure 5.2: Case Study Findings Comparison

There was moderate maturity within each of these case studies, in terms of their understanding of the competitive external environment, viz. the overall rating for each case study was hovering around 3. This was followed by the strategic management process. The literature review had also pointed out a similar picture. Specifically, [Gunsberg et al, \(2018:1315\)](#) called on HEIs to be agile in terms of responding to changes in the teaching and learning, as well as the research spaces. Concurring, [Shadnam \(2020:831\)](#) points to the fact that since HEIs have a responsibility to deliver graduates that are destined to shape the future then HEIs have an added responsibility to track changes in the external environment and respond appropriately thereto. Thus, positioning the HEIs to embracing the platform university stature, which amongst others, implies an appetite for the search of solutions to wicked problems, which [Alexander and Manolchev \(2020:1149\)](#) referred to.

Similarly, in the context of the strategic management process, [Angiola et al \(2018:748\)](#) highlight what seems to be a relative immaturity issues, viz. that HEIs tend to focus more on operational activities than strategy. And, goal setting of HEIs

tends to fail the SMART principles (Angiola *et al*, 2019:389), with academics being reluctant to adequately get involved in the strategic planning activities (Angiola *et al*, 2019:390).

The ratings per this Figure 5.2 should be read in conjunction with Annexure 3, which provides a drill-down into each of the four main themes contained in this graph. In addition, the researcher has reflected on each of the case studies below, which confirm the key messages that emerged during the literature review.

5.4.1 Reflection on Each Case Study

Researcher Reflections on Case Study 1

- **RR-1.1:** Seven sub-themes emerged from the interviewees, in relation to the competitive external environment. Fraud and Corruption was highlighted in the context of two closely inter-linked areas of the university, viz. procurement and physical infrastructure. Thus, aligning with views expressed in the literature review about the HEIs in South Africa (Curlewis, 2023; Jansen, 2023:192; Madondo, 2023:1). Of concern was the view expressed in relation to emerging technologies, viz. that some academics do not embrace the notion of emerging technologies such as the 4-IR. It potentially points to the inward-looking posture given the imperative to deliver graduates that are relevant to the market – a posture similarly alluded to by (Miller, 2021:85).
- **RR-1.2:** None of the participants were able to articulate all three phases; as far as planning is concerned, the consultative element came out strongly, with some focusing on the external stakeholders whilst others mentioned internal stakeholders. Still, indicative of the diversity of opinion, there was one participant who believed that not enough was being done in terms of internal consultations.

The undue jostling for positions, accompanied by infiltration of the process by external parties, does not bode well from a maturity perspective for this case study.

- **RR-1.3:** The fear-factor seems to be quite strong, to a point of adversely impacting on creativity and innovation, something that is quite unfortunate for a HEI that has prioritised entrepreneurship for its students. Compounding this relative immaturity is mistrust. This aligns with the view expressed by [Bhana and Suknunan \(2020:412\)](#), who highlight a poor ethics-embrace within South African HEIs, with [Badenhorst and Botha \(2022:11\)](#) pointing to bullying and intimidation as another factor.

Researcher Reflections on Case Study 2

- **RR-2.1:** Interviewees identified 10 sub-themes, or factors, that influence the competitiveness of the external environment, which was the highest in comparison with the other five case studies. Perspectives expressed on two of those sub-themes, viz. Institutional Autonomy as well as the Integrated Posture, pointed to interviewees' deeper-analysis. Hence, there is a potential opportunity for more enriched deliberations during strategic conversations within this HEI, which could ultimately lead towards a more matured risk culture. Similarly, in terms of Stakeholder-Centricity, this is the only case study wherein professional and regulatory bodies as well as sponsors/donors were mentioned as part of the stakeholders. Thus, aligning with the literature review, specifically the views by some authors ([Nordberg & Andreassen, 2020:178](#); [Hair et al, 2019:644](#)).
- **RR-2.2:** In terms of the strategic management process, the view expressed by one of the interviewees is quite concerning, viz. that there are some who do not even understand the strategy of this university. The researcher concern is arising because a strategy is supposed to be a rallying tool for the entire university community, to coordinate interdependencies and enhance organisational performance.

In addition, there were three sub-themes whereon this HEI seemed to be falling short, viz. the Integrity of Assessments, the Talent Management Effectiveness,

and Socioeconomic Transformation. All three have an adverse impact on both the broader institutional culture and the risk culture within the university.

- **RR-2.3:** In terms of risk culture, a total of 15 sub-themes were raised, the majority of these deemed to be at a 3-rating. Worth noting as well is that both sub-themes that talk to leadership were rated well; these are the Tone-at-the-Top as well as the Accountability sub-themes.

Researcher Reflections on Case Study 3

- **RR-3.1:** Only four sub-themes emerged within this case study, in relation to how its interviewees understood the competitive external environment. However, the views expressed pointed to a relatively mature level in terms of understanding such environment, e.g. the viewing of a potential collapse of the NSFAS as a business continuity management risk for this HEI. Similarly, the perspective that being a recently established HEI implies being ‘born-digital’ points to the entrepreneurial posture of this HEI.
- **RR-3.2:** Punctuating the strategic management process are three sub-themes which this CS seems to be not doing well at, viz. the Governance Structures, the Research Outputs and/or Impact, and the Socioeconomic Transformation. The potential overreach by oversight structures constitutes a significant risk and could ultimately weaken the risk culture within this HEI. Similarly, to have not yet established a fully-fledged office focused on the generation of third-stream income points towards relative immaturity in terms of entrepreneurial posture within this case study. The overall 2-rating points to relative immaturity in relation to the strategic management process within this case study.
- **RR-3.3:** The Institutional Culture was punctuated by four sub-themes wherein this case study rated immature. These were the Managerialism, the Change Management, the KPIs, and the Vision and Values. Hence, the overall rating of 1.4 for the Institutional Culture. This aligns with the literature review, to extent highlighted by [Vlachopoulos \(2021:12\)](#), whose British focused study pointed out

that despite being experts in various fields, HEI executive leaders remain low on change management.

- **RR-3.4:** Risk Culture also fell below the 2-rating mainly because of five sub-themes whereon interviewees believed this case study was not doing well. These are Contrarian Views, Policies and Procedures, Reporting Structure of the IAF/ERM, Stakeholder-Centricity, as well as Tone-at-the-Top. The latter sub-theme aligns with governance failure related scandals which were pointed out during the literature review as having punctuated the HEIs ([Mpati et al, 2023:31](#); [Kakabadse, Morais, Myers, & Brown, 2020](#)).

Researcher Reflections on Case Study 4

- **RR-4.1:** The competitive external environment perspectives were punctuated by two themes that were unique in that they have not featured in other case study interviewees. These are Xenophobia and the UNSDGs. Perhaps the relevance of the former, in particular, is that it has some linkage with international students, which is one of the priority areas for a typical HEI. Of the seven sub-themes raised by interviewees, only the UNSDGs was cited as a pain-point for this case study. Two publications ([Lee & Sehoole, 2020:308](#); [Herman & Kombe, 2019:518](#)), in the literature review, point to xenophobia as being a dampening factor in relation to efforts aimed at attracting international students into South African HEIs. Further, the UNSDGs as a strategic priority tends to be hampered due to poor coordination of interdependencies, particularly for community engagement related projects or initiatives of a typical HEI ([Shabalala & Ngcwangu, 2021:1588](#)).
- **RR-4.2:** Regarding the strategic management process, none of the interviewees reflected on the phases thereof. Perhaps, this, again points to the fact that HEIs do not place much emphasis on strategy in broad terms; rather they focus on strategic planning which serves as a basis for the Annual Performance Plan. Talent Management was another theme wherein this case study seemed to be struggling, which potentially means challenges in the delivery of strategy as well

as deepening the university's risk culture. The continued lag by some of South African HEIs in pursuit of the National Development Plan goal of the minimum threshold of 75% of academic holding a PhD, emerged during literature review (DHET, 2020). Together with the continues incidents of bullying and intimidation, these point to talent management inadequacies within HEIs (Badenhorst & Botha, 2022:11).

- **RR-4.3:** Closely linked with Talent Management, as pointed out in strategic management process, the Institutional Culture views were punctuated by 'unsurprising' concerns. These are Bullying and Intimidation, the Excellence Posture, as well as the Coordination of Interdependencies. Hence, these could have an adverse impact on risk culture as well.
- **RR-4.4:** For risk culture, there was only one sub-theme in which this case study seemed to be doing well, viz. Accountability/Leadership. Unfortunately, interviewees felt that this case study was not doing well in four other sub-themes. These were Data Analytics, which were hindered by poor integration between systems utilised. Similarly, the poor Coordination of Interdependencies as well as an In-ward Looking posture could hamper the risk deepening efforts.

Researcher Reflections on Case Study 5

RR-5.1: Three of the sub-themes cited as influencing the competitive external environment were pointed out as weaknesses of this particular HEI. Specifically, Emerging Technologies as a necessary part of academic offerings was found to be lacking – the same applied regarding Technology. Similarly, private HEIs were believed to be ahead of this case study and other public HEI, in terms of operational efficiencies and quality of service. On the other hand, a unique sub-theme that emerged was the VUCA, which was raised in the context of vaccines coming from outside South Africa, as well as the shrinkage of geographic distance because of being able to enrol for a further-afield based HEI. The literature review, Polimeni and Burke (2021:162), highlight various initiatives that could be undertaken to enhance the uptake of emerging technologies within HEIs.

RR-5.2: The strategic management process focused sub-themes emerged as pointing to relative immaturity within this case study. Specifically, of the eight sub-themes pertaining to the implementation phase of the strategic management process, five showed up as weaknesses within this case study. They are Business Continuity Management, Distinctive Capabilities, HDUs, Organisational Agility, Student Dropout Rate. None of the remaining sub-themes were prominent. Literature review points to HEIs' inadequacies in relation to student dropout rate, viz. the South African ones continue to have a low graduation rate (Styger *et al*, 2015:1) whilst those in other countries do not have a long-term intervention to mitigate against this risk (Gupta *et al*, 2018). Similarly, business continuity management featured in the context of instability in key positions during the literature review (Vanichchinchai, 2023:339; Randaree *et al*, 2012:486).

RR-5.3: Perhaps pointing to a relatively immature Institutional Culture, only one of the five constituent themes – Vision, Mission, and Values – has shown a 3-rating in terms of maturity. According to interview perspectives, this case study has failed the Learning Organisation posture on various fronts, e.g. failure to seize opportunities, inadequacy of its entrepreneurial flair, the inadequacy of its implementation of lessons learned, the failure to elevate the impact of the training budget, and inability to sufficiently inculcate consequence management. Reflecting in the literature review, Mzimba, Smidt and Motubatse (2022:137), lament the adverse impact that poor consequence management has on the HEI's control environment.

RR-5.4: Risk Culture is punctuated by 16 sub-themes, with 62.5% (viz. 10) of those pointing towards a weakness for this case study. These include Accountability/Leadership, the Contrarian Views, the Positive Outlook on Risk-taking, as well as Tone-at-the-Top. Illuminating the imperative for staff to speak out against acts that could create a toxic working environment (Lee, 2023:151; Asher & Wilcox, 2022:229), others (Bryant & Sharer (2021:83) further warn against the risk of mistakenly encouraging staff to give only good news. Academics tend to be muted, have a silent voice, under such circumstances (Lee, 2023:151).

Researcher Reflections on Case Study 6

- **RR-6.1:** Their Competitive External Environment was viewed through only six sub-themes, one of those being Institutional Autonomy, which was raised in the context of local responsiveness. That is, sensitivity to the local context and carving the organisational strategy in line with local realities. Another uniqueness was their definition of Financial Sustainability, which they viewed through the lens of battling to attract the scarce skills due to budgetary constraints. The literature review, through [Shabalala and Ngcwangu, \(2021:1587\)](#) illuminated essence of there being a rapport between HEIs and the communities they serve.
- **RR-6.2:** The rating of strategic management process was pulled down, in terms of maturity, by four of the seven sub-themes pertaining to the Implementation Phase, including Research Output and/or Impact, the Internationalisation, as well as the Entrepreneurial Flair of the university. It is worth noting that of the four interviewees from this case study, two of them were not as elaborative in their views, despite being an integral part of the senior leadership team of this university. The entrepreneurial flair came through during the literature review, with [Ferreira \(2020:1856\)](#) encouraging HEIs to support students transition from being hybrid entrepreneurs, to running their business on a fulltime basis.
- **RR-6.3:** Institutional Culture showed relative immaturity in that it ranked below the 3-rating. Distinguishing perspectives relate to Community Engagement, which featured more in this case study than the others, and the fact that the performance management process has been rolled out across hierarchical levels of this case study.
- **RR-6.4:** Risk Culture was reflected upon through the lens of 14 sub-themes, with the three lowest being Academic Offerings, Contrarian Views, as well as Risk Maturity. Perhaps part of the reason for a relatively lower maturity level is the fact that this case study's ERM function has been established only recently, whilst on the other hand, the IAF is outsourced, with no CAE position internally. Yet market practice, as highlighted by ([Cossin, 2021:56; Mishra, 2019:178](#))

during the literature review, points to the need to elevate the hierarchical reporting of the Chief Risk Officer, viz. to the Chairperson of the Board or the Risk Committee.

Researcher Reflections on External Group of Practitioners

- **RR-7.1:** The higher education sector falls short in terms of tracking market trends in the external environment and responding optimally to those. Specifically, none of the 10 identified sub-themes were believed to be a particular area of strength for the South African public HEIs. For eight of the 10, the EGPs held a view that pointed to HEIs being of relatively low maturity level, despite being knowledge institutions and supposedly centres of thought leadership.
- **RR-7.2:** The strategic management process falls just below the 2-rating in terms of maturity level, with key concerns expressed by the EGPs in relation to particularly the four sub-themes. Effectively, their view of the higher education sector is that strategic plans lack distinctiveness.
 - Strategic plans of respective HEIs tend to lack in terms of uniqueness or distinctiveness.
 - Academic offerings that tend to be rigid, instead of responding to the financial needs of the university, particularly in light of the fact that STEM modules, for instance, attract more government subsidy compared to social sciences ones.
 - Compromised relevance of graduates to the market, compounded by undue pressure to deliver higher student throughput rates.
 - Short-sited view on international students, which fails to recognise the inherent brain-drain for home countries.
- **RR-7.3:** Institutional Culture that is constrained in relation to three of the five main focal areas, viz. Transparency and Dialogue, Brand Reputation, as well as Visions, Mission and Values. Similarly, Organisational Performance is punctuated by 55.6% of the sub-themes that are 1-rated in terms of maturity.

- **RR-7.4:** Risk Culture is punctuated by just over 68% of sub-themes falling at the lowest rating in terms of maturity, with none of the remainder sub-themes being rated as matured. Fortunately, this scenario does align, to a very significant degree, with how the six case study's viewed themselves during interviews.

5.4.2 Reflection on Themes

5.4.2.1. Competitive External Environment

It is evident that in all the six case studies there is awareness of the competitive external environment, with interviewees raising themes that were common in some instances and those that were different. There was relative maturity within the case studies, based on the key factors identified by the interviewees. Hence their scores that ranged from 2.6 to 3. Commonalities, which were aligned with what emerged widely during the literature review were as follows:

- a. Both Financial Sustainability as well as Institutional Autonomy showed up in all six case studies, even though the institutional autonomy was referred to as Policy (Un)Certainty in CS1.
- b. Technology was the second most prevalent, featuring in the form of infrastructure that aids online teaching and learning and/or emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and 4-IR that inform the curriculum reviews.

Further, depictive of diversity of perspectives, five themes were unique in that they were raised by only one case study, respectively. These were the massification of higher education (CS1), the mergers and acquisitions (CS2), talent mobility (CS3), UNSDGs (CS4), and VUCA (CS5).

5.4.2.2 Strategic Management Process

There was relative immaturity on this front, with none of the case studies achieving a mid-point of 3; the highest performer being CS4 at level 2.6. Some of the underlying key messages in this regard include the following:

- a. **Phases of the Strategic Management Process**: Some of the interviewees were either not able to articulate the constituent phases of the strategic management process, or made reference to only one or two. Thus, it appears that HEIs place more effort on the development of the annual performance plan and its targets than the broader activity of strategy development and refinement activity.
- b. **Planning Phase**: Two case studies were particularly distinctive on this front. Specifically, CS1 was the only one that illuminated the involvement of external stakeholders – government and industry - in the university’s strategic planning exercise. In addition, four of the six interviewees mentioned this phase of the strategic management process, focusing on the consultative nature thereof. Further, CS2 brought in the perspective of the linkage which this phase has with the country’s national goals and the DHET Act 101 of 1997. Again, five of the six interviewees referred to this phase.

CS3’s uniqueness was the fact that their most recent strategic planning was informed by external environmental scanning that was led by two retired academics, who previously held DVC/VP roles at other HEIs.

- c. **Strategy Implementation Phase**: The number of sub-themes raised by each case study ranged from five to eight, with the main determining factor on maturity being more how interviewees felt each sub-theme raised played out in their own HEI. In this regard, although CS4 raised the fewest sub-themes, viz. five, the reason it scored highest in comparison to other case studies is that 80% of those were rated 3, whereas the remainder one rated at 2.

