

ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AND EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

THE CASE OF A NEWLY MERGED UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Declaration

By submitting this dissertation electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated) and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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Date: 30 October 2009

Abstract

Organisational culture and external quality assurance in higher education have both drawn significant attention to their promise of greater organisational effectiveness and efficiency and enhanced, improved higher education respectively. In recent years, these constructs have been linked by an assumption that an organisational culture that is amenable to change would be more receptive to the introduction of formal external quality-assurance structures, systems and instruments, as these are aimed at effective and efficient higher education practices, processes and outcomes. However, this assumption has not been sufficiently tested given that there are significant philosophical, conceptual and methodological controversies and contestations surrounding both constructs. While the organisational culture literature has been littered with a proliferation of paradigms and, albeit, fragmented theories, there has been a paucity of theory building in the corresponding literature on quality in higher education in general and on the impact of external quality assurance on institutions specifically.

A qualitative case study was conducted at a newly merged university of technology to investigate two taken-for-granted assumptions: first, that organisational cultures are homogenous, unitary and centred around shared values and could therefore easily be manipulated (usually from the top by management), and second, that the introduction of external quality assurance is an unproblematic technology that will be accepted without question by higher education institutions as it was premised upon the laudable aim of improving the quality of those institutions. A conceptual four-perspective framework was developed to critically evaluate the literature and provide the basis for the three-

dimensional model used in analysing the findings. The research generated several key conclusions that appear to challenge commonly held and articulated positions with regard to organisational culture and external quality assurance. First, organisational culture should be considered as being more ephemeral than concrete, multidimensional than singular, characterised simultaneously by conflict, consensus and indifference and in a constant state of flux. Second, external quality assurance is not necessarily a value-free and neutral exercise aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning, as promised in its early conceptualisation and implementation. Third, multiple cultures may exist simultaneously, interact with and influence each other constantly and of course determine interactions within the organisation and the nature of engagement with externally originated initiatives. Fourth, external quality assurance has purposes that go beyond its often morally just and public-good motives as it tacitly and overtly acts as an agent of control, empowerment and transformation and simultaneously as an agent of the state, though not necessarily to the same extent.

Opsomming

Organisatoriese kultuur en eksterne gehalteversekering in hoër onderwys het albei die aandag in groot mate gevestig op hulle belofte van groter organisatoriese doeltreffendheid en doelmatigheid en gevorderde, verbeterde hoër onderwys onderskeidelik. In die afgelope paar jaar is hierdie konstruksie bygebring deur 'n veronderstelling dat 'n organisatoriese kultuur wat vatbaar is vir verandering, meer ontvanklik sal wees vir die invoer van formele eksterne strukture, stelsels en instrumente vir gehalteversekering, aangesien dit op doeltreffende en doelmatige praktyke, prosesse en uitkomst vir en van hoër onderwys gerig is. Hierdie aanname is egter nie voldoende getoets nie gegee die feit dat daar aansienlike filosofiese, konseptuele en metodologiese strydvrage en twispunte ten opsigte van albei konstruksie bestaan. Terwyl literatuur oor organisatoriese kultuur deur 'n magdom paradigmas en weliswaar gefragmenteerde teorieë oorweldig is, was teoriebou in die ooreenstemmende literatuur oor gehalte in hoër onderwys in die algemeen en oor die impak van eksterne gehalteversekering op instellings in die besonder redelik skaars.

'n Kwalitatiewe gevallestudie is onderneem by 'n universiteit van tegnologie wat onlangs saamgesmelt het om twee aannames wat as vanselfsprekend aanvaar is, te ondersoek: eerstens, dat organisatoriese kulture homogeen, unitêr en óm gedeelde waardes gesentreer is en dat dit dus maklik gemanipuleer kan word (gewoonlik van bo af deur die bestuur), en tweedens, dat die invoer van eksterne gehalteversekering 'n onproblematiese tegnologie is wat sonder teenspraak deur hoëronderwysinstellings aanvaar sal word, aangesien dit op die prysenswaardige oogmerk van verbetering van die

gehalte van daardie instellings gegrond is. 'n Konseptuele raamwerk bestaande uit vier perspektiewe is ontwikkel vir die kritiese evaluering van die literatuur en dit verskaf die grondslag vir die driedimensionele model wat vir die analise van die bevindings gebruik is. Die navorsing het verskeie belangrike gevolgtrekkings na vore laat kom wat algemeen geldende en duidelik bepaalde posisies ten opsigte van organisatoriese kultuur en eksterne gehalteversekering blyk uit te daag. Eerstens moet organisatoriese kultuur beskou word as efemeries eerder as konkreet, multidimensioneel eerder as enkelvoudig, terwyl dit gelyktydig deur konflik, konsensus en onverskilligheid gekenmerk word en in 'n gedurige toestand van wisseling verkeer. Tweedens is eksterne gehalteversekering nie noodwendig, soos in die vroeë konseptualisering en implementering belowe, 'n waardevrye en neutrale oefening gemik op verbetering van die gehalte van onderrig en leer nie. Derdens kan veelvuldige kulture gelyktydig bestaan, met mekaar in interaksie tree en mekaar voortdurend beïnvloed en natuurlik interaksies binne die organisasie en die aard van betrokkenheid by inisiatiewe wat ekstern ontstaan, bepaal. Vierdens het eksterne gehalteversekering oogmerke wat veel verder strek as die motiewe daarvan wat dikwels moreel geregverdig en vir die openbare beswil is aangesien dit stilswyend en op owerste wyse optree as 'n agent vir beheer, bemagtiging en transformasie en tegelyk as 'n agent van die regering, alhoewel nie noodwendig tot dieselfde mate nie.