- d. **Strategy Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation Phase:** Five of the six case studies scored below a 3 on this phase of the strategic management process; only CS4 scored a 3. The two case studies that scored the lowest, namely a 1 rating, were CS1 which did not mention this phase at all, and CS5 whereby there was a view that accountability was lacking despite a performance that points to less than 60% of targets being achieved. A related view, still within CS5, was that some targets are set without an understanding as to how they would be pursued.

5.4.2.3 Institutional Culture

All six case studies fell below the mid-point of a 3 rating in terms of maturity with regards to institutional culture, which seems to align with both the literature review as well as, within South Africa, the Human Rights Commission Report, following its national hearing. Looking at the five constituent elements of this focal area, some of the key messages that emerge are:

- a. **Learning Organisation:** For CS1 and CS6, none of the interviewees referred to this sub-theme, whereas interviewees in three of the case studies cited specifics which pointed to their universities trailing behind in relation to this sub-theme. For CS4, although only one interviewee responded, the view pointed to a deeper understanding of the sub-theme and how it could be taken forward.
- b. **Organisational Performance:** Reflections from the six case studies varied; some of the interviewees focused exclusively at a personal level, e.g. on work ethic or toxicity of workplace relationships. However, interviewees in two of the case studies (viz. CS4 and CS6), covered the organisational performance related aspects as well.
- c. **Transparency and Open Dialogue:** Three of the case studies received a 1-rating, either because the interviewees were silent on the matter, or raised specific issues which the researcher deemed to be of deeper concern. The other three case studies scored a 2-rating (see Figure 5.2).

- d. **Brand Reputation**: This sub-theme also contributed to keeping the overall maturity level below 3 in that two of the case studies had a 1-rating, with interviewees having not commented at all on the sub-theme itself. Whilst the other four case themes obtained a 2-rating maturity level, there were factors that hindered a higher rating. Specifically, there were no more than two interviewees commenting on this sub-theme, or those two interviewees expressed views that were contradictory to each other.
- e. **Vision, Mission, and Values**: Only CS5 had a 3-rating maturity in relation to this sub-theme, which was boosted by the fact that most of the interviewees (viz. 4) reflected on this sub-theme and demonstrated insight into how it contributes to the broader institutional culture. Three of these, viz. CS2, CS4, and CS6, were accorded a 2-rating in terms of maturity, whereas the other two had a 1-rating.

5.4.2.4 Risk Culture

This is the other theme on which most of the case studies demonstrated a relatively lower maturity level, a rating that is below 3. Thus, aligning with a consistent view that emerged from the literature review, viz. that the maturity levels within HEIs' ERM function value proposition, and risk culture, tend to be lower. Broadly, the main contributory factors are those themes that talk to leadership as well as the learning orientation posture of the HEIs. For instance, CS3 distinguished itself with how it comprehends Tone-at-the-Top, which was beyond the ordinary hierarchical definition.

5.5 Risk Culture Maturity Framework – a Proposal

This study's contribution is a framework that is specific to the higher education sector and is entitled Risk Culture Maturity Framework – a Higher Education Sector Context (refer to Annexure 4). It is the outcome of an exploratory study. Distinctive about the Framework itself are factors that include the following:

- Scope of coverage is broader than ERM in that it incorporates the full value chain of a typical HEI. Thus, including milestones pertaining to the respective portfolios

of the Registrar, the Teaching and Learning, the Research and Innovation, the Community Engagement, Finance (or CFO), as well as Resourcing and Operations.

- Places and added effort on strategic environmental scanning in that it seeks to stretch this initiative beyond merely scanning and incorporates the sense of organisational agility in response to opportunities identified.
- Consolidates some of the sub-themes that emerged from the literature review. The rationale being that these were retained for the fieldwork purely to broaden the space for accommodating interviewee perspectives.
- Deliberate in transitioning the higher education sector onto a loftier plane. This is evidenced by the naming assigned to each of the five phases of maturity, viz. Embryonic, Evolving, Explorative, Entrepreneurial, and Elegance-Shaper. In a sense, the researcher believes it is this naming that will sober-up higher education sector role players on the essence of redefining the strategic landscape within which HEIs operate.
- The decision on what milestones to include is informed by not only the literature review that talks to both the higher education sector and other industries, but some of the views expressed by interviewees from within the higher education sector and externally. The rationale of the researcher was to infuse an added stretch to the targets. In this context, some of the milestones point towards a merged version of the sub-themes.

5.6 Conclusion

The value-add brought by perspectives contained in this Chapter is premised on the basics which this study considered in terms of participant sample selection. Specifically, those basics were that participants had to come from the key focal areas of a typical HEI, viz. Teaching and Learning, Research and Innovation, Community Engagement, Institutional Strategy and Planning, Finance and

Procurement, the Registry, as well as ERM and the IAF. Further, the hierarchical positioning, which tilted largely to tiers 1 to 4, together with the open-ended nature of the questions during in-depth interviews, played into the strategic orientation of participants. Thus, bringing out perspectives that were of three-dimensional contribution, viz. in terms of practice, the body of knowledge, as well as to the transitions theory itself – and creating an opportunity for accelerating the transition of HEIs along the risk culture maturity curve?

“Transitions are periods of change, rarely orderly or simple, but rather complex... It is at points of transition that values, views and ways of being in the world are challenged and require individuals to actively deal with the resulting changes. Whether anticipated or unanticipated, chosen or compelled, viewed as positive or negative, all transitions require redefinition of situation and self.”
Willson, 2020:838.

Chapter 6, which follows, is an attempt to handpick some of the key messages that this study presents in the form of conclusions and recommendation, with a view to indeed transition the South African public higher education sector.

Chapter 6

Conclusions, Recommendations, and Future Research

“As organizational goals evolve, some risk professionals are taking on a greater strategic role. By incorporating the strategic storytelling framework into their practice, risk professionals can amplify their reach and impact as strategic business partners, advance organizational risk initiatives, and drive meaningful dialogue and informed decision-making that will result in sustained value for their respective organizations.” – (Angkaw, 2023:23).

6.1 Introduction

This phase of the research journey serves as an opportunity to reflect on whether the aim of the study has been achieved. Specifically, the researcher's contribution to the body of knowledge with particular focus on how risk culture integrates with the strategic management process and institutional culture.

6.2 Research Problem – a Recap and Reflective Conclusion

The research problem, of a relatively immature risk culture within public HEIs, as stated in Section 1.3 has been corroborated through both the literature review and in-depth interviews. Addressed through the transitions theory, which recognises the complexity of the environment in which such HEIs operate, this problem arises in the context of:

- Declining public funding for the higher education sector, which places an added pressure on these HEIs. Specifically, HEIs have to be more entrepreneurial in terms of both third-stream income generation and the enhancement of operational activities.
- The significance which these HEIs bear in relation to society's socioeconomic transformation.
- The business model of these HEIs, including how they balance the collegiality with what they refer to as managerialism; their strongly hierarchical structures, and efforts to attract international students.
- Concerns in relation to the erosion of institutional autonomy, which arises in the form of regulation and/or public policy as well as some of the government decisions.
- Mushrooming private HEIs, which pose a Black Elephant risk for South African public HEIs.

If adopted by the HEIs, the Risk Culture Maturity Framework being contributed by this study will transition these HEIs onto a more mature level. Such a Framework is the outcome of a research journey aimed at achieving a deeper understanding into:

- Factors underpinning risk culture and institutional culture, within public HEIs.
- Constituent elements of a sound strategic management process.
- The extent to which risk culture, institutional culture and the strategic management process inter-link, within public HEIs.
- How the HEIs compare with other sectors, including potential interventions in bringing them on par with other sectors.

The researcher believes that the understanding of the research problem is now deeper and clearer. Hence, the Risk Culture Framework that is being contributed. Its priority focal areas include, for instance, the imperative for Council to infuse learning amongst itself too, the imperative to undertake strategic environmental scanning as a HEI's multi-functional team, and the elevation of combined assurance framework.

6.3 Research Objectives – a Recap and Reflective Conclusion

Outlined below are some of the key aspects that emerged during the fieldwork, and during the literature review stage.

SRO 1: To determine the factors that impact on institutional culture and, more specifically the risk culture within HEIs – (refer Section 1.4.1)

During the literature review, eleven key success factors of trendsetter risk culture emerged – refer to Section 3.4.2.

SRO 2: To determine the elements of a sound strategic management process within the HEIs.

In terms of the key phases, the strategic management process within HEIs is similar to that of market best practice, viz. planning, implementation as well as monitoring, review and reporting. However, most of the participants were not able to articulate all three phases of the strategic management process. For instance, they spoke more to strategic planning, which is the development of a strategic plan (or Annual

Performance Plan), than strategy formulation, or determining the strategic direction of the university. However, there were aspects that pointed to strategic management process being an area that still requires improvement within HEIs. For instance:

- a. International students remain a minute proportion of HEIs' pool of students. Thus, forfeiting potential added revenue.
- b. Organisational agility remains fledgling, despite most of the HEIs having values such as Excellence, Innovation and Creativity as part of their strategic identity. As such, initiatives such as design-thinking have not yet been socialised.

SRO 3: To determine the extent of linkages, if there are any, between the risk culture, the institutional culture, and the strategic management process of an institution within the HEIs.

There seems to be a strong linkage in this regard. Concerns raised about the fear factor by some of the participants imply that the open dialogue is not adequately embraced within HEIs. Similarly, the poor tone-at-the-top, as illustrated through various examples have a negative effect on all three of these focal areas.

SRO 4: To explore how risk culture, within the sector, influences institutional response to strategic challenges and opportunities.

- a. Organisations in other sectors often demonstrate their pride in the product or service they deliver through preserving its quality. However, in the case of HEIs, the opposite seems to prevail, to an extent. Specifically, despite technology having proven to be critical in terms of strengthening organisational competitiveness, HEIs in South Africa continue to lag in terms of cutting-edge technology. Hence, online assessments tend to yield a higher pass rate than the in-person one; thus, pointing to inadequacies in maintaining rigour in terms of such assessments' integrity. In fact, some of the HEIs were not ready for online learning itself, let alone assessments.

Similarly, the concern raised by two of the participants, viz. that students are allowed multiple opportunities to undertake assessments, to a point that it is 'impossible' for students to fail, is an illustration of mediocrity.

- b. Recruitment process that is tainted by mediocrity, which plays out in the context of either failing to select the best candidate for the job and instead allowing factionalist practices to dominate. Similarly, inconsistencies in undertaking the vetting process, when making an appointment, leading to compromised candidates taking over critical roles, do weaken HEIs' embrace of values.

SRO 5: To determine if HEIs trail behind other sectors in terms of ERM broadly and the risk culture in particular, and what would bring such institutions on par in so far as prioritising ERM and integrating it into their strategic conversations – and thus further enhance institutional risk culture.

This objective was achieved, with an emerging message being that indeed the HEIs are generally trailing behind. Some of the illustrative examples are as follows:

- a. The area of strategy seems not to be as much of a priority within HEIs as is the case in other sectors, particularly the private sector. Instead, the HEIs' focus is more on developing the five-year strategic plan, which is itself lacking in terms of distinctiveness. Hence, perhaps, the limited engagement in the annual environmental scanning, which is supposed to serve as input into the annual strategic risk profiling workshop for the following year. In fact, even the latter workshop is not undertaken consistently, despite being an existing best practice.
- b. Stakeholder-centricity by the ERM function seems poorer within the higher education sector, compared to other sectors. For instance:
 - i. Digitisation of ERM in the context of risk reporting, including providing an integrated view of how risks and opportunities impact the achievement of strategic goals within the university.
 - ii. Technical language seems to dominate interactions which ERM practitioners have with their stakeholders within the university. Yet, for risk owners, viz.

the first line defence or assurance role players, competence is assessed more in how ERM conversations become ‘user-friendly’ – whereby the ‘business’ language is used.

- c. Understandably, USAf serves as a platform for, amongst others, promoting a coordinated effort towards delivering the higher education sector agenda within the country. However, the embrace of cooptation, which is a strategic approach to enhancing organisational efficiencies, constitutes a lag by HEIs. That is, even (international) collaborations, which are an integral part of a HEI’s business model, seem to focus largely on research as well as staff and student exchanges. A missed opportunity relates to modules being offered to students, e.g.
 - i. In situations where (say) academics in one HEI have better expertise, then sister HEIs who so wish, could allow their students to undertake such module at that HEI – and still be able to graduate. Alternatively, a student could choose to register a particular module with a sister HEI simply because of its content rather than the expertise of academics.
 - ii. Within the same academic institutions, students should be able to include a module or two from a functional area that is outside their stream. In this context, cooptation is between faculties, within the same HEI.
- d. The best market practice of regular climate surveys being undertaken seems to be a rare occurrence within the higher education sector. In the context of this research, it is only in CS2 that there was mention of such a survey having been undertaken. Yet elements such as the fear factor, bullying and intimidation, and mental wellness challenges have emerged in this study. Failure to embrace such market practice, despite bullying and intimidation being rife within the higher education sector, is a clear pointer of a sector that trails behind in terms of risk culture. Specifically, such failure is in relation to the tone-at-the-top, the open dialogue, and the continuous improvement elements of risk culture – refer sections 3.4.2.1; 3.4.2.3; and 3.4.2.4 respectively.

6.4 Conclusions and Key Contributions

6.4.1 Competitive External Environment

Broadly, there is commonality in terms of how the participants understood the external environment, with differences being mainly more on emphasis than substance. For instance, both financial sustainability and institutional autonomy were the two most prevalent factors identified, with NSFAS as an integral part of the challenge. Similarly:

- Institutional autonomy featured in five of the six case studies, more in the context of government potentially being indecisive or taking policy positions that seem indefensible. Commendably, the notion of managerialism did not feature prominently; thus, pointing to possible embrace of the sense of accountability within HEIs.
- Technology, be it in the form of digitisation or emerging technologies, featured in all six case studies. This is an encouraging trend given the relative immaturity in the form of disparate systems and scarcity of fully-fledged Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems within HEIs, as well as 4-IR that is set to radically change the HEI landscape – refer sections 2.3.3.1 and 2.3.4.

Conclusion: Given that none of the case studies demonstrated a strength in terms of attracting third-stream income, or raising philanthropic revenue, there appears to be inadequate entrepreneurial drive. This applies to both the longer established as well as the recently established HEIs. Therefore, the **Contribution to Practice** recruitment of private sector skills, with expertise in business development, fundraising and marketing, is critical and necessary.

It is concerning that some sub-themes which were expected to emerge were either not raised at all, or were mentioned by very few participants. This could be as a result of weaknesses already raised during the literature review, about HEIs.

Specifically, the HEIs' inward-looking posture, their overly confident attitude or too big-to-fail-trap, or their poor risk culture generally. For instance:

- Private HEIs, as a threat or potential risk, emerged from only CS4 and CS5, being mentioned by only one participant in each of those case studies. Yet there are countries where such private HEIs are servicing the majority of students within a country – refers sections 1.2.3; 2.2.2; 2.3.8 and 2.3.9.
- University rankings featured in only CS4 and CS6, from one participant apiece, despite such rankings' linkage with the brand image of the university – and its ability to attract high calibre researchers/academics and students. Relatedly, the UNSDGs emerged from only CS4, being raised by only one participant, despite being a global initiative driven by the United Nations.
- Mergers and acquisitions emerged from only CS2, yet a DHET policy proposal is already underway threatening to downgrade or merge some HEIs, with a prospect of closing down others.
- International students did not feature at all in any of the case studies, yet international collaborations, which are an integral element of university activities, include student exchange programmes. Further, in light of a declining trend, in terms of government subsidy (refer to Section 2.3.3) and DHET capping of student fee increases, the exploration of ways to increase international students enrolment is essential.

Conclusion: Unless the tracking of Black Elephant Event risks is inculcated within regular activities of the university, as contained in Annexure 4, the country's HEIs' organisational agility will remain poor.

6.4.2 Risk Culture

In an effort to socialising the practice of deliberating on Black Sheep ideas that changed the world, the HEIs should create an opportunity for students to undertake a case study analysis of their own university. Led by academics and industry practitioners, such practice could even be elevated to the next phase where such analysis is undertaken by students from other HEIs. Thus, contributing towards continuous learning and encouraging the forward outlook of HEIs.

6.4.3 Strategic Management Process

Despite strategic management being an integral part of a typical HEI's activities, only CS5 had a participant who demonstrated an understanding of all phases of the strategic management process. That participant went on to even highlight the essence of making adjustments, in response to changes in the external environment. Mostly, the focus of other participants was on one or two of the phases – with limited instances where a participant would talk comprehensively on any two.

Conclusion: The concept of strategy seems to not be popular amongst HEIs. Instead strategic planning, in the context of the DHET driven Annual Performance Plan, appears to be popular. This points to the compliance mode rather than an entrepreneurial one by universities, which leads to such Annual Performance Plans being broadly similar rather than punctuated with differentiating elements for each HEI.

6.4.3.1 Strategic Planning

There is a general awareness, to varying levels, across the six case studies about the fact that the external environment is critical to consider when developing a strategic plan. CS1 was the only one that, commendably, featured the initiative of involving external stakeholders in its strategic planning phase; whereas CS6 was the only one where SWOT analysis was referred to as an integral part. On the overall though, only 50% of the case studies obtained a 3-rating; the others were rated as level 2.

Conclusion: Although the outcome of strategic planning, viz. the Annual Performance Plan, is cascaded across the university, there appears to be a **Contribution to Practice** limitation on two fronts. First, the formulation of targets seems to be ill-informed in the sense of those being set with limited insight. Second, there seems to be inconsistency in terms of socialising the targets, rather than merely cascading them. Both these limitations could be the root cause for the risk of failure to achieve some of the key targets by most HEIs.

6.4.3.2 Strategy Implementation

The 20 sub-themes punctuating this phase of the strategic management process collectively point to a need for improvement. For instance, whilst Organisational Agility emerged as the most prominent sub-theme, the key message from participants was that of inadequacies within HEIs in relation to this sub-theme. Further, on viewing Table 6.1 below, it is evident that participants’ reflections focus on the core business of a typical HEI in relation to this phase.

Table 6.1: Prominence of Sub-Themes for Strategy Implementation Phase

Sub-Theme	No of Case Studies	Actual Case Studies
Organisational Agility	6	All
Graduates’ Relevance to the Market	5	CS1; CS3; CS4; CS5; & CS6
Research Output and/or Impact	4	CS2; CS3; CS5; & CS6
Enrolment Targets	2	CS1 & CS2
Integrity of Assessments	2	CS2 & CS4
Student Dropout Rate	1	CS5

Although it is encouraging that there is a move away from graduate employability, towards graduate relevance to the market, of concern is the seeming reluctance to adequately prioritise academic offerings. Specifically, the curriculum that was said to be largely presentist – if not outdated – constitutes a red flag given the increased pace of change and the intensity of competition.

Conclusion: Institutional brand reputation, undepinned by the discipline to sustain or enhance organisational performance, requires priority focus. It points to a

potential failure on some staff members to take a futurist, external-inward informed view of their role within HEIs. It is thus indicative of a risk culture lag, by HEIs, in comparison with other sectors.

6.4.3.3 Strategic Monitoring, Review and Reporting

There are few factors at play that potentially lead to the compromise of this phase within HEIs. Specifically:

- The low uptake of the staff performance management process within HEIs generally, and the relatively low levels of its maturity in the instances where its embraced.
- Inconsistencies, if not outright failure by some HEIs, to include an ERM related KPI in the performance agreements of key staff members. Alternatively, formulating such a KPI in a manner that does not adequately address the accountability imperative.
- The integrity of information and/or reporting tends not to receive adequate priority, yet the quality of deliberations and impact of decisions is based on such reporting. Hence, a number of organisational scandals – even within the higher education sector – tend to arise from compromised integrity of reporting. Failure to address workload challenges also contributes to aspects such as poor governance as well as fraud and corruption in this regard.
- The pressure to deliver and/or meet targets tends to overshadow the aspiration to offer something unique to the world. As such, focus ends up leaning largely towards outputs rather than impact. For instance, the pressure to deliver high student throughput rates could in fact be counter-productive to an aspiration to deliver game-changer, or even game-creator, graduates for the market.

Conclusion: Best practices which HEIs teach to, especially, their business school graduates, do not reflect how these very same HEIs's internal processes unfold.

6.4.4 Institutional Culture

The view that HEIs are a microcosm of society emerged during this study, specifically in the context of society tending to expect the university to offer them income or a means of living rather than as a centre of learning. Relatedly, the quality of conversations in society that arise in the form of populist ideas, and the undue infiltration of students with politics leading to proacted protests, also emerged. Specific challenges in relation to institutional culture include the following:

- The embrace of a default self-defeatist posture by HEIs. How could it be that their calling for the preservation of institutional autonomy, which is correct, is paradoxically accompanied by their low appetite for proactively shaping society? Thus, ultimately influencing the profile of students who go to school and subsequently enter the HEIs.
- Failure to institutionalise consequence management, whilst preserving the innovative flair, is a self-inflicted pain that inculcates mediocrity; thus, curtailing organisational performance, viz. the other element of institutional culture.
- The poor focus on identifying core competencies that are distinctive to the HEIs, respectively, and tapping on those competencies in an effort to strengthening the competitiveness.
- The curtailed focus on the core business of a typical university, which is the generation of new ideas and innovative research. Understandably, there are annual awards meant to energise the university community.

Conclusion: A paradigm shift in the context of organisational hierarchy is required. Specifically, the notion expressed in Section 3.3 regarding the improvement journey needs to be embraced. This includes Council itself, viz. the fact that they are servicing a higher learning institution implies an imperative for Council to prize learning even amongst its own ranks too – as part of its professional humility.

6.5 Recommendations

6.5.1 Competitive External Environment

This is another area whereon the HEIs are not particularly strong. The recommendations in this section are aimed at contributing towards making the HEIs more attuned with market trends and being better capacitated to then realign their strategies, accordingly.

- a. Outcomes of the annual external environmental scanning exercise should be shared with the broader university community, rather than being restricted to the senior leadership team. An opportunity for the various faculties and sectors of the university should be given an opportunity to comment and provide further input. Any aspects deemed to be of value-add must be acknowledged and incorporated into the updated version of the outcomes that will feed into the strategic risk workshop.

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Further, in order to formalise the recognition of input, and even encourage it, ERM should be included as one of the KPIs in the performance agreement of everyone at the university. The nature of that KPI would differ with some categories of staff when compared with others. However, for a pre-determined category of staff such KPI should talk to their contribution to the external environmental scanning outcomes. Examples of this category of staff could include Executive Deans and their deputies, senior managers in that category, as well as Heads of Department.

- b. International collaborations should be undertaken in a more structured manner, taking into account both the needs of the university as well as the partnering university as well. Once done, then this needs analysis must be documented and taken through Faculty review process, and signed off accordingly. Thereafter, as during the period of the collaboration, key milestones should be

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tracked and any necessary interventions implemented in order to achieve such milestones. Undertaken with rigour, such collaborations contribute towards keeping abreast with emerging market trends.

6.5.2 Risk Culture

This section focuses on 7 of the key success factors for risk culture, and seeks to articulate in an elaborate manner some of the pertinent recommendations. Understandably, with risk culture being an integral of institutional culture, it remains one of the more difficult aspects to change and improve on. In highlighting these recommendations, the research is informed by both the literature review and perspectives expressed by the interviewees during the data gathering phase.

6.5.2.1 Capacitation of Enterprise Risk Management and Internal Audit Functions

The review of organisational structures within HEIs, as part of a continual exercise aimed at aligning structure with strategy, should look into ERM. The establishment of an ERM function should be considered, in the event of there being none at the moment; its proper capacitation is imperative. Other priority considerations should include:

- a. Re-looking at the reporting lines. The CRO and the CAE should be role-played by two separate people. The current practice, in some public HEIs, whereby the IAF is part of ERM, or *vice versa*, needs to be discontinued. According to the Combined Assurance Model, which all HEIs ought to have, the IAF falls on the third line of assurance, whereas ERM is part of the second line of assurance.
- b. A proper benchmarking should be the basis of a CAE's, and CRO's, job profile. Such benchmarking should incorporate a broader portfolio of sectors/industries, and cover a geographic footprint that is broader than South Africa. Thus, affording the HEI an opportunity to elevate the bar, in terms of expectations from both the ERM function and the IAF. As an outcome, the HEI should be better positioned

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to attract and appoint a candidate who is an authority in their respective areas of speciality, viz. ERM or internal audit. They should command technical prowess and astute leadership skills, be able to influence/interact across the hierarchical levels, and be sensitive to emerging market trends.

6.5.2.2 Continuous Improvement

In light of the VUCA environment, in order to remain competitive – or not regress further for those trailing behind – the university’s continuous improvement posture should embrace the following:

- a. Strategic environmental scanning should be an annual activity within the university. The approach of a multi-functional team that includes the core focal



areas of a typical university - Teaching and Learning, Research and Innovation, and Community Engagement – as well as the Registry and ERM, is new ground. Further, this team should include ICT, Procurement and HR, given that they are often viewed as hurdles in the university service delivery efforts. Its outcomes should serve as a pre-read for the annual strategic risk workshop, which should be attended also by Council Executive Committee. The benefit of including the latter is to utilise the risk profiling workshop as another platform for their training and awareness on pertinent trends that inform the risk profile.

- b. A separate strategic opportunities focused deliberation, whose outcomes are



intended to enrich the risk profile, should be convened shortly thereafter. During such session, the CRO will steer deliberations away from risk-focusing. Further, there should be consideration to broadening participation, through inclusion of some of the external stakeholders of the university, as a way of infusing fresh perspective. The expected benefit is the inculcation of a positive outlook on risk-taking, something that bodes well from an innovation perspective.

c. Quarterly reporting, especially by the CRO, should include a reflection on emerging risks and any other changes in the external environment landscape. A **Contribution to BoK** potential opportunity is for the CRO's quarterly report to include Black Elephant Event and/or wicked risks. These are risks which an ordinary ERM process may not necessarily be able to track and/or measure. A succinct, yet informed professional opinion by the CRO constitutes another source of competitive edge for the ERM function's value proposition. It nudges the CRO towards being more collaborative with the broader university community, sensing the 'pain-points', and thus undertaking a more informed scanning of the external environment. It is in this context that the CRO must not just be an ERM practitioner, but an authority in this specialist (ERM) field; thus, making it natural for her/him to engage across hierarchical levels.

d. Executives, who are the first line of assurance role players, should report on incidents that may have arisen within their realm during each quarter, as part of **Contribution to BoK** their quarterly reporting. Such reporting should be a consolidation of similar reports that would have been tabled at the various departments within their executive portfolios. In the event that nothing is reported on any two successive quarters, this should be regarded as a red flag that could draw the attention of the CAE for an *ad hoc* audit or review.

In an effort to socialising this initiative the ERM function should craft a concept note, informed by market case studies, which will serve as a basis for the training to staff and external members on this initiative. Thereafter, once risk owners have been trained they can convene and facilitate meetings aimed at compiling such as report, as and when incidents arise.


e. Creativity should be one of the core competencies within the university. As such, HEIs should take the incident management reporting initiative a step further, **Contribution to Transitions Theory** through the following approach. First, through creating a climate where experimentation with ideas is a norm. Maintaining a tracking mechanism for ideas, particularly the unorthodox ones, that were implemented. Celebration of both the successful ideas, as well as the lessons learned from the unsuccessful ones, is crucial. Such


lessons learned should be shared across the university, and thus mitigating against a similar recurrence and further inefficiencies. Second, through ensuring that all staff members undergo divergent-thinking training and development sessions, customised to their roles or 'job families'. A similar intervention should be offered to external members of Council and its sub-committees. The rationale being that, in order to provide meaningful oversight, such external members need to have a good understanding of the creativity-journey, which staff members go through.

- f. Council annual evaluation should be mandatory at all HEIs, and undertaken, ideally, tapping on technology-based functionalities. It should be preceded by an evaluation of each meeting of Council and its sub-committees. Critically, to mitigate against turning these evaluations into routine, or tick-box-exercise, or protocol inclination, they should lead to in-depth conversations within Council, aimed at enhancing Council performance.
- g. The inquest into Boeing's 737 Max two aircrashes, in 2018 and 2019, found the Board wanting. Specifically, despite the airline industry being engineering and health and safety intense, four of the Board members were found to have no engineering experience; neither did the company have a safety committee in place (Sucher & Gupta, 2021:49). In the context of HEIs the 'Call for Council Nominations' for members should be deliberate in terms of the skills and competencies being sought. Such skills should be aimed at enhancing the competitive edge of the HEI, rather than merely 'oversight as usual'. Specifically, such competencies could include 4-IR, the future-orientation, immersion with market trends, and a track record of engagement in innovation projects/initiatives. Despite these competencies being topical matters which HEIs continue to grapple with, yet in need of, the 'Calls for Council Nominations' remain silent on them. No wonder Council tends to be overly preoccupied with rear-view mirror issues. Some of its members are not in a position to know how to nourish the exploratory posture related competencies amongst the university staff.

6.5.2.3 Policies and Procedures

A more deliberate approach should be adopted in relation to the policies and procedures of the university. The basics of ensuring that these are proactively updated and approved in line with the delegations of authority across the university are known. New considerations, some of which should be incorporated into the Policy on Policies, include:

- a. The infusion of institutional values into such policies. Thus serving as another  platform for socialising the values; as and when the policies are rolled out it will be an opportunity to further elevate awareness levels on values.



- b. In an effort to also further strengthen the integrated posture, it is important for benchmarking to be undertaken, and in a way that taps onto existing  collaborations, locally and internationally. That is, the various sectors of the university could liaise with, for example the internationalisation team, in identifying specific HEIs to refer to for benchmarking. This approach is not just about operational efficiencies within the university, in the sense of tapping on already existing partnerships, but also broadening the professional networks for those who operate in the university's 'back office'.

Further, such benchmarking should be broad enough in terms of geographic footprint, and adequately diversified with regards to industries/sectors. In addition, recent publications should also be factored into the policy benchmarking exercise. Thus, the benefit being the incorporation of any potential 'unknown unknowns', viz. unusual perspectives, or clauses, worthy of inclusion in the university's new/updated policy.

6.5.2.4 Positive Outlook on Risk-Taking

The achievement of a gyroscopic response to the myriad of complex changes in the external environment requires of HEIs to embrace a positive outlook on risk-taking.

Sustaining it is even more challenging, given the seeming inadequacy of HEIs' organisational agility as well as their tendency to adopt an inward-looking posture. However, the following measures are recommended:

- a. Beyond succession planning, which is an imperative within any organisation,  the contribution of emerging researchers, together with any groundbreaking ideas, should be tracked as one of the priority KPIs. This serves as a deliberate effort to collapse the hierarchical wall within the university. Such an approach will potentially address the concerns that often arise in relation to institutional memory, viz. that of falling short when it comes to exploring new ideas.
- b. The annual calendar of Council includes a retreat or strategy lekgotla, which incorporates a reflection on future trends and university's strategic response options. Scenario analysis must be an integral part of this lekgotla and serve to reinforce the imperative for quarterly Council meetings being more deliberate on:
 - i. Future-orientation than merely tracking progress against pre-set targets. The rationale behind this approach is that if it is the highest decision-making body (Council) itself that drives a futurist, exploratory posture then it will be socialised better.
 - ii. Socialising the imperative for transparency in terms of university conversations. Thus, avoiding a situation where even reporting to Council tends to reposition key messages, to a point of concealing some risks, yet it should be cold facts that yield optimal decision-making.
- c. Personal professional development should be a pre-requisite for retention of Council membership, for each Council member. This is another way of  demonstrating an appetite for learning, as a Council member. As such, the annual evaluation of Council performance should include evidence by each member that she/he has earned continuous development development (CPD) points – at

own cost. The Council Charter should specifically talk to this, as pre-requisite. The significance of undertaking such training interventions at own cost is two-fold. First, it demonstrates that the member comprehends the significance of staying abreast, to a point of making the financial sacrifice. Second, it mitigates the risk of Council members unduly 'pressuring' the HEIs they serve into shouldering such responsibility. Failure to do so is, perhaps, an indication of a Council member that does not adequately comprehend the importance of this matter. Thus, they might be unlikely to nourish a learning organisation posture on the part of the university.

- d. The development of a risk appetite framework within the university, informed by the context of the university itself, should be prioritised by the ERM function. In this regard, the following need to be taken into consideration:
 - i. A training and awareness material should be developed and rolled out across the university. It is important for such material to be developed in-house, by the ERM function itself, as a demonstration that the ERM team itself actually understands the concept of risk appetite. The language used, during these workshops, should be less technical and more user-friendly; ERM practitioners should refrain from the technical jargon.
 - ii. Engagement with the university's leadership team should take place, in an effort to solicit from them what the optimal risk appetite and risk tolerance should be for each of the critical risks and opportunities. In this regard, the strategy of the university should serve as a point of departure in determining the optimal levels. For instance, where the strategy talks to innovation – as most HEIs in South Africa do – then the appetite for entrepreneurial activities cannot be Low. Similarly, where the strategy talks to state-of-the-art infrastructure then appetite for a poorly coordinated and implemented maintenance plan has to be Very Low.
- e. An institution-wide initiative, sponsored by Council, and spearheaded by the Vice Chancellor, aimed at tracking how the university scales big ideas that are aligned with the the strategy. The celebration of milestones achieved should not deter continual exploration for more such ideas.

6.5.2.5 Tone-at-the-Top

All 26 HEIs within South Africa have a set of values which they profess to abide by. Yet, the majority of views from participants point to a deficit at leadership level, in terms of such values. The following recommendations are put forward to mitigate against such values-deficit:

- Contribution to Practice**
- a. University Council membership should exclude what is referred to as Ministerial Appointees, doing so as part of an effort to de-politicise Councils. The very category implies a potential compromise to such individuals' sense of independence, and a threat to institutional autonomy. A quick glance at the criteria set by DHET, in its typical advert for ministerial appointees, points to similarity with what a HEI would typically be looking for too.
- b. The annual performance evaluation of Council and its sub-committees should be undertaken by an external service provider, whose independence from Council members is beyond reproach. Priority areas of coverage for this assessment should include:
- i. Relevance and depth of skills which Council commands, including how those skills match the required expertise in the sub-committees where each Council member has been deployed.
 - ii. How Council handles ethical dilemma, especially on matters that speak to the values of the university and its brand image. Examples include conflict of interest, the process followed for appointment of Council and its sub-committee, and the extent of Council members' proximity to tenders.
 - iii. Quality of reports, by sub-committee chairpersons, to Council. Specifically, the extent to which these demonstrate the depth of conversations at the sub-committees. Thus, preventing a situation where sub-committees become a management-bashing platform rather than a governance-strengthening space.