Dedication

Dedicated to my wife, Vasi, who endured my dissertation anxieties.

My children, Carissa and Karish, who taught me the true meaning of dedication, endurance and perseverance.

My late mother, for whom this would have been a source of immense pride, and my father, for imbuing in me a thirst for knowledge.

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Chapter One: Introduction to the study

1.1. Background

Organisational culture and external quality assurance in higher education have both drawn significant attention to their promise of greater organisational effectiveness and efficiency and enhanced, improved higher education respectively. In recent years, they have been linked by an assumption that an organisational culture that is amenable to change would be more receptive to the introduction of formal internal and external quality-assurance structures, systems and instruments, as these are aimed at effective and efficient higher education practices, processes and outcomes (Sahney, Banwet and Karunes, 2004). However, this assumption has not been sufficiently tested given the philosophical, conceptual and methodological controversies and contestations surrounding both constructs (Martin, 1992; Parker, 2000; Morley, 2003). While organisational culture has been subject to some degree of meta-theoretical scrutiny (Martin, 2003), external quality assurance in higher education has not enjoyed the same level of analysis. However, in response to the generally held view that external quality assurance is aimed at the common good, Newton (2007), Harvey (2006), Barnett (2003) and Morley (2003) have presented strident critiques of current practices, especially with regard to the introduction of external quality-assurance regimes to higher education and its purported aims of improving the quality of teaching and learning.

This study sought to investigate the relationship between these two constructs, which up to now had not been examined in a South African higher education institution (HEI). Although organisational culture had been subject to meta-theoretical analysis, the absence of a general theory or paradigm consensus has led to fundamental differences with regard to epistemology, methodology, political ideology and theory (Martin and Frost, 1996). While the organisational culture literature has been littered with a proliferation of paradigms and, albeit, fragmented theories, there has been a paucity of theory building in the corresponding literature on quality in higher education in general and on the impact of external quality assurance on institutions specifically. Therefore, this study contributes to theory building on the interrelationship of both constructs in a South African HEI.

1.2. Rationale

The thrust and importance of the study are that it investigated two taken-for-granted assumptions: first, that organisational cultures are homogenous, unitary and centred around shared values and could therefore easily be manipulated (usually from the top by management) and second, that the introduction of external quality assurance is an unproblematic technology that will be accepted without question by HEIs as it was premised upon the laudable aim of improving the quality of those institutions. The study also pointed to the potential disconnection between national quality-assurance policies that appear to be legitimated by a public-good and morally right paradigm, and the manner it is perceived and engaged by higher education academic staff. The assumptions mentioned above may not be

sufficiently convincing, especially if organisational members interpret the policy implementation as infringing on their autonomy and academic freedom. As a result, external quality assurance, while mandatory, may not realise its stated outcomes, as those on the receiving end may not mutely and meekly acquiesce to the demands of the policy.

The study took place at a time when South African HEIs underwent fundamental change. The case study illustrates the enormity of the change experienced by the institution: The institution was newly established by the merging of three institutions of different historical contexts, size, shape, staff and student profiles and geographical locations. The resultant institution was reconfigured into a new institutional type in South African higher education, namely a university of technology (UoT). At the time of the institution's establishment there had been (and there is still) a lack of clarity on what exactly constitutes such an institutional type and how it differs from the so-called traditional university. Against this backdrop the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), the statutory external quality-assurance agency, began its quality audits of all HEIs in 2004, and the audits of merged institutions were scheduled as of 2007. While the research may be context-specific as it used the qualitative case study research methodology, its findings will nevertheless resonate with all the other merged institutions that have yet to undergo the external audit.

1.3. Problem statement

It has been posited that culture is a critical component in understanding the process of implementing planned change in universities and colleges (Keup, Walker, Astin and Lindholm, 2001). However, it has also been observed that although organisational research has focussed on the impact of organisational culture on many aspects of organisational life, little empirical research has been conducted on how organisational culture affects change processes and strategies (Kezar and Eckel, 2002). Furthermore, the notion of organisational culture as homogenous, unitary and centred around a set of shared values (Schein, 1992) becomes problematic when commonly held ontological and epistemological assumptions are tested using a multidimensional paradigmatic analysis, such as Burrell and Morgan's (1979) sociological paradigms.

With regard to external quality assurance, the responsible agencies have been at pains to point out that they have no desire to create a culture of compliance within HEIs with their external quality regimes. Rather, they are motivated by a public-good rationale to improve the quality of those institutions and indicate that there are multiple beneficiaries in a peer-driven, objective assessment of the institutions' quality arrangements for its core functions. It is therefore their desire to encourage the development of a culture within universities that is characterised by the will to take quality matters seriously (Barnett, 2003).