- iv. Corporate governance insights on the part of Council members, including how each may have contributed towards strengthening such governance within the university. This aspect of the evaluation would address the risk within Council meetings that relates to ‘passengers’, passive participants, or how contrarian views are handled. Lack of such contrarian views could be red flag for group-think.
 - v. Council philosophy on gaining assurance over the university’s institutional culture, including measures in place to prevent toxicity within such culture.
- c. Professionalisation of the Company Secretariat function, which currently resides within the Registry.
- d. A governance audit, focusing on the university’s EMC activities, should be undertaken on a two-yearly basis, focusing on red-flags such as:
- i. The nature of information provided in the university’s annual report, with **Contribution to Practice** regards to Council assessment and implementation of any intervention plans, to address possible weaknesses. Considerations, by the audit, should also include whether or not the detail in the annual report is adequate to provide the reader with a good sense on the adequacy of this initiative. Such detail also serves as a pointer on how one year differs from the other year(s).
 - ii. Procurement process related committees, particularly in situations where either the blurring of lines with Council have arisen, or litigation following tender awards seems common. Alternatively, this could address the risk of probity audits commonly pointing to process deficiencies.

6.5.2.6 Organisational Agility

- a.** In light of a general view emerging from the majority of in-depth interviews during this research study, the key recommendation is that HEIs should develop an agility maturity model (refer Section 3.6). The distinction, as proposed by this study, is for each institution to develop its own agility maturity model, taking into account the uniqueness of its context. Thus, creating a 'platform' for measuring the transition towards a self-defined roadmap towards organisational maturity. Undertaken with a view to enhancing competitiveness within each HEI, such a model would have stretched targets or milestones that address aspects such as:
- Contribution to Transitions Theory**
- Inward-looking posture
 - Proactive embrace of market trends, including astute implementation thereof
 - Tracking of Black Elephant Event risks and opportunities, including proactive response thereto.
 - Opportunities for inclusivity of the university community, e.g. infrastructure such as heritage buildings that may not be accommodative of people living with disabilities. Similarly, some policies may not be sufficiently friendly to the LGBTQIA+ strata of the university community. Thus, leading to sub-optimal performance on their part.
- b.** Collapsing silos, in the context of academic offerings, through exploring various avenues in an effort to enhancing the competitive edge of a HEI. For instance:
- i. Responsiveness to fluctuations in the strength of academic skills within a HEI. Wherever, say key academic staff leave the university, for whatever reason, it should be possible for the HEI to partner with another sister HEI and ensure that students continue to receive tuition despite a 'temporary' weakness in terms of academic skills for specific modules. Important to recognise is that for this initiative to be sustainable the HEIs have to embrace technology.
 - ii. Where a student needs to enrol for a module that is not on offer at the university where they are enrolled, it should be possible to register such module with another university, concurrently, and still be able to graduate. This approach would play into what strategists refer to as cooperation.

- c. The so-called historically disadvantaged university have some form of heritage enrichment within them. Organisational agility also implies the ability to turn their seeming 'disadvantage' around and become beacons of hope for society. For instance, as one participant alluded, the University of Fort Hare was once the envy when it comes to agriculture.

- d. In light of financial sustainability constraints, the entrepreneurial flair in terms of third-stream income generation should be strengthened. For instance, in addition to broadening the pool of academic staff participation, the support staff could also be roped in. Some of the opportunities include:
 - i. Serving at oversight structures such as Audit Committees, Risk Committees - during university time - with fees generated therefrom going into the third-stream income pool of the university. Of course, this will require amendment of the relevant policies within the university.

 - ii. Co-publishing with their academic counterparts within the very same institution, or those in sister institutions. Admittedly, such publishing would not be at the same scale as that normally undertaken by academics and researchers; its contribution to third-stream income will be lesser. However, it brings other potential benefits, viz.:
 - The further strengthening of support staff's technical competence in their respective fields of expertise.
 - Mitigates against the DHET stance of possibly downgrading and/or closure of some HEIs based on, amongst others, poor research outputs.
 - Concerns regarding the relatively higher proportion of support staff, which continues to be a bone of contention within HEIs, could be alleviated.

- e. Most HEIs have multi-campus, some of which arise from the merger period that occurred during the early 2000's, in South Africa. It is imperative to explore ways in which the 'satellite' campuses could be given an opportunity to operate with some form of autonomy even though remaining part of the same brand. The rationale being that there tends to be peculiarities in terms of context in

such satellite campuses. Yet, by adopting a uniform approach in running the campuses, in the name of operational efficiencies and institutional-culture-inconsistencies-ameliorating, there tends to be stifling of the satellite campuses. Thus, curtailing the impact of the university's brand, somehow.

- f. Embracing a process mapping initiative, whereby the value chain of core activities of the university is analysed in an effort to identifying, within each process:
- What the key activities are;
 - Gaps that may exist in the form of control deficiencies, poor turnaround times, inadequate segregation of duties, etc.
 - Interventions required to address such gaps – and this includes further capacitation in the form of resources.
 - Recommendations to the leadership team for implementation of interventions.

It is critical to undertake such process mapping across the entire full value chain, which cuts across various functions of the university and, where applicable, its external interdependencies too. Thus, contributing towards enhancing the coordination of interdependencies as well – which is a risk culture element. An example of a process that includes external interdependencies is the New Programme/Qualification Application Process. Internally, it goes through Faculty Boards, Senate and Council – before it goes to DHET, CHE, and SAQA.

- g. Building onto process mapping, the annual audit plan, led by the CAE, should include end-to-end process audits. The rationale being to ensure that:
- The design adequacy, and effectiveness, of interventions that have been implemented.
 - Areas that could constitute fertile ground for fraud and corruption are identified and addressed. The point being that, at times, inefficiencies arise from negligence, with the aim of concealing fraudulent activities.
- h. Whilst organisational hierarchy remains important, the university should be deliberate in recognising the expertise element of leadership. The rationale

being to strengthen the sense of empowerment on the part of staff, which could lead to better accountability, ownership and sense of initiative. New ideas could mushroom at a faster rate too.

6.5.2.7 Data Analytics

The ERM practitioners ought to be conversant with technology. Specifically, the ERM function needs to undertake an analysis of its needs and, based on the context, acquire a software that will enable it to track risks and subsequent mitigation thereof, digitally. If this can be undertaken as part of the ERP system already in place, then that's first prize. Otherwise, it is important to ensure the ERM software can integrate with the broader ERP system.

6.5.3 Strategic Management Process

Given the central role which the strategic management process plays in the context of HEIs, some of the considerations recommended for potential incorporation into the HEIs' risk culture-deepening efforts include the following:

6.5.3.1 Strategic Planning

- a. Strategy development should be regarded as distinct from strategic planning, and undertaken at shorter intervals than 5-yearly – preferably, twice within such **Contribution to Practice** 5-year horizons. In this regard, the involvement of cross-industry experts, drawn from the university's multi-stakeholder pool and collaborative partners, should be prioritised - including higher education sector gurus. Deliberations of such strategy development and/or review session should include reflections on Black Elephant Events, Back Swans, scenario analysis, and other disruptors.
- b. The annual strategic planning should be undertaken with the intent of illuminating the distinctiveness of the university, in relation to its sister HEIs. In

other words, it should not just be about developing the Annual Performance Plan (APP) and setting the targets for the following year. Thereafter, such APP should be socialised with the broader university community, with a view to gaining its buy-in to the APP. The benefit of such an approach is that it also contributes towards ensuring that the APP targets are SMART.

6.5.3.2 Strategy Implementation

In an effort to mitigate against the common challenge of difficulties in implementation of organisational strategy, the university should consider the following:

- a. Creating a pool of volunteers who are keen to participate in ad hoc projects, as and when these arise during the course of the year – similar to the Strategic Workforce Architecture and Transformation (SWAT) as espoused by [Fuler *et al* \(2021:132\)](#). This should be undertaken in the context of job crafting, and the reality that hierarchical upward mobility is not the only form of professional development. Such volunteers should then be deployed to support the various executives, in relation to formulation of implementation interventions and tracking progress during the course of the year.
- b. Brand loyalty should be assessed, in part, on the extent to which staff understand the strategy of the university. As such, there should be ongoing exploration of ways in which the university community understands the strategy of the university – without such insights, delivery on the strategy will be more difficult.
- c. Employment contracting, when staff get recruited, should be given particular attention, especially in relation to what the key priorities of the university are. For instance, some HEIs struggle with research outputs, entrepreneurship, academic offerings, or internationalisation. These should reflect in both the employment contract, including a reasonable probation period, as well as annual performance agreements entered into with staff. This is of particular necessity given the low staff turnover rate within the higher education sector.

6.5.4 Institutional Culture

Illuminated below are 3 of the 5 key focal areas pertaining to institutional culture, which the researcher believes warrant specific priority by HEIs. Embracing the pertinent recommendations thereon could have an optimal impact in relation to risk culture deepening efforts within HEIs.

6.5.4.1 Learning Organisation

In terms of values, all HEIs in South Africa have chosen integrity and/or excellence as part of what defines their institutional culture. In order to address the toxicity and ethical breaches, a more deliberate approach should be considered, including the following.

- a. In terms of recruitment process for key positions, background checks should be undertaken by an external party, whose mandate is to ensure there are no stones left unturned. In other words, due diligence should be applied in an effort to mitigating against potential recruitment of candidates that either have a criminal record, a governance related scandal, and/or any violations that could tarnish the brand image of the university. Should it be deemed necessary, the

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enrolment of a forensic private investigator should be explored to undertake such background checks, particularly for those candidates being recruited for leadership roles. Equally important, such rigorous vetting should also apply to those individuals who are being promoted through the ranks, within a HEI. Thus, ensuring that any rot that is already inside the HEI does not rise to becoming more influential; and that institutional memory is in fact punctuated by integrity and business ethics.

- b. The staff induction process should be broadened beyond the onboarding for those who are joining the university from externally. Rather, a mandatory annual

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ethics-focused induction module should be developed, considering the peculiarities of the HEI. Such a module could take the form of in-person and/or online format, with an assessment at the end whereby a relatively high pass-mark is expected.

If one fails to score the minimum target, then they should not be allowed to carry out their work activities. Continued failure to complete the induction module should be deemed as a red flag, leading to consequence management too, for the individual staff member.

- c. Reinforcement of the Employee Relations team, in terms of both skills and human capital capacitation, is imperative. Specifically, cases that are being reported must be handled with competence, and the priority placed onto finalising them within a reasonable period time. Thus, preserving the integrity of the grievance handling process itself whilst also strengthening the confidence which the university community has in internal processes.
- d. The team that handles whistleblowing reports, as received via an independent external service provider, should be similarly well resourced – and its interdependency with Employee Relations guarded. The investigation of such cases should be undertaken promptly and completed within reasonable time. Equally important, communication to the broader university community on progress being made with such cases, including sanctioning of culprits must be undertaken regularly. Such communication, when undertaken continually, is beneficial in that:
 - Awareness about the Hotline remains heightened, leading to relative ease of reporting any misdemeanours.
 - Confidence in the university's tone-at-the-top gets strengthened, and potential governance missteps deterred.
- e. All relevant policies and procedures pertaining to institutional culture must be updated within prescheduled timelines and approved accordingly

6.5.4.2 Organisational Performance

Personal professional development should be viewed as directly linked to both the employee's performance and ultimately that of the university. In this regard, the following measures should be considered for implementation:

- a. Academic positions at tier-3 and above should be reserved for only staff who have industry experience, in addition to HEI experience. The rationale being to pace those candidates for university-industry partnerships and other initiatives aimed at rendering research more relevant to the market. Similarly, they would be better positioned to stimulate the drive towards infusing market trends – including jobs of the future - into academic offerings.
- b. In light of the relatively lower levels of maturity in terms of performance management processes across the HEIs, there should be a deliberate effort towards socialising this initiative. Led by the Human Capital Innovation Centre, also known as Human Resources, and spearheaded by the Vice Chancellor, **Contribution to Transitions Theory** staff performance management should be a core competence of the university. That is, the initiative should serve nurture talent and rally the team around the university's vision and strategy, rather than as a tool for stifling creativity and managing staff out of the university.

University conversations should shift away from mere selling of this staff annual performance management idea/initiative, towards its actual implementation; Perhaps, resistance to embracing the initiative is tacit support for mediocrity? Further, KPIs should be informed by aspirations of the university, as espoused on its strategy, which should expectedly include not only hard deliverables such as publications, but softer issues that talk to creating a conducive working environment. That is, everyone should be viewing the university more as a centre of excellence rather than merely a source of making a living; each role should be viewed as a calling to serve a higher purpose.

- c. The deliberate effort, aimed at aligning competencies with structure, should be taken a step further. For instance, in terms of candidacy profile, the mixture as guided by [Chan & Muthuveloo \(2018:8\)](#), should be considered, viz. with the following broad categories of staff profiles taken into consideration:

- Transformers, who are star performers that can create novel ideas for the university;
- Transactors, who are high performers and could add value towards enhancing efficiencies within operational activities; and
- Performers, who are excellent followers and will contribute towards sustaining the university's organisational performance.

Of course, circumspect remains critical in the sense that there is a stereotype-risk in assuming that everyone can be classified into specific categories. Perhaps, a supreme guide is the notion of the right skills in the right jobs.

6.5.4.4 Vision, Mission and Values

The socialisation of the university's vision, mission and values should be regarded as standard within each HEI. Every role player within the university should be able to articulate such vision, mission and values; otherwise how else would staff be able to live those and tap on them during moments of decision. Added considerations, in this context include the following:

- a. Brand-Identity Moments should be introduced within HEIs, whereby regular meetings kicks-off with a reflection on what the values of the university are. Illustrative scenarios, based on interactions that university staff may have observed, heard or experienced. The university's own stories, to the university itself ([Barney et al, 2023:85](#)) should serve to inspire such Brand Identity Moments. Narrated with authenticity, each story is likely to infuse, at least one-heart-at-a-time, with a desire to contribute towards the creation of a healthy working environment within the university. In this publication being referred to, stories are told by leaders, about themselves; this recommendation is about stories played out by the broader university community, spotted and shared by their colleagues. Thus, serving to also encourage the open dialogue, contrarian views, and a deepened sense of ownership to the university strategy and delivery thereon.

- b. Reviewing the institutional lexicon, particularly in relation to risk culture, in such a way as to infuse a more positive narrative to institutional activities and/or operations. An opportunity to undertake this arises, for instance, during the review of governance documents such as policies, or during organisational structure reviews. The rationale behind such lexicon changes is two-fold, viz.:
- To reshape the working environment by infusing an atmosphere that stimulates creativity, tantalises the exploration of new ideas, and intensifies the performance drive and pursuit for excellence across the university.
 - To elevate, in particular, the ERM practitioners onto value-add advisors to executives, and distinctive governance coaches to the broader university community. They must be an authority, and a point of reference, when it comes to risk-culture deepening initiatives.

Noted below are illustrative examples of lexicon review, in relation to risk culture:

Table 6.2: Possible Changes to Institutional Lexicon

Current Common Naming	Proposed Potential Naming
Chief Risk Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Chief Risk-Innovation Practitioner ▪ Chief Risk-Innovation Advisor
Enterprise Risk Management Function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Enterprise Risk-Innovation Advisory ▪ Enterprise Risk Leadership Function
Human Resources Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Human Capital Innovation Centre ▪ Human Capital Capacitation Services
Incident Management Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lessons Learned Reflective Tool ▪ Lessons Learned Tracking Initiative
Strategic Risk Workshop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strategic Opportunities and Risks Conversation ▪ Exploratory, In-Dialogue, Opportunities Session

Similarly, the ERM practitioners should steer clear of the technical jargon, and instead engage with their stakeholders in a language which those stakeholders understand. Necessarily, this brings storytelling into ERM conversations; for such stories to be impactful, the ERM practitioners have to have a pool of case

studies to tap on, or make reference to. That is, beyond academic qualifications, professional certifications, ERM practitioners have to be prolific readers.

- c. Ethics Certification should be considered as one of the core competencies for the university community. In this regard, partnership with an organisation such as The Ethics Institute, should be explored, in an effort to ensuring that (say) each Department has an Ethics Champion, with the ERM Function playing a coordinative role in socialisation of ethics within the university.

6.6 Limitations of the Study

Limitations, during the execution of the study, included the following:

- Inability to access tiers-1 and -2 employees in CS4, which was a result of more the Research Ethics Office than the potential participants themselves.
- The variation in terms of the IAF and/or ERM function, in the context of some being outsourced whereas others are in-sourced, meant that the perspectives are expressed more by the executive or senior manager responsible for the IAF.
- The transcribing of the data was not verified by the participants due to their time constraints. However, a third reviewer was contracted to verify the information based on the recordings.
- The non-availability of some of the public HEIs in South Africa, which resulted in the pool of case studies being smaller (based on the content analysis).
- As this is an exploratory inductive study, the framework can not be generalised for all South African public HEIs until it has been supported by a deductive study.

6.7 Avenues for Future Research

6.7.1 Private Higher Education Institutions

The extent to which mushrooming private HEIs pose a risk to South African public HEIs, and which could turn out to be public HEIs' Black Elephant. Specifically, the context could include an exploration into how it is that some countries have ended up with private HEIs serving the majority of those countries' students. Perhaps that would point to another avenue for risk-culture deepening broadly, and organisational agility in particular.

Importantly, the framework should be supported by a deductive study that ensures that it can be generalised to a broader audience. However, as no such framework currently exists, it may still be used by HEIs as basis to develop their own risk culture maturity framework.

6.7.2 Elevating the Bar for Council

Given the constituencies that get represented at Council, it might be worthwhile to explore the feasibility of setting a higher bar for Council membership. Specific competencies that could be deemed mandatory include the:

- iii. Exploratory mindset, taking into consideration the transitions phase which HEIs are battling with. Expectedly, it will take some years for these HEIs to rid themselves of the risk-averse posture and the presentist, rather than futurist, mindset.
- iv. Reducing the size of Councils in an effort to enhancing efficiencies within its workings. In this regard, a benchmarking exercise aimed at exploring how smaller Boards at other HEIs around the globe operate.

6.7.3 Influence of Higher Education Sector in Shaping South Africa's Enterprise Risk management Agenda

As crucibles of excellence and centres of knowledge, the extent to which the higher education sector contributes towards shaping the ERM agenda is important. Specifically, beyond delivering graduates that have ERM as an area of specialty and/or one of the modules in their study are the HEIs doing enough. Such future study could focus on the extent of involvement, and impact, of HEIs' ERM practitioners at platforms such as:

- Relevant professional bodies, such as the IIA, IRMSA, Certified Information System Auditors (CISA), and Certified Fraud Examiner (ACFE).
- Representation at oversight structures, such as audit committees, risk committees, and Boards outside the higher education sector itself.
- Thought leadership space, such as the IRMSA Annual Risk Report.
- Conferences whereby they deliver presentations or facilitating panel discussions.

6.7.4 Continuous Improvement

The literature review made reference to continuous improvement, which means without interruption. Should it not be referred to as continual rather? Regardless of how rapid the changes are, there is inevitably a period where the improvement intervention should be given some time to demonstrate its effectiveness or otherwise. Even where there is a 'wave of improvements, there ought to be some observation period; otherwise chaos would be the order of the day. On the other hand, at an organisational level, it is possible for learning to be continuous given that there are various role-players whose learning could occur at different times in a day – through each day.

6.8 Overall Conclusion

The risk culture maturity framework, which serves as the core contribution of this research study seeks to not only elevate the value proposition of an ERM function within HEIs, but to also serve as a rallying tool. In light of the Framework's incorporation of the various key functions that constitute a typical HEI value chain it is thus likely to strengthen the integrative posture, including the coordination of interdependencies, whilst also enhancing institutional performance.

In order for transitioning towards a more matured risk culture, the Elegance-Shaper as per the Framework being proposed in this study, the HEIs should recognise that the higher education sector is a strategic inflection point which the then Intel Corporation CEO, Andrew Grove, once referred to thus:

“A strategic inflection point is a time in the life of business when its fundamentals are about to change. That change can mean an opportunity to rise to new heights. But it may just as likely signal the beginning of the end.”

The sense of permanence amongst all role players within HEIs should give way to an urgency-informed exploratory posture in search of better ways to enhance the value proposition of HEIs. The ‘too big to fail’ mentality, encouraged by the demand that seems to exceed the supply, in relation to HEI qualifications, as well as the blind spot within which mushrooming private HEIs are operating in, should give way to sensitivity to the competitive forces at play in the external environment.

“We are all time travellers, journeying together into the future. But let us work together to make that future a place we want to visit. Be brave, be curious, be determined, overcome the odds. It can be done.” – (Stephen Hawking)

Annexure 1

List of Masters and Doctoral Theses on Risk Culture

Researcher Name, Institution, & Level	Topic & Industry Focus	Published	Research Objective/ Question	Research Questions
Dr. Viljoen van der Walt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ University of Stellenbosch Business School; ▪ PhD 	An integrated strategy and risk management approach for public universities in South Africa. [Higher Education]	2017	Contribute towards a risk-embedded strategy formulation approach by proposing a structured step-by-step process for embedding risk management steps into a generic strategy formulation process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What are the key components of the risk management process? ▪ What are the key steps or components of a generic strategy formulation process? ▪ Which steps of the risk management process need to be integrated at what point of the strategy formulation process, and which steps could be combined towards a simplified risk-embedded strategy formulation process? ▪ Is there support for the underlying principles of the proposed step-by-step sequential process by the two groups involved in the study? ▪ Are there significant differences between the responses of participating university respondents and respondents from business organisations?
Dr. Anne Lundquist <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Western Michigan University; 	Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) at U.S. Colleges and Universities:	2015	How do administrators with risk management responsibility at institutions of higher education in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What factors led to the decision to adopt ERM? ▪ What steps did institutions take to implement ERM?

Researcher Name, Institution, & Level	Topic & Industry Focus	Published	Research Objective/ Question	Research Questions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PhD 	<p>Administration Processes Regarding the Adoption, Implementation, and Integration of ERM.</p> <p>[Higher Education]</p>		<p>the US describe ERM adoption, implementation, and integration, and what do these cases (quantitative and qualitative) offer by way of an explanatory model for how ERM is initiated, implemented, and integrated in the higher education sector?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How is ERM organized? What activities are involved in the ERM process? What is the relationship between organizational structure, goal-setting, decision-making, and ERM? How do administrators describe the value of ERM?
<p>Dr. Angela Z Röschmann</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of St. Gallen; PhD 	<p>Towards an ideal risk culture for (re)insurance companies.</p> <p>[Insurance industry]</p>	2016	<p>To determine what the desirable risk culture is within the insurance industry, as well as the role it plays in a risk management framework.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is risk culture in the insurance industry? Which values are characteristic of an “ideal” risk culture for insurance companies?
<p>Ms. Agnes Asare</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> University of Ghana; Masters 	<p>The Impact of Risk Culture on Underwriting Risk of Life Insurance Companies in Ghana.</p> <p>[Insurance Industry]</p>	2015	<p>To determine how the risk culture of insurance firms influences their risk management practices, particularly in their underwriting of contracts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Are adequate controls and checks in place to identify potential violations in business transactions? Is risk awareness and education sufficiently promoted across an organization? Is risk assessment key to business decisions? How do risk culture variables impact on underwriting risk?

Researcher Name, Institution, & Level	Topic & Industry Focus	Published	Research Objective/ Question	Research Questions
Dr. Denise Schoenfeld <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ University of Gloucestershire; ▪ PhD 	Organisational Risk Culture: Differences between Managerial Expectations and Employees' Perception [Corporate Real Estate]	2013	The research objective is threefold: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To develop a risk culture framework to advance theory about risk culture; ▪ To identify the target risk culture of a case study unit to gain an understanding about their ideal risk culture should look like in practice (Managerial Expectations); ▪ To determine any congruencies and differences between managerial expectations and employees' perception, that represent the existing risk culture within the case study unit. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ What are differences, if any, between managerial expectations and employees' perception in organisational risk culture? ▪ What are the key components of an organisational risk culture? ▪ What are managerial expectations in terms of the target risk culture within the case study unit? ▪ What are the congruencies and differences between managerial expectations and employees' perception within the case study unit?
Mr. Anssi Paalanen <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Aalto University; ▪ Masters 	Risk Culture – a Descriptive Model [Energy Sector]	2013	To develop a risk culture model	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ How risk culture can be described? ▪ How different culture types can be classified? ▪ What risk management methods are feasible for different culture types?

Annexure 2

Themes and Sub-Themes

Themes from Literature Review	Sub-Themes from Literature Review (Chapters 2 & 3)	Sub-Themes from Content Analysis (Chapter 4 & 5)	Mergers of Sub-Themes (Chapter 4)	Additional Sub-Themes from In-Depth Interviews (use in future studies) (Chapter 5)	Final Sub-Themes Used in Chapter 5
1. Competitive External Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Agility ▪ Change Management ▪ Competence ▪ Dialogue/Communication ▪ Efficiencies or Operational Efficiencies ▪ Ethics or Ethical ▪ External Environmental Scanning or External Environment ▪ Financial Sustainability or Funding ▪ Governance or Governing Structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Collaboration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Opportunities + Landscape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Compliance ▪ Core Business ▪ Digitisation/Digitalisation or Data Analytics ▪ Emerging Technologies ▪ Entrepreneurial ▪ Ethics or Ethical ▪ Explore or Exploratory ▪ External Environmental Scanning or External Environment ▪ Financial Sustainability or Funding ▪ Forward-looking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Emerging Technologies ▪ Financial Sustainability ▪ Fourth Industrial Revolution ▪ Fraud and Corruption ▪ Influential Factors ▪ Institutional Autonomy ▪ International Students ▪ Massification of Higher Education ▪ Mergers and Acquisitions ▪ Policy Certainty (Poor-) ▪ Private Higher Education Institutions ▪ Quality of Students ▪ Socioeconomic Transformation ▪ Stakeholder-Centricity

Themes from Literature Review	Sub-Themes from Literature Review (Chapters 2 & 3)	Sub-Themes from Content Analysis (Chapter 4 & 5)	Mergers of Sub-Themes (Chapter 4)	Additional Sub-Themes from In-Depth Interviews (use in future studies) (Chapter 5)	Final Sub-Themes Used in Chapter 5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Innovation or Failure as a Source of Innovation ▪ Leadership ▪ Market Trends ▪ Opportunity or Opportunities ▪ Policies and/or Procedures ▪ Strategic Planning ▪ Students or Student-centricity ▪ Technology ▪ Values ▪ Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity (VUCA) 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fourth-Industrial Revolution or 4-IR or Industry 4.0 ▪ Governance or Governing Structure ▪ Graduate Employability or Relevance of Graduates to the Market ▪ Historically Disadvantaged Universities ▪ Institutional Autonomy ▪ Integrative or Integration ▪ Integrity ▪ Interdependencies ▪ International Students ▪ Inward-looking ▪ Landscape ▪ Leadership ▪ Maturity Model 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student Protests ▪ Talent Mobility, Attraction and Retention ▪ Technology ▪ University-Industry Partnerships ▪ United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) ▪ University Rankings ▪ Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity. ▪ Xenophobia ▪ Weak Economy

Themes from Literature Review	Sub-Themes from Literature Review (Chapters 2 & 3)	Sub-Themes from Content Analysis (Chapter 4 & 5)	Mergers of Sub-Themes (Chapter 4)	Additional Sub-Themes from In-Depth Interviews (use in future studies) (Chapter 5)	Final Sub-Themes Used in Chapter 5
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policies and/or Procedures ▪ Rankings or University Rankings or International Rankings ▪ Regulation or Regulatory ▪ Reputation or Brand Reputation or Brand Image ▪ Socioeconomic Transformation ▪ Stakeholders ▪ Students or Student-centricity ▪ Student Retention and/or Dropout Rate ▪ Technology ▪ Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity (VUCA) 	

Themes from Literature Review	Sub-Themes from Literature Review (Chapters 2 & 3)	Sub-Themes from Content Analysis (Chapter 4 & 5)	Mergers of Sub-Themes (Chapter 4)	Additional Sub-Themes from In-Depth Interviews (use in future studies) (Chapter 5)	Final Sub-Themes Used in Chapter 5
2. Risk Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accountability ▪ Business Continuity Mgt. ▪ Change Management ▪ Collaboration ▪ Competence ▪ Compliance ▪ Customers or clients ▪ Dialogue/Communication ▪ Digitisation/Digitalisation or Data Analytics ▪ Emerging Technologies ▪ Entrepreneurial ▪ Ethics or Ethical ▪ Explore or Exploratory ▪ External Environmental Scanning or External Environment ▪ Forward-looking ▪ Governance or Governing Structure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Collaboration ▪ Continuous Improvement ▪ Dialogue ▪ ERM Maturity ▪ Ethics/Ethical ▪ Interdependencies ▪ Opportunities ▪ Risk Appetite/Tolerance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Performance + Performance Targets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accountability ▪ Change Management ▪ Organisational Agility ▪ Competence ▪ Compliance ▪ Coopetition ▪ Dialogue/Communication ▪ Digitisation/Digitalisation or Data Analytics ▪ Efficiencies or Operational Efficiencies ▪ Emerging Technologies ▪ Entrepreneurial ▪ Explore or Exploratory ▪ External Environmental Scanning or External Environment ▪ Financial Sustainability or Funding ▪ Forward-looking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Academic Offerings or Re-circulation ▪ Accountability ▪ Bureaucracy ▪ Collaboration ▪ Continuous Improvement ▪ Data Analytics ▪ ERM Linkage with Performance ▪ Failure As a Source of Innovation ▪ Forward Outlook/Future Oriented ▪ Governance ▪ Graduates' Relevance to the Market ▪ Hierarchical Positioning of ERM and/or the IAF ▪ Institutional Performance ▪ Integrated Posture ▪ Integration with Strategy ▪ Interdependencies ▪ Inward-Looking ▪ Open Dialogue ▪ Policies and/or Procedures

Themes from Literature Review	Sub-Themes from Literature Review (Chapters 2 & 3)	Sub-Themes from Content Analysis (Chapter 4 & 5)	Mergers of Sub-Themes (Chapter 4)	Additional Sub-Themes from In-Depth Interviews (use in future studies) (Chapter 5)	Final Sub-Themes Used in Chapter 5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Hierarchical Positioning or Organisational Structure ▪ Improvement ▪ Incident Management Reporting ▪ Innovation or Failure as a Source of Innovation ▪ Integrative or Integration ▪ Integrity ▪ Interdependencies ▪ Key Success Factors ▪ Landscape ▪ Leadership ▪ Learning Organisation ▪ Market Trends ▪ Opportunity or Opportunities ▪ Personality Cult ▪ Policies and/or Procedures 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fourth-Industrial Revolution or 4-IR or Industry 4.0 ▪ Governance or Governing Structure ▪ Graduate Employability or Relevance of Graduates to the Market ▪ Hierarchical Positioning or Organisational Structure ▪ Improvement ▪ Innovation or Failure as a Source of Innovation ▪ Institutional Autonomy ▪ Integrative or Integration ▪ Integrity ▪ Interdependencies ▪ International Students ▪ Inward-looking ▪ Landscape 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Positive Outlook on Risk-taking ▪ Silos ▪ Stakeholder-Centricity ▪ Tone-at-the-Top ▪ Value Proposition (of HEI) ▪ Quality Assurance ▪ Regulatory Compliance ▪ Risk Appetite ▪ Risk Maturity

Themes from Literature Review	Sub-Themes from Literature Review (Chapters 2 & 3)	Sub-Themes from Content Analysis (Chapter 4 & 5)	Mergers of Sub-Themes (Chapter 4)	Additional Sub-Themes from In-Depth Interviews (use in future studies) (Chapter 5)	Final Sub-Themes Used in Chapter 5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Regulation or Regulatory ▪ Resilience or Organisational Resilience ▪ Risk Appetite or Risk Tolerance ▪ Risk Fatigue ▪ Risk-taking ▪ Silo or Siloes ▪ Soft Skills ▪ Stakeholders ▪ Strategic Planning ▪ Students or Student-centricity ▪ Technology ▪ Tone-at-the-Top ▪ Transparency ▪ Trendsetting or Trendsetter ▪ Values 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Leadership ▪ Opportunity or Opportunities ▪ Performance Targets ▪ Organisational Performance ▪ Personality Cult ▪ Policies and/or Procedures ▪ Principles or Principled ▪ Quality Assurance ▪ Rankings or University Rankings or International Rankings ▪ Regulation or Regulatory ▪ Reputation or Brand Reputation or Brand Image ▪ Responsiveness 	

Themes from Literature Review	Sub-Themes from Literature Review (Chapters 2 & 3)	Sub-Themes from Content Analysis (Chapter 4 & 5)	Mergers of Sub-Themes (Chapter 4)	Additional Sub-Themes from In-Depth Interviews (use in future studies) (Chapter 5)	Final Sub-Themes Used in Chapter 5
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Risk Appetite or Risk Tolerance ▪ Risk-taking ▪ Silo or Siloes ▪ Stakeholders ▪ Strategic Planning ▪ Strategy Implementation ▪ Students or Student-centricity ▪ Technology ▪ Tone-at-the-Top ▪ Transparency ▪ Values 	
3. Institutional Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bullying/Fear/Intimidation ▪ Competence ▪ Coopetition ▪ Customers or clients ▪ Dialogue/Communication ▪ Entrepreneurial ▪ Ethics or Ethical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bullying and Intimidation ▪ Change Management ▪ Compliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Principles + Ethics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Academic Offerings ▪ Bullying and Intimidation ▪ Change Management ▪ Competence ▪ Core Business ▪ Corporatisation ▪ Dialogue/Communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Brand Reputation ▪ Institutional Performance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Community Engagement ○ Competitive Advantage ○ Competitiveness ○ Distinctive Capabilities ○ Excellence Posture