This study therefore examined the organisational culture of an HEI in order to determine the nature of its engagement with the external quality audit, and whether the stated aim of the

external quality agency of developing a culture (within HEIs) that takes quality matters seriously would be realised.

1.4. Research objective

The goal of the study was to examine the interrelationship between the organisational culture of an HEI and external quality assurance in the form of an institutional audit. The study aimed to investigate whether underlying values and assumptions were consistent across the institution, that is, whether a homogenous and unitary culture existed or whether the institution was characterised by a more fragmented organisational culture and the manner in which this would define the interrelationship with external quality assurance.

1.4.1. Research question

The research question of the study was: “What is the nature of the organisational culture of an HEI and how does it determine the relationship with external quality assurance in the form of an institutional audit?”

1.4.2. Sub-questions

The sub-questions were formulated as follows:

- 1.4.1.1. How do the assumptions and values of organisational members define the organisational culture of an HEI?
- 1.4.1.2. What model or framework could explain the relationship between the organisational culture and the implementation and eventual outcomes of external quality assurance in the form of an institutional audit?

1.5. Study delimitation

As there was neither a recognised theory nor a substantial body of literature that addressed the context of the study and provided variables that could be tested quantitatively, this was an exploratory, qualitative case study. While issues of context and the use of a case study may delimit the research, its findings are nevertheless significant as it contributes to theory building in an under-theorised field. The findings would also resonate with, and aid, other HEIs with similar contexts that have yet to engage with mandatory external quality assurance.

The research site and context that defined the case further delimited the study. The research site was a recently merged UoT in the northern metropolis of an inland province in South Africa. Factors relating to the change in institutional type, the merging context, the nature of the erstwhile merging partners, the size and shape of the institution and its geographical location also delimited the study. While these factors may point to a specific case study with

a clearly delineated context, the findings were still relevant as all but seven HEIs in South Africa have been merged. Virtually all mergers were between institutions with widely divergent historical antecedents, that is, they were between historically white institutions and historically black institutions.¹ Furthermore, the mergers resulted in new institutional types, such as universities of technology or comprehensive universities. As a result, the research findings may resonate with contexts of HEIs experiencing similar conditions.

Furthermore, the study only interviewed academic staff to surface underlying assumptions and values. The rationale for excluding students and non-academic staff from the study was informed by the current HEQC's institutional audit framework that focuses primarily on teaching and learning, research and community engagement (2004c). As the external audit concerned itself with the academic environment, the study is consistent with that of Kuh and Whitt (1988) and Hall (1997), who considered it prudent to focus primarily on the values and assumptions of academic staff. Finally, the study did not aim to investigate the role of race, gender, age, geographical location or any other demographic tag, as these have been previously researched (Chatman, Polzer, Barsade and Neale, 1998; Chatman and Flynn, 2001; Martins, Milliken, Wiesenfeld and Salgado, 2003; Chuang, Church and Zikic, 2004).

¹ The exceptions here are the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and the University of Johannesburg, which resulted from the merger of historically white institutions. Both institutions, however, incorporated campuses of Vista University, a historically black institution.

1.6. Review of related literature

The early organisational culture literature, exemplified by Peters and Waterman's bestseller *In search of excellence* (1982), advocated that effective leaders could create a strong unified culture by articulating and reinforcing a set of values (usually their own) with formal policies, informal norms, stories, rituals and jargon. Strong cultures were therefore homogenous and unitary and centred around a set of shared values (as defined by top management) (Schein, 1992). It was argued that such cultures would lead to an efficient organisation with financial success as a key performance indicator. Culture, therefore, from this perspective, was a homogenous monolith made up of a set of clear and unambiguous values perceived, enacted and shared by all in an organisation-wide consensus (Ott, 1989). Within this view, there was very little space for ambiguity, dissent, conflict or subcultures. When any of these emerged, they were rationalised as anomalies and presented as evidence of a weak organisational culture that had to be remedied.

However, as more empirical research was conducted on organisational culture with its seductive promises of greater efficiency and effectiveness, scholars began noticing that their findings were characterised more by the anomalies previously rationalised and/or presented as dysfunctional than it supported the original thesis that a strong, homogenous and unitary organisational culture leads to improved or excellent performance (Batteau, 2000). The contrary view holds that organisational culture is not necessarily homogenous and unitary,

since an organisation may be characterised by multiple cultures with fluid membership that is not permanent, but coalesces around common issues for mutual benefit.

According to Martin (2003), organisational culture was extremely complex and contained elements of consensus, contradiction and confusion. Furthermore, the reification of organisational culture into a thing is contrasted by the view that it is not something an organisation has; rather it is something an organisation is, thereby making assertions regarding its malleability somewhat spurious (Martin, 1992). According to Martin and Frost (1996:602), homogeneity, harmony and a unified culture within complex organisations may not be possible. It would appear that there is little consensus on what exactly organisational culture is, how it relates to the social and organisational world, what informs its assumptions and which methods should be used to study and theorise about this construct (Parker, 2000; Martin, 2003). Such is the level of divergence, that Martin and Frost (1996:600) speak of paradigmatic “war games” raging among scholars in this field.