Themes from Literature Review	Sub-Themes from Literature Review (Chapters 2 & 3)	Sub-Themes from Content Analysis (Chapter 4 & 5)	Mergers of Sub-Themes (Chapter 4)	Additional Sub-Themes from In-Depth Interviews (use in future studies) (Chapter 5)	Final Sub-Themes Used in Chapter 5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ External Environmental Scanning or External Environment ▪ Governance or Governing Structure ▪ Innovation or Failure as a Source of Innovation ▪ Interdependencies ▪ Leadership ▪ Organisational Performance ▪ Reputation or Brand Reputation or Brand Image ▪ Research Outputs and/or Impact ▪ Silo or Siloes ▪ Stakeholders ▪ Transparency ▪ Values 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Digitisation/Digitalisation or Data Analytics ▪ Distinctive capabilities ▪ Ethics or Ethical ▪ Financial Sustainability or Funding ▪ Governance or Governing Structure ▪ Graduate Employability or Relevance of Graduates to the Market ▪ Hierarchical Positioning or Organisational Structure ▪ Improvement ▪ Innovation or Failure as a Source of Innovation ▪ Institutional Autonomy ▪ Integrative or Integration ▪ Integrity ▪ Interdependencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Governance ○ Key Performance Indicators ○ Organisational Structure ○ Research Output ○ Staff-Student Ratio ○ Student Retention or Dropout Rate ○ Student-Centricity ▪ Learning Organisation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Corporatisation or Managerialism ○ Change Management ▪ Open Dialogue <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Bullying and Intimidation ○ Corporatisation or Managerialism ○ Interdependencies ▪ Vision, Mission and Values

Themes from Literature Review	Sub-Themes from Literature Review (Chapters 2 & 3)	Sub-Themes from Content Analysis (Chapter 4 & 5)	Mergers of Sub-Themes (Chapter 4)	Additional Sub-Themes from In-Depth Interviews (use in future studies) (Chapter 5)	Final Sub-Themes Used in Chapter 5
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Inward-looking ▪ Key Performance Indicator ▪ Landscape ▪ Leadership ▪ Learning Organisation ▪ Managerialism ▪ Maturity Model ▪ Opportunity or Opportunities ▪ Organisational Performance ▪ Personality Cult ▪ Policies and/or Procedures ▪ Principles or Principled ▪ Rankings or University Rankings or International Rankings 	

Themes from Literature Review	Sub-Themes from Literature Review (Chapters 2 & 3)	Sub-Themes from Content Analysis (Chapter 4 & 5)	Mergers of Sub-Themes (Chapter 4)	Additional Sub-Themes from In-Depth Interviews (use in future studies) (Chapter 5)	Final Sub-Themes Used in Chapter 5
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reputation or Brand Reputation or Brand Image ▪ Research Outputs and/or Impact ▪ Resilience or Organisational Resilience ▪ Responsiveness ▪ Risk Appetite or Risk Tolerance ▪ Silo or Siloes ▪ Staff-Student Ratio or Supervisor-Student Ratio ▪ Stakeholders ▪ Strategic Planning ▪ Students or Student-centricity ▪ Student Retention and/or Dropout Rate ▪ Technology 	

Themes from Literature Review	Sub-Themes from Literature Review (Chapters 2 & 3)	Sub-Themes from Content Analysis (Chapter 4 & 5)	Mergers of Sub-Themes (Chapter 4)	Additional Sub-Themes from In-Depth Interviews (use in future studies) (Chapter 5)	Final Sub-Themes Used in Chapter 5
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tone-at-the-Top ▪ Transparency ▪ Values 	
4. Strategic Management Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Best Practice ▪ Collaboration ▪ Competence ▪ Customers or clients ▪ External Environmental Scanning or External Environment ▪ Improvement ▪ Integrative or Integration ▪ Interdependencies ▪ International Students ▪ Inward-looking ▪ Landscape ▪ Market Trends ▪ Maturity Model ▪ Monitoring and Reporting ▪ Principles or Principled 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Organisational Agility + Responsiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Bureaucratic ▪ Collaboration ▪ Compliance ▪ Coopetition ▪ Core Business ▪ Customers or clients ▪ Dialogue/Communication ▪ Distinctive capabilities ▪ Entrepreneurial ▪ Ethics or Ethical ▪ Explore or Exploratory ▪ External Environmental Scanning or External Environment ▪ Financial Sustainability or Funding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Phases of the Strategic Management Process ▪ Planning Phase ▪ Implementation Phase <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Academic Offerings ○ Business Continuity Management ○ Competitive Advantage ○ Community Engagement ○ Competence ○ Core Business ○ Distinctive Capabilities ○ Entrepreneurial Posture ○ Enrolment Targets ○ Governance Structures ○ Graduates' Relevance to the Market ○ Historically Disadvantaged Universities

Themes from Literature Review	Sub-Themes from Literature Review (Chapters 2 & 3)	Sub-Themes from Content Analysis (Chapter 4 & 5)	Mergers of Sub-Themes (Chapter 4)	Additional Sub-Themes from In-Depth Interviews (use in future studies) (Chapter 5)	Final Sub-Themes Used in Chapter 5
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strategic Planning ▪ Students or Student-centricity 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Fourth-Industrial Revolution or 4-IR or Industry 4.0 ▪ Governance or Governing Structure ▪ Graduate Employability or Relevance of Graduates to the Market ▪ Hierarchical Positioning or Organisational Structure ▪ Historically Disadvantaged Universities ▪ Improvement ▪ Incident Management Reporting ▪ Institutional Autonomy ▪ Integrity ▪ International Students ▪ Inward-looking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Integrity of Assessments ○ Internationalisation ○ Organisational Agility ○ Organisational Structure ○ Proactive Embrace of Coopetition ○ Research Outputs and/ or Impact ○ Resourcing of the Strategy ○ Socioeconomic Transformation ○ Student-Centricity ○ Student Dropout Rate or Throughput ○ Talent Management ○ Undue Jostling for Job Opportunities ○ Vision and Mission Refinement ▪ Monitoring, Evaluation and Monitoring Phase <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Key Performance Indicators ○ Graduates' Relevance to the Market

Themes from Literature Review	Sub-Themes from Literature Review (Chapters 2 & 3)	Sub-Themes from Content Analysis (Chapter 4 & 5)	Mergers of Sub-Themes (Chapter 4)	Additional Sub-Themes from In-Depth Interviews (use in future studies) (Chapter 5)	Final Sub-Themes Used in Chapter 5
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Key Performance Indicator ▪ Landscape ▪ Leadership ▪ Managerialism ▪ Market Trends ▪ Monitoring and Reporting ▪ Opportunity or Opportunities ▪ Performance Targets ▪ Quality Assurance ▪ Rankings or University Rankings or International Rankings ▪ Reputation or Brand Reputation or Brand Image ▪ Research Outputs and/or Impact 	

Themes from Literature Review	Sub-Themes from Literature Review (Chapters 2 & 3)	Sub-Themes from Content Analysis (Chapter 4 & 5)	Mergers of Sub-Themes (Chapter 4)	Additional Sub-Themes from In-Depth Interviews (use in future studies) (Chapter 5)	Final Sub-Themes Used in Chapter 5
				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Resilience or Organisational Resilience ▪ Responsiveness ▪ Silo or Siloes ▪ Socioeconomic Transformation ▪ Stakeholders ▪ Strategic Planning ▪ Strategy Implementation ▪ Students or Student-centricity ▪ Student Retention and/or Dropout Rate ▪ Technology ▪ Transparency ▪ Values ▪ Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, Ambiguity (VUCA) 	

Annexure 3

High-Level Summary of Risk Culture Maturity Assessment Per Case Study

Legend:

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All views expressed about sub-theme are negative. ▪ No views. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Majority of views expressed about sub-theme are negative, although some are positive. Alternatively, Participants are <u>mostly</u> silent on this sub-theme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All views expressed about the sub-theme are positive. ▪ 50% participants, within the case study, commented on the sub-theme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All views expressed about sub-theme are positive. ▪ 1 or 2 distinctive novelties about sub-theme. ▪ More than 50% participants commented on sub-theme. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All views expressed about sub-theme are positive. ▪ 3 or more distinctive novelties about sub-theme.

Case Study 1

Theme	Risk/ERM Culture	Risk Appetite/ Tolerance	Institutional Culture	Strategic Planning/ Management	Innovation/ Continuous Improvement	Opportunity/ Opportunities	Compliance	Dialogue	Ethics/ Ethical	Collaboration/ Interdepend
Content Analysis	3-5	1-2	5+	5+	5+	5+	5+	1-2	5+	5+
External Environmental										2.7
	Financial Sustainability	University- Industry Partnerships	Policy Certainty	Student Protests	Technology	Fraud & Corruption	Massification of HEI			

Strategic Management Process										2.0
Phases	No views									
Planning	Consultative Posture									
Implementation	Enrolment Targets	Jostling for Job Opportunities	Embrace of Coopetition	Relevance of Graduates	Vision & Mission	Resourcing for Strategy	Organisational Agility			
Reporting and Monitoring	No views									
Institutional Culture										1.0
Learning Organisation	No views									
Organisational Performance	Work Ethic									
Transparency, Open Dialogue	Only as Risk Culture									
Brand Reputation	No views									
Vision, Values, Mission	No views									
Risk Culture										1.8
	Academic Offerings	Compliance or Regulation	Open Dialogue/ Contrarian Views	Hierarchy: of ERM/IAF	Integrated Posture	Stakeholder-Centricity	Tone-at-the-Top	Value Proposition	Quality Assurance	Risk Maturity

Case Study 2

Theme	Risk/ERM Culture	Risk Appetite/ Tolerance	Institutional Culture	Strategic Planning/ Management	Innovation/ Continuous Improvement	Opportunity/ Opportunities	Compliance	Dialogue	Ethics/ Ethical	Collaboration/ Interdepend.
Content Analysis	0	3-5	5+	5+	5+	5+	5+	0	5+	5+
External Environmental Scanning										3.0
	Emerging Technologies	Financial Sustainability	Fraud and Corruption	Institutional Autonomy	Integrated Posture	Mergers and Acquisitions	Stakeholder-Centricity	Technology	University-Industry Partnerships	Weakly Economy
Strategic Management Process										2.1
Phases/ Definition										
Strategic Planning	Strategy vs. National Goals									
Strategy Implementation	Enrolment Targets	Integrity of Assessments	Organisational Agility	Research Outputs and/or Impact	Socioeconomic Transformation	Talent Mgt. Effectiveness				
Monitoring, Evaluation & Reporting										
Institutional Culture										2.2

	Learning Organisation	Organisational Performance	Transparency & Open-Dialogue	Brand Reputation	Vision, Mission and Values					
	Risk Culture									2.7
	Academic Offerings	Accountability/ Leadership	Continual Improvement	Open-Dialogue/ Contrarian Views	ERM Linkage with Performance	Forward-Looking/ Future-Oriented	Graduate Relevance to the Market	Inter-Dependencies	Policies & Procedures	Positive Outlook on Risk-Taking
	Quality Assurance	Compliance or Regulation	Stakeholder-Centricity	Tone-at-the-Top	Risk Maturity					

Case Study 3

Theme	Risk/ERM Culture	Risk Appetite/ Tolerance	Institutional Culture	Strategic Planning/ Management	Innovation/ Continuous Improvement	Opportunity/ Opportunities	Compliance	Dialogue	Ethics/ Ethical	Collaboration/ Interdepend.
Content Analysis	0	0	3-5	3-5	1-2	3-5	3-5	3-5	3-5	5+
	External Environmental Scanning									2.75
	Financial Sustainability	Institutional Autonomy	Talent Mobility, Attraction, and Retention	Technology						
	Strategic Management Process									2.0
Phases of SMP	All Three Phases									
Strategic Planning	Environmental Scanning									

Strategy Implementation	Academic Offerings	Organisational Agility	Business Continuity Mgt.	Entrepreneurial Posture	Governance Structures	Research Outputs and/or Impact	Socioeconomic Transformation			
Reporting, Evaluation and Reporting										
Institutional Culture										1.4
Learning Organisation	Corporatisation/ Managerialism	Change Management								
Organisational Performance	Competitiveness	Key Performance Indicators								
Transparency & Dialogue										
Brand Reputation										
Vision, Mission & Values										
Risk Culture										1.6
	Accountability/ Leadership/Sense of Ownership	Contrarian Views or Open Dialogue	Integration with Strategy	Coordination of Interdependencies	Policies and Procedures	Positive Outlook on Risk-Taking	Reporting Structure for ERM/IAF	Regulatory Compliance	Stakeholder-Centricity	Tone-at-the-Top
	Risk Maturity									

Case Study 4

Theme	Risk/ERM Culture	Risk Appetite/ Tolerance	Institutional Culture	Strategic Planning/ Management	Innovation/ Continuous Improvement	Opportunity/ Opportunities	Compliance	Dialogue	Ethics/ Ethical	Collaboration/ Interdepend.
Content Analysis	0	1-2	5+	5+	5+	5+	5+	5+	3-5	5+
External Environmental Scanning										2.9
	Emerging Technologies	Financial Sustainability	Institutional Autonomy	Private HEIs	University Rankings	United Nations SDGs	Xenophobia			
Strategic Management Process										2.6
Phases of SMP	No views									
Strategic Planning										
Strategy Implementation	Talent Management	Graduates' Market Relevance	Integrity of Assessments	Organisational Agility	Technology					
Reporting, Evaluation and Reporting										
Institutional Culture										1.9
Learning Organisation	Competence									
Organisational Performance	Distinctive Capabilities	Excellence Posture	Competitive Advantage	Key Performance Indicators	Research Output and/or Impact	Student Retention/ Dropout Rate				

Transparency & Dialogue	Bullying and Intimidation	Corporatisation or Marketisation	Coordination of Interdependencies							
Brand Reputation										
Vision, Mission & Values										
Risk Culture										1.6
	Accountability/ Leadership	Compliance or Regulation	Continual Improvement	Data Analytics	Coordination of Interdependencies	Inward-Looking	Stakeholder-Centricity	Risk Maturity		

Case Study 5

Theme	Risk/ERM Culture	Risk Appetite/ Tolerance	Institutional Culture	Strategic Planning/ Management	Innovation/ Continuous Improvement	Opportunity/ Opportunities	Compliance	Dialogue	Ethics/ Ethical	Collaboration/ Interdepend.
Content Analysis	3-5	5+	5+	5+	5+	5+	5+	1-2	5+	5+
External Environmental Scanning										2.6
	Emerging Technologies	Financial Sustainability	Institutional Autonomy	Private HEIs	Socioeconomic Transformation	Quality of Students	Technology or Digitisation	VUCA		
Strategic Management Process										1.4
Phases of SMP										
Strategic Planning										

Strategy Implementation	Business Continuity Management	Core Business	Distinctive Capabilities	Historically Disadvantaged Universities	Organisational Agility	Graduates' Market Relevance	Research Output and/or Impact	Student Dropout Rate/ Throughput		
Reporting, Evaluation and Reporting	Key Performance Indicators									
	Institutional Culture									1.6
Learning Organisation	Consequence Management									
Organisational Performance										
Transparency & Dialogue										
Brand Reputation										
Vision, Mission & Values										
	Risk Culture									1.4
	Academic Offerings	Accountability/ Leadership	Bureaucratic/ Bureaucracy	Continual Improvement	Failure As a Source of Innovation	Contrarian Views/ Raising a Red Flag	Forward Outlook/ Future-Orientation	Inward-Looking	Hierarchical Positioning of ERM/IAF	Integrated Posture
	Interdependencies/ Coordination	Policies and Procedures	Positive Outlook on Risk-Taking	Regulatory Posture	Tone-at-the-Top	Risk Maturity				

Case Study 6

Theme	Risk/ERM Culture	Risk Appetite/ Tolerance	Institutional Culture	Strategic Planning/ Management	Innovation/ Continuous Improvement	Opportunity/ Opportunities	Compliance	Dialogue	Ethics/ Ethical	Collaboration/ Interdepend.
Content Analysis	0	1-2	5+	3-5	5+	5+	5+	5+	3-5	5+
External Environmental Scanning										2.7
	Financial Sustainability	4-IR	Institutional Autonomy	Socioeconomic Transformation	University Rankings	Technology or Digitisation				
Strategic Management Process										1.9
Phases of SMP										
Strategic Planning										
Strategy Implementation	Agility/ Organisational Agility	Distinctive Capabilities	Entrepreneurial	Graduates' Market Relevance	Historically Disadvantaged Universities	Internationalisation	Research Outputs and/ or Impact			
Reporting, Evaluation and Reporting										
Institutional Culture										2.1
Learning Organisation										

Organisational Performance	Business Continuity Management	Community Engagement	Competitive Advantage/Edge	Competitive/ Excellence Posture	Governance or Governing Structure	Hierarchical Positioning or ERM/IAF	Key Performance Indicators	Staff/Supervisor-Student Ratio	Student-Centricity	
Transparency & Dialogue										
Brand Reputation										
Vision, Mission & Values										
Risk Culture										1.9
	Academic Offerings	Accountability/ Leadership	Collaborative or Collaboration	Dialogue and/or Contrarian Views	Forward-Looking or Future Oriented	Governance or Governing Structure	Integrative/ Integrated Posture	Interdependencies	Organisational Performance	
	Policies and Procedures	Regulatory Posture or Regulation	Siloes	Stakeholder-Centricity	Tone-at-the-Top	Risk Maturity				