While the organisational culture ‘paradigmatic wars’ raged, the quality movement, in its various guises, began to gain popularity in the popular and academic literature. Although its origins in industry and business could be traced back to the late nineteenth century, its rise began in the middle of the previous century with the writings and practice of the so-called quality ‘gurus’ such as Crosby (1979), Deming (1982), Juran (1988), Ishikawa (1990), Shingo, (1990) and Feigenbaum (2004), and it gained momentum in business and higher education in the last two decades (Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2003). Like organisational culture, the rise

of the quality movement was predicated upon promises of greater organisational effectiveness and efficiency in a time of economic uncertainty, falling revenues and greater demand for stakeholder and shareholder accountability, to enable production and service at the most economical levels in order to ensure customer satisfaction (Kenny, 2006).

According to Harvey (2006), quality in higher education in recent times evolved around the need for higher education to contribute more effectively to improving the performance of the economy, raising academic standards and paying continuous attention to the quality of teaching and learning, research and community engagement. Newton (2007:14) adds that changes in society has had a profound impact on higher education in relation to its growth, size and shape, austere funding regimes, pressures for greater efficiencies and economies of scale as well as increasingly diverse student populations. As a result, several national states began taking an overt interest and playing a more instrumental role in higher education by demanding greater accountability from institutions on meeting socio-economic needs and on securing the return on investment of taxpayers' money (Brennan and Shah, 2000). Consequently, according to Newton (2007), the concern for quality in higher education became global, as many countries established national quality-assurance agencies. The evolution of formal quality-assurance arrangements, including external quality-assurance agencies and instruments, was in part the state's attempt at making higher education more responsive to social and economic needs, widening student access and ensuring comparability of provision and procedures within and between institutions, international comparability and accountability for public money (Amaral, 2007) .

The generally accepted view of external quality assurance is that it is primarily concerned with quality improvement and enhancement to ensure that higher education is more responsive to societal needs and to engender public confidence in its academic offerings (Naidoo, 2007). One could hardly argue against such noble goals of societal responsiveness and high quality academic programmes. The introduction of external quality assurance was to the benefit all stakeholders involved in the higher education enterprise: socio-economic needs would be addressed, the students and the public would be protected from shoddy academic programmes, the reputation of the academics would be validated, the brand value of the HEI would be enhanced and the greater efficiencies would please the national treasury as public funds would be deployed more effectively (Brennan and Shah, 2000; Sahney et al., 2004). Just as the notion of a strong homogenous and unitary culture centred around a set of common values appeared to be particularly alluring as a means of seeking greater organisational effectiveness and efficiency, so too was external quality assurance's seemingly noble aim of benefitting all parties involved in higher education equally appealing to those seeking to make higher education more effective and efficient.

However, scholars have begun to contest the altruistic and democratising discourse that had been used to support the introduction of external quality assurance into higher education. Barnett (2003:93), for example, asserts that as a state-sponsored project it was aimed at producing compliance cultures in HEIs where the space for debate or indeed dissent would be severely constrained. This view is supported by Morley's (2002:127) contention that external quality assurance was a regime of power that had a fundamental impact on social

relations in HEIs. In addition, Newton (2007:20) indicates that the notion of quality was contested, as there were multiple competing voices and discourses on its definition, suitability for higher education, approaches, beneficiaries and outcomes. Finally, Harvey (2006:269) is of the opinion that the introduction of external quality assurance has resulted in increased accountability and compliance with the concomitant erosion of academic autonomy and freedom.

With regard to the South African context, Lockett (2006:1) points out that external quality assurance is one of the “most demanding and intrusive policy interventions with which institutions of higher learning currently have to deal”. If this is indeed the case, then the impact of external quality audits on the institution and the demands on academic staff especially would be profound. This is in stark contrast to the stated goals of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and its permanent subcommittee responsible for quality assuring the higher education sector, the HEQC. The HEQC’s founding document (2004b) articulates profound arguments for the establishment of a national quality assurance framework, to ensure academic programmes are relevant to the needs of students, employers and other higher education stakeholders so that social, intellectual and economic goals of social development are met. In addition, the national quality-assurance system would be aligned to higher order goals of equity and redress, democratisation, development, effectiveness and efficiency, academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability as the key drivers of post-apartheid higher education transformation.

The HEQC's primary role, according to the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997 (South Africa, 1997), would be to promote quality, audit the quality-management systems of HEIs and accredit programmes. The HEQC in discharging its audit function defines quality as 'fitness for purpose' within a 'fitness of purpose' context, value for money and transformation (2004b). These definitions have significant consequences for HEIs and particular relevance for this study. For example, the fitness for purpose definition, though appearing to support institutional autonomy in determining its vision and mission, does so with the fitness of purpose caveat. Two significant inferences may be drawn from these definitions. First, institutions are free to determine their vision and mission as long as they demonstrate fitness of purpose, which of course is founded upon national priorities. Institutions are consequently 'steered' in a particular direction, which is rationalised by the assertion that since public institutions are primarily funded by taxpayers money, the state has a vested interest in how that money is spent.

The fitness for purpose definition too has significant consequences for the institution and has particular resonance with this study. Assuming that the institution has successfully negotiated the fitness of purpose issues, it must now define its vision and mission and then align its processes to demonstrate fitness of purpose. Doing so begs several questions: Who constitutes the institution? Who now, as Lockett (2006:23) asks, determines the vision and mission? How much space is there for multiple, dissenting or otherwise, voices? The HEQC's policy documents are silent on these questions and the committee presumes that these issues would be resolved at institutional level. What this presupposes is that the

organisational culture of HEIs would be amenable to and support these fundamental changes, because they are founded upon an altruistic and morally good premise.

What emerges from these assumptions is a somewhat poor understanding of the dynamics of the organisational cultures of complex organisations, especially HEIs. It would appear that there is a reliance on the notion that there would be sufficient consensus within the institution that external quality assurance is aimed at advancing the public good. This assumption is founded upon the premise that organisational culture is homogenous, unitary and centred around a set of shared values, which, according to Wood (2004), Parker (2000) and Hall (1997), is a somewhat fallacious argument.

1.7. Research design and methodology

A theoretical framework based on Burrell and Morgan's (1979) typology of sociological paradigms was developed in order to advance the understanding and knowledge base of organisational culture and external quality assurance in higher education by bringing both constructs onto the same analytical plane. The multidimensional framework delineates the ontological (the essence of the subject under investigation), epistemological (the nature of knowledge) and human nature (the relationship between humans and their environment) position. The meta-theoretical assumptions consequently underpinned the frame of reference, mode of theorising and corresponding research methodology (Parker, 2000). The framework therefore provided a consistent method to examine both constructs and pointed

to parallels in their theorising and research methodology as well as their relationship and impact in a higher education setting.

Since the aim of the research was to examine how organisational members in an HEI sought to assign meaning to externally driven quality assurance, the philosophical assumptions underpinning the research design resonated with that of interpretive research and the advocacy and activism elements of critical theory, rather than with postpositivism. The research design was aligned with Willis's (2007) assertion that the understanding of local contexts is an honourable purpose of research to counter postpositivist claims that research should be aimed only at generating universal laws and generalisations that can be scientifically tested.

A qualitative approach was considered prudent for this study, as it was situated in a specific context of a real-world, organisational setting, namely a newly merged UoT. As there has been very little research examining the relationship between organisational culture and external quality assurance in HEIs and because of the absence of recognised theory to provide variables to be tested quantitatively, this study was exploratory and its findings were more relevant for its context and for theory building. The researcher followed Patton's (2002:150) advice that a qualitative approach would be particularly useful in "illuminating the nature and meaning of external quality assurance in particular contexts".

As the research focussed on a single HEI of a specific type, the case study was considered the most appropriate approach. The value of using the qualitative interpretive case study was

that it enabled the researcher to uncover and gain access to information and insights previously hidden and consequently posit theoretical propositions about the up-to-now under-theorised and unproblematised relationship between organisational culture and external quality assurance in HEIs.

The unit of analysis for the study was a UoT situated in the northern metropolis of an inland province of South Africa. The researcher used purposeful stratified sampling, followed by purposeful random sampling, to identify the research informants. Purposeful stratified sampling was used to ensure that the voices from all the academic occupational categories were heard. Informants were limited to the academic occupational categories, as the external quality audit focussed mainly on the institution's core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement. The use of the occupational categories as the purposeful stratified sampling criterion was informed by the theoretical framework that alluded to multiple constructions of reality as well the role of power relations in organisational culture and external quality audits among the key academic role-players. Purposeful random sampling was then used to identify informants from within the categories mentioned above.

The primary data-collection method used in the study was the semi-structured interview. The researcher used Tierney's (1988:8) cultural elements framework, namely environment, vision and mission, socialisation, information, strategy and leadership, to formulate the questions of the interview guide. After the interviews were conducted, they were

transcribed by a data-capturer. The researcher used the verbatim records of the interviews in the data-analysis process for two reasons: first, to ensure that any data critical to the research was not lost and second, not to compromise the analysis by using data that may have been filtered or altered by some form of pre-analysis.

In order to treat evidence fairly, produce compelling analytic conclusions and rule out alternate interpretations the researcher followed Yin's (2003:111) advice to use a general analytical strategy, in this case, the *analytic induction* approach. According to Taylor and Bogdan (in Patton, 2002), the analytical induction approach begins with the researcher's deduced propositions or theory-derived hypothesis as a procedure for verifying theories or propositions based on qualitative data.

A three-dimensional model was used comprising the Tierney (1988) cultural framework, the modified cultures of the academy of Bergquist and Pawlak (2007) and the adapted four sociological perspectives of Burrell and Morgan (1979) was developed to enable data analysis. These elements formed the deductive elements of data analysis. Using this frame of reference, the researcher analysed the data looking for patterns and emerging themes using the data-coding and data-analysis approach described below. This formed the inductive element of data analysis. This approach is consistent with Miles and Huberman's (1995:17) suggestion that the analysis of a pattern of relationships and conceptualisation requires a combination of the inductive and deductive approaches.