External Group of Practitioners

External Environmental Scanning										1.2
	Financial Sustainability	Institutional Autonomy	4-IR	Influential Factors	International Students	Socioeconomic Transformation	Stakeholders	UNSDGs	Technology	VUCA
Strategic Management Process										1.5

Phases of SMP	No comments									
Strategic Planning										
Strategy Implementation	Organisational Agility	Distinctive Capabilities	Graduates' Market Relevance	International Students	Student Dropout Rate					
Reporting, Evaluation and Reporting	No comments									
Institutional Culture										1.4
Learning Organisation	Business Continuity Management	Change Management								
Organisational Performance	Community Engagement	Corporatisation	Core Business	Competence	Competitive Edge	Competitive/ Excellence Posture	Governance/ Governing Structure	Hierarchical Positioning of ERM/IAF	Student-Centricity	
Transparency & Dialogue	Personality Cult or Cronyism									
Brand Reputation										
Vision, Mission & Values										
Risk Culture										1.3

	Academic Offerings	Tone-at-the-Top	Accountability/Leadership	Collaboration/Collaborative	Contrarian Views/Open Dialogue	Forward-Looking/Future-Oriented	Hierarchical Positioning of ERM/IAF	Interdependencies	Integrative Posture or Integration	Innovation or Failure as a Source of Innovation
	Inward-Looking	Quality Assurance	Risk Appetite	Stakeholder-Centricity	Transparency	Risk Maturity				

Annexure 4

Risk Culture Maturity Framework – a Higher Education Sector Context

Themes and Sub-Themes	Level 1 Embryonic	Level 2 Evolving	Level 3 Exploratory	Level 4 Entrepreneurial	Level 5 Elegance-Shaper
1. Strategic Management Process					
1.1 Strategic Formulation and Planning					
1.1.1 Strategic Environmental Scanning	1.1.1 None undertaken at all.	1.1.1 Scanning that is based on compliance and various audit related outcomes, mainly – responds to those	1.1.1 Environmental scanning that is informed by benchmarking and undertaken annually, led by ERM function. ERM Function's competence is demonstrable, in terms of extracting relevant trends and packing those into relevant messages for the university.	1.1.1 Environmental scanning that is undertaken annually, by a multi-functional team within the university (e.g. ERM, IPQA, RIE, & T&L). Tracking of market trends, led by ERM, and feeding into Quarterly governance reporting is a norm.	1.1.1 Adopts a Shaper posture in response to market trends that emerge, viz. selecting some and creatively elevating those to a new level or innovating and bringing novel trend-setter. Futurist-led brainstorming sessions, during a Council retreat, executive partaking, aimed at tracking risks and opportunities. A Risk Note, on emerging risks and Black Elephant Event, or any risk which the university could be blinded to, circulated to risk owners.
1.1.2 Strategy Development and/or Refinement	1.1.2 Focused on performance planning than strategy, annually and led mainly by Executives.	1.1.2 Planning-focused, involves all key role players in leadership roles.	1.1.2 Strategy developed, with underpinning plan, socialised to broader university.	1.1.2 Strategy conceived at executive level, endorsed by Council, and developed via bottom-up with entire university community.	1.1.2 Key stakeholders engaged upfront, & their perspective informs strategy conception process.

Themes and Sub-Themes	Level 1 Embryonic	Level 2 Evolving	Level 3 Exploratory	Level 4 Entrepreneurial	Level 5 Elegance-Shaper
1.1.3 Strategic Opportunities and Risks Profiling	1.1.3 Done by ERM, one-on-one with Executives.	1.1.3 ERM facilitates small focus groups	1.1.3 Annual risk workshop with senior executives - facilitated by ERM.	<p>Employees, across university's hierarchy, can articulate how their job fits in with overall strategy of the university.</p> <p>1.1.3 Dedicated effort, in addition to the risk workshop, undertaken and focused on identifying opportunities.</p> <p>Sense-checking of opportunities and risks is an integral part of the profiling, e.g., how they map against the:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Strategy alignment or direction ▪ Key phases of SMP. ▪ Key programmes, or goals. 	<p>Both strategy and the APP are unique, in relation to other HEIs.</p> <p>1.1.3 A select of key external stakeholder, along the value chain, participate in the strategic risk profiling.</p> <p>Continual tracking and evaluation of wicked risks, which cannot ordinarily be tracked via normal ERM processes, is done at least annually.</p>
1.2 Strategy Implementation 1.2.1 Organisational Agility	1.2.1.1 Status-quo dominates the approach to university processes for service delivery.	1.2.1.1 Despite an understanding of the risks pertaining to bureaucratic processes there is no sustained will to reconfigure processes	<p>1.2.1.1 Legal framework as well as policies and procedures serve not as a point of departure, but a 'territory' within which to try new approaches.</p> <p>The implementation of Action Plans for strategic and critical risks is subjected to independent auditing, reported on Quarterly by the ERM Function.</p>	1.2.1.1 Benchmarked maturity models, tailored to the university's context, exist for core functional areas (e.g. Internationalisation; Entrepreneurship; Planning and Monitoring; Registry; Finance; ERM; Registry), approved at oversight structure level, serve to inspire a wave of agility.	1.2.1.1 Track record for scaling of big ideas, including aligning those with university strategy, as a core competency of the university.

Themes and Sub-Themes	Level 1 Embryonic	Level 2 Evolving	Level 3 Exploratory	Level 4 Entrepreneurial	Level 5 Elegance-Shaper
	<p>1.2.1.2 Research and Innovation portfolio forms part of Teaching and Learning portfolio, accountable to a joint DVC/VP.</p> <p>Research is not informed by emerging market trends, focuses mainly on RSA challenges.</p> <p>1.2.1.3 Academic programmes are archaic, academics are not keen to bring in curriculum changes.</p>	<p>1.2.1.2 Research and Innovation is a separate portfolio from T&L.</p> <p>Research focus includes emerging trends, informed by an Internationalisation Strategy, though only ad hoc implementation of such strategy occurs.</p> <p>1.2.1.3 Although academics are keen but there is no structured capacitation intervention on offer by the university. Low staff turnover and strong union resistance to change.</p>	<p>1.2.1.2 Two separate DVCs/VPs serve as executive heads for RIE and T&L, respectively.</p> <p>Internationalisation strategy informs collaborative nature of innovation research, key emerging trends focus.</p> <p>1.2.1.3 Design-thinking, informing curriculum transformation, is at elementary stages, with constrained budget allocation. Staff training is being rolled out.</p> <p>Tenure of academic staff is based on productivity, in light of a dynamic strategy. No jobs-for-life.</p>	<p>1.2.1.2 High-impact journals targeted by the university's researchers, and a fair amount of success achieved.</p> <p>University-industry partnerships show a steady rise in the university's research activities.</p> <p>1.2.1.3 Design-thinking embraced widely across the university, with pockets of excellence showing up, through future-oriented curriculum.</p> <p>Diversity, in terms of staff profile is deliberate in its focus on cross-generational mix, the rate at which succession planning churns out emerging leaders.</p> <p>Effective leveraging on mutually beneficial partnerships, e.g. with SAQA, as pave way to improved turnaround time for curriculum review and approval.</p>	<p>1.2.1.2 Industry experience is a pre-requisite for Tier-3 leadership roles, e.g. Executive Deans.</p> <p>Communities are a source of university's competitive advantage in relation to impactful research.</p> <p>1.2.1.3 Design-thinking is integral to the university's culture and socialised across the value chain of the HEI.</p> <p>Leadership is framed in terms of pre-defined core competencies rather than hierarchical position within the university.</p> <p>Contribution of emerging leaders, together with any groundbreaking ideas, is tracked as a priority KPI.</p>

Themes and Sub-Themes	Level 1 Embryonic	Level 2 Evolving	Level 3 Exploratory	Level 4 Entrepreneurial	Level 5 Elegance-Shaper
1.3.3 Combined Assurance	<p>1.2.2.3 Individual performance management process (IPMP) for staff does not exist.</p> <p>1.3.3.1 University without formally approved Combined Assurance Framework (CAF).</p>	<p>1.3.2.3 The IPMP for staff is immature, and is applied to only senior leadership of the university.</p> <p>1.3.3.1 Despite an approved CAF, it is not aligned with unique features of the university, nor is its implementation properly structured.</p>	<p>1.3.2.3 Performance appraisals for staff are entered into, and contracting concluded, by the end January – every employee is enrolled to IPMP.</p> <p>1.3.3.1 Properly benchmarked CAF that is customised to the university's uniqueness, with meetings convening regularly and properly attended. CRO/CAE chairs</p>	<p>1.3.2.3 The IPMP is punctuated by overly stretched targets, with failure viewed through the lessons learned prism.</p> <p>IPMP strengthens the values-embrace, deepens emotional connection with staff and fuels a wave of excellence.</p> <p>1.3.3.1 Representation at the Combined Assurance <u>Forum</u> is pegged at Tier-3 of the university's leadership, except where the hierarchical structure does not permit.</p>	<p>1.3.2.3 IPMP serves as a critical component of the university succession planning, with core competencies aligned to strategy an integral to the IPMP.</p> <p>1.3.3.1 Executives, viz. 1st line of assurance, actually present their respective portfolios' risk reports – as crafted by the CRO,</p>
2. Institutional Culture					
<p>2.1 Learning Organisation</p> <p>2.1.1 ERM Related Training and Awareness</p> <p>2.1.2 Ethics-Focused Institutional Posture</p>	<p>2.1.1.1 There is either no training and awareness focused on ERM, or it is ad hoc and elementary.</p> <p>2.1.2.1 Induction is limited to onboarding, undertaken infrequently, focused on the Code of Conduct</p>	<p>2.1.1.1 ERM training and awareness is undertaken infrequently and focused on hard or technical skills.</p> <p>2.1.2.1 Centrally coordinated staff induction, led by Human Resources (HR), focused on CoC) and</p>	<p>2.1.1.1 Infusion of ERM training and awareness into quarterly engagements with 1st Line of Assurance role players.</p> <p>2.1.2.1 Quarterly staff induction, hosted by HR, and led by relevant functional leaders within the university.</p>	<p>2.1.1.1 Contribution of the ERM Team to thought leadership is undertaken via presentation at professional body forums, conferences, etc.</p> <p>2.1.2.1 Monthly Staff induction sessions take place, with an opportunity for re-induction to those already aboard and keen on a refresher.</p>	<p>2.1.1.1 ERM Team is actively involved in thought leadership via publications in collaboration with fellow ERM practitioners and/or, Academics within the network of international collaborations.</p> <p>2.1.2.1 Industry experts, on the governance of ethics, partner with the university,</p>

Themes and Sub-Themes	Level 1 Embryonic	Level 2 Evolving	Level 3 Exploratory	Level 4 Entrepreneurial	Level 5 Elegance-Shaper
2.1.3 International Collaboration Strategy	<p>(CoC) and HR related policies.</p> <p>Both the CoC and related policies have neither been recently updated in the last 3 years, nor are they all in place.</p>	<p>related policies, gets facilitated once a year for new staff.</p>	<p>The ERM architecture includes key policies that are socialised once approved (Fraud Prevention Policy; Anti-Bullying and Harassment Policy; the Whistleblowing Policy, etc.).</p>	<p>The socialisation of policies occurs as integral to Quarterly briefings to the university community, on outcomes of whistleblowing cases that were reported.</p> <p>Adequate capacitation of the Ethics Function, the IAF, the ERM Function and HR (incl. Employee Relations) and effective coordination of these functions is evident.</p>	<p>on a retainer basis, and co-facilitate staff induction</p> <p>Digitised CoC and ethics modules, incorporating market case studies, and with a 'bring it home' element, serve as a tool for induction.</p> <p>All existing staff members are required to undertake an ethics and CoC related training annually. A 75% pass-mark gives one a 'Passport to Work' for 12 months.</p>
2.1.4 Alignment of Culture with Strategy	<p>2.1.3.1 Unstructured</p> <p>2.1.4.1 Culture is not deemed a priority focal area.</p>	<p>2.1.3.1 Semi-structured</p> <p>2.1.4.1 Elementary focus on culture, accompanied by more strategic plan than strategy.</p>	<p>2.1.3.1 Structured, with impact pre-defined yet not consistently tracked.</p> <p>2.1.4.1 The University's talent management is informed by both the values and technical skills necessary to deliver on the strategy</p>	<p>2.1.3.1 Institutional competencies-based strategy informs the choice of HEIs targeted for collaboration.</p> <p>2.1.4.1 The lexicon within the university reflects an aspirational, future-orientation posture. [e.g. HR vs. People Culture or HCS; Risk Innovation Officers.</p>	<p>2.1.3.1 Institutional strategy-centric approach, viz. university strategy informs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Choice of which HEIs to collaborate with, based on mutually beneficial posture. ▪ Lessons learned, upfront, rigorous tracking of impact tracking thereof. <p>2.1.4.1 The future of work landscape informs the talent management strategy of the university.</p>

Themes and Sub-Themes	Level 1 Embryonic	Level 2 Evolving	Level 3 Exploratory	Level 4 Entrepreneurial	Level 5 Elegance-Shaper
2.2 Brand Reputation	2.2.1 No structured, deliberate approach aimed at prioritising brand reputation of the university.	2.2.1 Brand reputation has been identified as a risk at operational level within the university. Mitigating actions identified are neither adequate nor effective.	2.2.1 Brand reputation identified as a strategic risk. Comprehensive set of mitigation actions, adequately designed, and effective. Efforts towards managing brand reputation are led by Marketing & Communications team of the university.	2.2.1 Brand reputation serves as an Item on every Council meeting, with the implementation of any action items tracked diligently. Combined assurance forum, which is well established, does prioritise brand reputation risk, including opportunities for enhancing it. Coordinated initiative has been put in place to socialise the notion of staff members, academic & support to be brand ambassadors of the university.	2.2.1 A higher education sector brand reputation maturity model, specific to the university has been developed. Council tracks progress at 2 of its meetings during a year, with implementation thereon being effective. Assurance or auditing of performance by university, on its implementation, by an external expert, is done annually.
3. Risk Culture					
3.1 Tone-at-the-Top	3.1.1 Personality cult, an insular mentality, and a too-big-to-fail posture punctuates the culture of the university.	3.1.1 Occasionally, institutional climate surveys are undertaken but results thereof are either ignored or selectively actioned.	3.1.1 Institutional climate surveys are undertaken on a 2-yearly basis and key messages prioritised for actioning.	3.1.1 Institutional climate surveys are administered annually, results thereof unpacked, an action plan to address gaps drawn up, and implementation thereof tracked for impact.	3.1.1 The project team who unpacks Outcomes of the institutional climate survey has no senior leadership – accounts directly to the Sponsor, the VC. Outcomes of the climate survey serve as another source of attracting high calibre, scarce-skills into the university.