The researcher used the Nvivo 8 computer assisted qualitative data-analysis software (CAQDAS) to manage, code, search, analyse and present the data collected from the interviews. Tree nodes using Tierney's (1988) model, namely environment, vision and mission, socialisation, information, strategy and leadership were created to attach relevant data chunks. In order to look for patterns in the data, the researcher created a matrix and ran a coding query using the occupational category cases as the rows and the Tierney (1988) categories as the columns of the matrix. The researcher then mapped the data from each cell onto a model, which was created for each of the cultural framework's categories. The analytical dimension of the data-analysis strategy then commenced by identifying themes within categories. The themes within categories then enabled the researcher to perform a comparative study across the occupational categories to identify commonly recurring themes and thereby posit propositions about the nature of the relationship between organisational culture and external quality assurance.

The researcher took several steps to ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the study. First, a theoretical framework to bring both constructs of the study onto a common analytical plane was developed. Second, the researcher's philosophical orientations and role within the study and at the research site was declared upfront. Third, the sampling strategy afforded an opportunity for data triangulation by using more than one individual as a data source, in order to access multiple viewpoints of the constructs under study within the research context. Fourth, interview transcripts were made available to all informants to

validate their veracity, and the coded models and themes were sent to selected informants to verify the analysis and interpretation.

1.8. Definition of key terms

In order to contextualise the study's theoretical and methodological approach, it is necessary to provide a set of definitions of key terms, concepts and constructs used in the study. Some of the terms have found general acceptance in a review of related literature, while others are contested and dependent on the context and underlying theoretical foundations.

Accountability: The requirement when undertaking an activity to address the concerns, requirements and perspectives of others (Harvey, 2004).

Accreditation: The process by which an external body (state or private) evaluates the quality of an HEI, either as a whole or of a specific education programme, to determine whether the institution had met certain criteria and standards, in order to confirm the higher education status of that institution or permit the institution to offer a programme for a specified period (adapted from Higher Education Quality Committee, 2004a; Vlasceanu, Grünberg and Pârlea, 2004). In the context of this study, accreditation refers to formal recognition of the whole institution to offer higher programmes at all its sites of delivery.

Epistemology: This entails assumptions about the nature of knowledge and how one might go about understanding the world and communicating such knowledge to others (Van de Ven and Poole, 2005).

Excellence (quality as): A traditional elitist notion of quality that requires and exhibits the most exacting standards and characteristics, usually taken to refer to a high level of difficulty that is implicitly not achievable by all (Harvey, 2004).

External quality agency: A state or legally mandated national agency that has the authority to accredit institutions as higher education providers in their entirety, or to offer specific programmes for a specified period of time (adapted from Harvey and Newton, 2007).

External quality assurance: The systematic and critical analysis of an HEI's quality arrangement by an external statutory (or legally mandated) body (Vlasceanu *et al.*, 2004). The definition in this study has been extended to encompass all externally originated quality-assurance policies, initiatives, criteria and approaches to which HEIs are formally subjected.

Fitness for purpose (quality as): The ability of an institution to fulfil its stated mission (Harvey, 2004; Higher Education Quality Committee, 2004b). This is taken to allude to the institution's policies, procedures, systems, structures and deployment of its resources to achieve its goals and objectives effectively and efficiently.

Fitness of purpose (quality as): The extent to which the institution's mission, goals and objectives are responsive to local, regional and international contexts (Higher Education

Quality Committee, 2004a). In addition, the institution's relative success in achieving its mission and objectives is used as the primary point of departure to make statements about its quality.

Institutional audit: The evaluation of an institution's quality arrangements for teaching and learning, research and community engagement against a set of nationally derived criteria by external panel of peers(Higher Education Quality Committee, 2004c).

Institutional audit portfolio: Documentation prepared by the institution and submitted to the external quality agency, usually comprising the self-evaluation report and supporting evidence (Higher Education Quality Committee, 2004a).

Ontology: The nature of the social world that is seen as either an objective external reality or a subjective creation of people (Jackson and Sorenson, 2003). Ontology therefore refers to the very nature or the essence of the subject being investigated.

Organisational culture: A very slippery term of which the definition is contingent upon philosophical and theoretical assumptions and orientations. The researcher adopted Kuh and Whitt's (1988) view that it is the collective, mutually shaping patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs and assumptions that guide the behaviour of individuals and groups in an institute of higher education and provide a frame of reference with which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus.

Organisational subcultures: Organisational subcultures consist of distinctive clusters of ideologies, cultural forms and other practices that groupings of people in an organisation exhibit (adapted from Trice and Beyer, 1993:174).

Paradigm: A set of meta-theoretical assumptions that inform a frame of reference, a mode of theorising and a research methodology (adapted from Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Parker, 2000).

Quality: In higher education this is an elusive term that encompasses elements of excellence, fitness of and for purpose and transformation (Harvey and Green, 1993; Harvey, 2004). This study favours the quality as transformation definition aligned to the views of Tam (2001) and Van Kemenade, Pupius and Hardjono (2008). This definition can be interpreted as the enhancement and empowerment of students and the development of new knowledge to bring about fundamental change.

Quality assurance: Continuous internal and external processes to evaluate the quality of a higher education system, institution or its programmes (Vlasceanu *et al.*, 2004).

Quality enhancement: Systematic and continuous processes to improve the quality of a higher education system, institution or its programmes (adapted from Higher Education Quality Committee, 2004c; Vlasceanu *et al.*, 2004).

Quality management: An aggregation of policies, procedures, systems and mechanisms deployed at systemic, institutional and programme level to assure the quality of higher

education with the aim of improving quality as a whole (adapted from Vlasceanu *et al.*, 2004).

Self-evaluation: The process whereby the institution conducts a critical review and analysis of its quality systems.

University of technology: A relatively new institutional type in South Africa of which the definition has not been clearly articulated. While such institutions have the label of university in their title, they have generally been gazetted to offer technikon- or career- and vocational-type academic programmes (South Africa, 2003). The South African Technology Network (SATN), an advocacy group, asserts that a UoT is characterised by the “interweaving, focus and interrelation between technology and the nature of a university” (2008:16). They summarise the characteristics of a UOT as being research-informed; having a curriculum developed around the graduate profiles defined by industry and professions; focusing on strategic research and applied research on professional practice; having multilevel entry and exit points for students; being primarily concerned with the development of vocational/professional education; and promoting technological capabilities as equally important to cognitive skills (2008).

However, there is still debate and discussion with regard to the clear delineation of UoTs from other institutional types. In this context, the definition of a UoT is aligned to the SATN’s summary of definitions.

1.9. Dissertation outline

The study is introduced in Chapter One, wherein the controversies and contestations around the central constructs were briefly explicated, the need for the research outlined and the research questions presented. Chapter Two outlines the theoretical framework underpinning the study. As the research is located in an organisational setting, the chapter begins with an overview of some of the controversies associated with organisational theory. Thereafter, sociological paradigms are advanced as a means of negotiating the contestations raised in organisational theory. Two central elements of sociological paradigms, namely philosophy of science and the nature of society, and their implications for organisational theory are discussed. The four-perspective analytical framework, adapted from Burrell and Morgan (1979), is presented as the preferred theoretical framework to examine the central constructs of the study. The final part of the chapter entails a critical assessment of the organisational culture construct as theorised about, researched and reported in the academic literature.

As the theoretical framework has already been explicated in Chapter Two, Chapter Three begins with an overview on quality by alluding to the rise of the quality movement. This section of the chapter then comments on quality in the university, alludes to the South African higher education context, and ends with comments defining quality. Consistent with the literature review methodology used in Chapter Two, quality in higher education is thereafter examined using the four-perspective framework. The final part of the chapter

summarises the key elements of organisational culture and quality and maps both constructs onto a common framework.

Chapter Four outlines the research methodology and design used in the study. The first part of the chapter focuses on locating the research within the preferred research methodology. The chapter begins by drawing a distinction between research methodology and research methods as well as between quantitative and qualitative research. Thereafter, a brief overview of the three most popular research perspectives, namely postpositivism, critical theory and interpretivism, is presented. This section of the chapter concludes by locating the study within the preferred research methodology. The second part of the chapter focuses on the specific research design used in examining the research problem, the specific qualitative design is explicated, the role of the researcher delineated, the unit of analysis identified, the sampling strategy explained, the data collection and management described and the data analysis explicated. Although the statements on assuring the credibility and trustworthiness of the study are made throughout the chapter in the relevant subsections, the chapter concludes with a summary of the verification of the data interpretation and analysis.

Chapter Five uses the three-dimensional analytical model developed in Chapter Four to provide the framework for the presentation and analysis of the research findings. As the cultural elements dimension of the analytical model, namely environment, vision and mission, socialisation, information, strategy and leadership, were used to guide data collection, management and analysis, it also served as the organisational structure of the

chapter. The research findings are presented in a combination of description, analysis and quotations of interviewees. The description component assisted in organising the data to make it manageable for interpretation and analysis while the quotation element allowed for an articulation of the informants' actual sentiments and served as a reference point to ground interpretation and analysis.

Chapter Six discusses the findings, presents a model with the potential to explain the interrelationship between the central constructs of the study, identifies themes and questions for future research, and finally concludes the study.

Chapter Two: Paradigmatic analysis of organisational culture

2.1. Overview

Whereas the academic literature on organisational culture and indeed the construct itself have been analysed using various typologies and classificatory schemas (Smirchich, 1983; Martin, 1992; Martin and Frost, 1996), the same cannot be said about quality assurance (although Lockett fairly recently (2006) proposed a simple analytical framework for quality assurance). This study aimed to advance the body of knowledge on the relationship of organisational culture and external quality assurance within an organisational context by bringing both constructs onto a common analytical plane. In order to do so, a conceptual framework based on Burrell and Morgan's (1979) typology of sociological paradigms was developed. The purpose was not to be confined by the limitations of the framework, but rather to use its elements in a suggestive manner to generate a new way of examining organisational culture and external quality assurance in an academic setting. The same framework was used to analyse the literature on quality in Chapter Three and provided a set of philosophical assumptions to guide the research design and methodology in Chapter Four.

The first part of this chapter begins with a brief comment on the controversies in organisational theory, follows with statements on the use and limitations of paradigms and ends with an overview of Burrell and Morgan's (1979) typology of sociological paradigms.

The second part of the chapter provides a brief exposition on the development of organisational culture, then analyses the extant literature on each using the preferred schema and ends with a definition of organisational culture.