Themes and Sub-Themes	Level 1 Embryonic	Level 2 Evolving	Level 3 Exploratory	Level 4 Entrepreneurial	Level 5 Elegance-Shaper
3.2 Continuous Improvement	<p>3.2.1 Change is viewed with scepticism, the university community prefers old ways of service delivery.</p> <p>3.2.2 University policies remain largely archaic; where reviewed that is done in a compliance posture.</p>	<p>3.2.1 Change is understood at leadership level, but its uptake is does filter through key projects and initiatives.</p> <p>3.2.2 Although university policies are reviewed regularly, basic benchmarking rarely gets done.</p>	<p>3.2.1 Change Management is one of the core competencies, and flagship projects across the university domains show a fairly good uptake at leadership level.</p> <p>3.2.2 University policies reviewed and approved by Council on a 3-yearly basis, with limited benchmarking being integral to such review. of university policies.</p> <p>The university has a Policy on Policies, which incorporates benchmarking as integral to university policies' review.</p>	<p>3.2.1 Impact of change management is tracked across levels and through the value chain of the university.</p> <p>Staff Alumni initiative is maintained, whereby views from ex-employees are welcome and considered for implementation.</p> <p>3.2.2 University policies reviewed and approved by Council annually, with broad-based, multi-sector-informed benchmarking being integral to such review.</p> <p>Tracking of the impact which changes to policy have on the university's control environment is done and communicated on relevant university platforms.</p>	<p>3.2.1 Culture of experimentation is embedded, with failure viewed as source of innovation, e.g. funds are allocated for potential value, rather than just cost, is of importance.</p> <p>3.2.2 The benchmarking of university policies infuses emerging perspectives as per published articles.</p> <p>Select-values, pertinent to continual learning, e.g. Excellence, innovation, or Creativity, are infused in the policies – serving to inspire learning or change.</p>
3.3 Open Dialogue	<p>3.3.1 Strongly hierarchical, top-down communication, with intolerance for dissent, prevails across the university.</p>	<p>3.3.1 Collegiality prevails, yet careful thought to context should precede the airing of ideas that are out of the norm. Consistency trumps exploration.</p>	<p>3.3.1 Incident management report tool is in place, with breakdowns in process, control, or system being tracked. It facilitated by ERM, focused more on mistakes.</p> <p>Comprehensive training and awareness on risk appetite and tolerance is digitised and</p>	<p>3.3.1 Lessons Learned Tracking Tool, led by Department Heads, under the stewardship of ERM. Emphasis on lessons learned that are then shared across the university and impact tracked.</p> <p>Innovation is not for a selected few, nor is it for specific Departments within the university. Ideas are</p>	<p>3.3.1 Distal thinking, together with Black Sheep ideas that 'changed the world', are tracked and celebrated at a university-wide function, as part of annual Awards.</p> <p>DVC/VP-level tracking of Failed projects that pinpointed impactful lessons, leading to</p>

Themes and Sub-Themes	Level 1 Embryonic	Level 2 Evolving	Level 3 Exploratory	Level 4 Entrepreneurial	Level 5 Elegance-Shaper
			<p>readily available to inform staff decisions.</p> <p>Exit interviews are conducted and key messages tracked for improvement of the working environment.</p>	<p>sourced across the hierarchy and functions of the university.</p> <p>Default beliefs-challenge sessions held monthly, across the university, and impact tracked accordingly</p> <p>Exit interviews are conducted by a line manager one-level up, with key messages being tracked for implementation.</p>	<p>either change in strategic direction, or enhancement of strategy delivery efficiencies.</p>
3.4 Positive Outlook on Risk	<p>3.4.1 The compliance mentality dominates the leadership approach to running the university, with mistakes that arise leading to punishment.</p>	<p>3.4.1 Concept of risk appetite is part of the university lexicon, but the ERM Function is not conversant on how to implement it.</p> <p>Training and awareness on risk appetite and risk tolerance is technical and narrow-focused.</p>	<p>3.4.1 ERM Function has socialised the concepts of risk appetite and risk tolerance across the university.</p> <p>The 1st Line of Assurance role players proactively incorporate risk appetite and tolerance in key decisions taken.</p>	<p>3.4.1 University lexicon, in terms of the risk culture success factors, is inspired by an aspirational, innovative posture, premised on the quest for creativity.</p> <p>Impact of appropriate application of risk appetite and tolerance, by university staff, serves as a case study during continual training and awareness sessions to staff. Thus, reinforcing the optimist posture.</p>	<p>3.4.1 Brand Identity Moments, with staff's personal distinctiveness serving to illuminate institutional stories, and building onto annual institutional Awards, are a 'daily norm' across the hierarchy.</p> <p>Continual publications on risk culture, by the ERM Function, in partnership with industry occasionally.</p>

Annexure 5

Ethics Approval (from UNISA)



UNISA COLLEGE OF ACCOUNTING SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

Date: 9 June 2021

Dear S T Nyangintsimbi,

ERC Reference # :
2021_CAS_024

Name : S T Nyangintsimbi

Student no: 07766513

**Decision: Ethics Approval from 8
June 2021 to 7 June 2024**

Researcher(s): Mr Sikhuthali T Nyangintsimbi (sikhuthali2012@Yahoo.co.uk)
Supervisor(s): Prof Philna Coetzee (coetzeegg@tut.ac.za)

**Working title of research:
Integration of Risk Culture with Strategic Management and Organisational Culture
in public HEIs**

Qualification: PhD and Non-degree

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa College of Accounting Sciences Research Ethics Review Committee for the above mentioned research. **Ethics approval is granted for data collection through interviews and document analysis.** The certificate is valid for the period **8 June 2021 to 7 June 2024.**

*The **low risk application** was **approved** by the CAS RERC on **8 June 2021** 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.
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 CAS RERC.
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 require additional ethics clearance.
7. No fieldwork activities may continue after the expiry date (**7 June 2024**). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number 2021_CAS_024 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Signature : **Prof Lourens Erasmus**



Chair of CAS RERC

E-mail: erasmlj1@unisa.ac.za

Tel: (012) 429-8844

Signature : **Dr Chisinga Chikutuma**



Digitally signed by Dr CN Chikutuma, PhD
DN: cn=Dr CN Chikutuma, PhD, o=CAS:
Unisa, ou=Acting Head: Office for
Graduate Studies,
email=chikucn@unisa.ac.za, c=ZA
Date: 2021.06.09 12:30:52 +0200

Acting head: Office for Graduate Studies
and Research

By delegation from the Executive Dean:
College of Accounting Sciences

E-mail: chikucn@unisa.ac.za

Tel: (012) 429-3401

Annexure 6

Motivation Letter to Sampled Case Study's Research Ethics Office



June 29th, 2021

Prof XXXX

Job Title

Name of Department

Name of University or Case Study and Address

Dear Prof XXX,

PhD Research Study on XXX as Part of the Sample of HEIs Serving as a Case Study

I am reaching out to you in my capacity as a PhD student at the UNISA, who has now reached the fieldwork stage of my research journey.

Through this Motivation Letter, I am humbly requesting your support as the leadership team of XXX, and specifically as the Research Ethics Committee. In this regard, could you please kindly honour me with an opportunity to include your esteemed institution as one of the case studies I will be tapping on, in my attempts to enriching my PhD research study. The topic for which I would be honored to engage with them on is: [Integration of Risk Culture with Strategic Management and Institutional Culture in Public HEIs](#).

Having gone through the annual reports of the various sister public higher education institutions within our country, seeking to get a sense - from a distance – it was heartening to find your esteemed institution reflecting on the concept of risk culture in a tone that resonates so well with what my research study seeks to gain more insight into. Hence, this ardent appeal for your support as the XXX leadership team, Prof XX. And that will essentially make XXX the institution that will represent the XXX province in this study and, equally importantly, and providing yourselves with an opportunity to play deeper into the

thought leadership space – which is an area that seems to be one of your strengths as an institution.

Optimistically speaking, outcomes of this study will be of benefit to our higher education sector, which has often been criticised as being punctuated by a relatively immature risk culture; that we are overly risk-averse, inordinately hierarchical, etc. Such criticism seems aimed at not just our country's higher education sector, but in other countries' too.

Should you be agreeable to my request, Prof XXX, then potentially you will tag me with one of your Team members who will assist me in liaising with the specific individuals whom I would then engage with, through in-depth interviews, preferably virtually. Probing questions will be circulated upfront to pave the way for the respective interviews.

In conformity with ethical considerations:

- Confidentiality, in terms of the names of the participants as well as the information which they will share with me as a researcher, will be strictly observed. And this will be done also in seeking to comply with the POPI Act;
- Should Participants prefer to withdraw at any stage during the fieldwork or interview then by all means I commit to respecting their preferred stance.

All research activities such as sampling, data gathering, and processing of the relevant data will be undertaken in a manner that is respectful of the rights and integrity of all parties as stipulated in the UNISA Research Ethics Policy. Expectedly, there might be specific pre-conditions stipulated by your own institution, which I commit to abiding by.

Thanking you.

Mr. Sikhuthali T. Nyangintsimbi
PhD Student, College of Accounting Sciences
Unisa
Mobile: +27 83 635 635 9

Annexure 7

Participant Consent Letter



Date

Prof XXXX
Position XXXX
University of XXXX
Physical Address

Dear Prof XXXX,

Participant Information and Consent to Recruit Participants in a PhD Research Study

I am reaching out to you in my capacity as a PhD student at the UNISA, and have now reached the fieldwork stage of my research journey. Through this Consent Letter, I am humbly requesting your support as the leadership team of the University of XXX, by gracing me with an opportunity to interview some of your Team members as research Participants. The topic for which I would be honored to engage with them on is: Integration of Risk Culture with Strategic Management and Institutional culture in Public Higher Education Institutions.

Having gone through the annual reports of the various sister public higher education institutions within our country, undertaking a preliminary content analysis on them, it was heartening to find your esteemed institution reflecting on the concept of risk culture in a tone that resonates so well with what my research study seeks to gain more insight into. Hence, this ardent appeal for your support as the XXX leadership team.

Optimistically speaking, outcomes of this study will be of benefit to our higher education sector, which has often been criticized as punctuated by a relatively immature risk culture; that we are overly risk-averse, inordinately hierarchical, etc. Such criticism seems aimed at not just our country's higher education sector, but in other countries' too.

Should you be agreeable to my request, then potentially you will tag me with one of your team members who will assist me in liaising with the specific individuals whom I would then engage with for 60-90 minutes either virtually or in person. Key focal areas that will be covered through probing questions will be circulated upfront to pave the way for the respective interviews. Confidentiality in terms of the names of the Participants as well as the information which they will share with me as a researcher. Should they prefer to withdraw at any stage during the fieldwork or interview then by all means I commit to respecting their preferred stance.

The sampling, data gathering and processing of the relevant data will be undertaken in a manner that is respectful of the rights and integrity of all parties as stipulated in the UNISA Research Ethics Policy.

Thanking you.

Mr. Sikhuthali T. Nyangintsimbi
PhD Student, College of Accounting Sciences
UNISA

Annexure 8
Participant Information Sheet and Assent Form



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET
(CHANGE AS REQUIRED & PRINT ON UNISA LETTERHEAD)

Ethics clearance reference number: 2021_ CAS_024

February 15th, 2022

Title: The Integration of Risk Culture with Strategic Management Process and Institutional Culture in Public Higher Education Institutions in South Africa

Dear XXXX,

My name is **Sikhuthali Nyangintsimbi**, and I am engaged in a research study that is supervised by Prof Philna Coetzee, who is currently located at the Tshwane University of Technology.

The research study itself is in fulfilment of the PhD degree with the College of Accounting Sciences, at the University of South Africa. It is a self-funded research study.

Your participation in this research study, entitled The Integration of Risk Culture with Strategic Management Process and Institutional culture in Public Higher Education Institutions in South Africa in hereby humbly invited. In so doing, I am convinced that both your professional experience and expert insights will contribute towards enhancing the value-add of this research.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The main objective of this research study is to develop a risk culture maturity framework, including an illustration of how it integrates with the strategic management and institutional culture, in the context of the public higher education sector in South Africa.

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO PARTICIPATE?

Your enriched experience in our higher education sector, having serviced at least two institutions that include the XXX, imply that you have a meaningful commend of the organisational dynamics at play. Inextricably, such dynamics have a direct linkage with a university strategy as well as its institutional culture and pertinent risks. Needless to state, as a XXXX, your sensitivity to matters pertaining to these three focal areas of my research topic makes you strongly relevant. Hence, I am convinced that your reflective perspective will be of pivotal value-add.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF MY PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

You will effectively be the interviewee, providing responses to questions pertaining to especially the gaps within current practices relating the strategic management process within HEIs, as well potential enhancement opportunities. The latter would, of course, include how enterprise risk management could contribute in a manner that would graduate into better integration with the strategic management process whilst also maturing within the HEIs.

The interview itself will take about 60 minutes depending on the level of detail the responses take, as well as extent of follow up questions – at the very most it will be 90 minutes.

CAN I WITHDRAW FROM THIS STUDY EVEN AFTER HAVING AGREED TO PARTICIPATE?

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

Outcomes of this research study are likely be of benefit to higher education institutions, especially in relation to enhancements on how the strategic management process unfolds. Necessarily, this could lead to better performance against pre-set annual targets, which in turn widens the leadership space for prominent role players like yourself. For instance, the volume and/or value of university-industry partnerships for XXX could increase, and thus springing up more commercialisation opportunities for XXX.

ARE THERE ANY NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR ME IF I PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH PROJECT?

Your participation in this study is unlikely to attract negative consequences, particularly given the juncture in which our HE sector finds itself at. That is, the endemic challenges we encounter, some of which have led to the sector being described as immature in terms of both the strategic management process and ERM, imply that any potential contribution towards finding solutions is likely to be welcome. Further, besides the anonymity aspect, there are other role-players within UNISA who will also be interviewed.

WILL THE INFORMATION THAT I CONVEY TO THE RESEARCHER AND MY IDENTITY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

You have the right to insist that your name must not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher and his research supervisor, should know about your involvement in this research. Similarly, to safeguard the principle of anonymity, no one will be able to connect you to the answers you give.

That is, your answers will be given a code number or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings. That way, the principle of confidentiality will be maintained. Such confidentiality will be maintained even in situations where the researcher has to deliver a conference paper on the outcomes of this research.

HOW WILL THE RESEARCHER PROTECT THE SECURITY OF DATA?

The usage of hard copy information will be avoided as far as is practically possible and is, in fact, unlikely to be utilized for purposes of this research. On the other hand, electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval, if applicable. Once outcomes of the research have been published then any electronic data and information will be deleted permanently from the hard drive of my computer.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

There are certainly no incentives attached to participating in this research study. Your professional stature in the higher education sector broadly, and within UNISA in particular, is understood to be such that you define value as contributing to the higher good of society. And, optimistically speaking, outcomes of through outcomes of this research study your contribution will have impacted positively in terms of recalibrating the HE sector and its benefit to society.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICS APPROVAL

This study has received written approval from the Research Ethics Review Committee of the College of Accounting Sciences, at UNISA. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

HOW WILL I BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS/RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Sikhuthali Nyangintsimbi on:

Mobile Number: +27 83 635 653 9 or

Email Address: Sikhuthali2012@yahoo.co.uk.

The findings are accessible for three years. Similarly, should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, he will remain accessible on these same contact details.

Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact my supervisor on this research study, Prof Philna Coetzee, via the following details:

Mobile Number: +27 82 557 8833

Email Address: PhilnaCoetzee1@gmail.com

In the event that you have any ethical concerns and thus require to contact the relevant research ethics Chairperson, who is Prof Lourens Erasmus, he is available on the following contact particulars:

Office Number: +27 12 429 8844

Email Address: erasmlj1@unisa.ac.za

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for agreeing to participate in this study.

Sincerely,

Mr. Sikhuthali Nyangintsimbi

ASSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the interview.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname..... (please print)

Participant Signature..... Date.....

Researcher's Name & Surname.....(please print)

Researcher's signature..... Date.....

Annexure 9

Ethics Approval to Conduct Interviews



June 29th, 2021

Prof XXXX

Job Title

University XXXX

Physical Address

Dear Prof XXX,

PhD Research Study on XXX as Part of the Sample of HEIs Serving as a Case Study

I am reaching out to you in my capacity as a PhD student at UNISA, who has now reached the fieldwork stage of my research journey.

Through this Motivation Letter, I am humbly requesting your support as the leadership team of XXX, and specifically as the Research Ethics Committee. In this regard, could you please kindly honour me with an opportunity to include your esteemed institution as one of the case studies I will be tapping on, in my attempts to enriching my PhD research study. The topic for which I would be honored to engage with them on is: Integration of Risk Culture with Strategic Management and Institutional Culture in Public HEIs.

Having gone through the annual reports of the various sister public higher education institutions within our country, seeking to get a sense - from a distance – it was heartening to find your esteemed institution reflecting on the concept of risk culture

in a tone that resonates so well with what my research study seeks to gain more insight into.

Hence, this ardent appeal for your support as the XXXX leadership team, Prof XXX. And that will essentially make XXX the institution that will represent the XXX Province in this study and, equally importantly, and providing yourselves with an opportunity to play deeper into the thought leadership space – which is an area that seems to be one of your strengths as an institution.

Optimistically speaking, outcomes of this study will be of benefit to our higher education sector, which has often been criticised as being punctuated by a relatively immature risk culture; that we are overly risk-averse, inordinately hierarchical, etc. Such criticism seems aimed at not just our country's higher education sector, but in other countries' too.

Should you be agreeable to my request, Prof XXX, then potentially you will tag me with one of your Team members who will assist me in liaising with the specific individuals whom I would then engage with, through in-depth interviews, preferably virtually. Probing questions will be circulated upfront to pave the way for the respective interviews.

In conformity with ethical considerations:

- Confidentiality, in terms of the names of the participants as well as the information which they will share with me as a researcher, will be strictly observed. And this will be done also in seeking to comply with the POPI Act;
- Should Participants prefer to withdraw at any stage during the fieldwork or interview then by all means I commit to respecting their preferred stance.

All research activities such as sampling, data gathering, and processing of the relevant data will be undertaken in a manner that is respectful of the rights and integrity of all parties as stipulated in the UNISA Research Ethics Policy. Expectedly, there might be specific pre-conditions stipulated by your own institution, which I commit to abiding by.

Thanking you.

Mr. Sikhuthali T. Nyangintsimbi
PhD Student, College of Accounting Sciences
UNISA
Mobile: +27 83 635 635 9

Annexure 10

Language and Technical Editing Letters



23 February 2024

To whom it may concern,

I hereby declare that I have edited the research report of Sikhuthali T.T. Nyangintsimbi (student number: 0776-651-3), titled "A Risk Culture Maturity Framework for the South African Public Higher Education Sector", as requested.

Regards

Namhla Nyangintsimbi
LANGUAGE PRACTITIONER (ENGLISH EDITOR)
South African Translators' Institute (SATI) membership number: 1000385
078 697 7206

Ms S Botha

24 Foxcroft Avenue Orchards X 2
Akasia

5 July 2024

To whom it may concern

Report : Dr Sikhuthali T.T. Nyangintsimbi
Doctor of Philosophy : College of Accounting Sciences

Exploring the understanding of what it is that constitutes an optimal risk culture within Higher Education Institutions and determining how best to develop and sustain a dynamic integration of such a risk culture with the strategic management process of Higher Education Institutions.

This is a very well written report with information which reaches relevant conclusions and which could make a difference to Higher Education Institution's financial stability and future growth.

I confirm that I have perused the dissertation and have made suggestions and comments.

Susan Botha, MPH

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