2.2. Organisational theory

As both constructs find expression in an organisational setting, albeit in this case the specific context of an HEI, it is considered prudent to allude briefly to organisational theory and to the contestations around it in the academic literature. According to Scherer (2003:310), organisational theory is concerned with the “existence, genesis, functionality and the transformation of organisations ... and explicitly or implicitly with influencing organisational practice”.

Scherer (2003), however, cautions that organisational theory is not founded upon a single or unitary knowledge set. Diverse views and theories are largely a consequence of the complexities of organisations and of various levels at which they may be studied. Hage (1980) points out that, depending on the unit of analysis, whether it is the organisation as a whole, the relationship between organisations or the behaviour of individuals within an organisation, may result in so-called macro, meso, and micro theories, which makes the extrapolation of results somewhat difficult.

A further cause of discord among the ranks of organisational theorists lies in their research interests and choice of research methods. Scherer (2003:311-312) explains that some

researchers are primarily interested in “descriptive research” in order to gain knowledge of organisations without considering practical applications. Others follow a “prescriptive approach” and focus on organisational design with the objective of contributing to improved organisational practice. In adopting one or other position, organisational research may yield different outcomes and findings, thereby making generalisations or contributions to theory building rather complex and disputed.

Therefore, it would appear that organisational theorists and researchers do not share a common understanding of what constitutes research and what counts as valid knowledge, as they have varied points of departure in approaching organisational studies. In attempting to provide an understanding of the foundations underpinning these diverse views, Burrell and Morgan (1979:xii) posit that theories of organisations are based upon a philosophy of science and a theory of society. They contend that organisational theorists, explicitly or implicitly, use a set of basic assumptions of the social world in order to establish a frame of reference to inform their point of view in their study of organisations. These are founded upon ontological (the essence of the subject under investigation), epistemological (the nature of the knowledge) and human nature (the relationship between humans and their environment) assumptions and subsequently inform the methodological approaches used by social scientists and organisational theorists. The notion of sociological paradigms (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) is a useful classificatory schema to articulate the complexities as well as facilitate a comparative analysis of these assumptions.

2.3. Sociological paradigms

As this research was situated in an organisational context, the researcher aimed to explore the nature of the debates on organisational studies so that any theoretical and methodological predisposition and approaches that had the potential to influence the research and its outcomes would be declared upfront. In order to conduct such an examination, the researcher explored several analytical frameworks, such as the meta-theoretical assumptions (Smirchich, 1983), the anthropological school (Allaire and Firsirotu, 1984) and historical development (Martin and Frost, 1996), that had been used previously in studies of organisational culture. However, and aligned with Parker (2000), the preferred analytical framework for this research was Burrell and Morgan's (1979) sociological paradigms, as it provides a more sophisticated and incisive approach than those mentioned earlier.

This sociological paradigm framework was particularly useful owing to its premise that theories of organisations are based upon a philosophy of science and a nature of society (Burrell and Morgan, 1979:1). The framework, when depicted graphically (see Figure 2.1 on page 38), consists of two intersecting axes that generate four quadrants or paradigms. The horizontal axis concerns assumptions about the nature of social science, and is divided into the "objective" and "subjective" domains. The vertical axis indicates the polarities in the assumptions about the nature of society, and is labelled "sociology of radical change" and "sociology of regulation". These are discussed in detail later in the chapter.

The framework therefore provides a means to understanding that social scientists approach their subject through overt and/or tacit assumptions about the nature of the social world, the way it is investigated and the manner in which it is to be reported on (Tsoukas and Knudson, 2003). Consequently, their assumptions and methodology influence and colour their findings, analyses and conclusions.

2.3.1. Philosophy of science

Burrell and Morgan (1979) assert that assumptions that inform philosophical and theoretical assumptions are founded upon ontological, epistemological and human nature considerations. These assumptions then influence the methodological approaches to investigating the subject. They further suggest that these assumptions and indeed social theory and approaches to social science have been polarised into the so-called *subjective-objective* debate. It is important to examine the essence of this debate, as it provides the foundation upon which this study was located and consequently informed its methodology and conclusions.

From an ontological perspective, the subjective-objective debate finds expression in the *nominalism* versus *realism* perspectives. The nominalist perspective broadly suggests that there is no structure to the real world. Names, labels and concepts are merely tools to describe and understand the external world and are products of individual cognition (Milam, 1991:653). Therefore, the nominalist view holds that the social world is purely a product of

human description, consciousness and action, and is therefore deeply subjective as everyone has their own reality or combinations of reality (Wood, 2004). Realism, by contrast, suggests that the social world is made up of tangible structures that exist independent of and external and prior to the existence of the individual (Scherer, 2003:317). Therefore, the realism view holds that the social world exists separately from individual humans and their appreciation of it.

Epistemologically, the subjective-objective debate finds expression in the *anti-positivism* versus *positivism* argument. Positivism aims to explain and predict what happens in the social world by seeking causal relationships and regularities between its constituent elements using the methods of the natural sciences (Donaldson, 2003:40). Anti-positivism, by contrast, rejects the view that the social world is characterised by such relationships and regularities, and that the methods of the natural sciences are incompatible with the human sciences (Milam, 1991). Consequently, it posits that only those directly involved in their social world can understand the meanings and significance that they ascribe to their actions.

With regard to human nature (and the relationship between humans and the environment), the subjective-objective debate finds expression in the *voluntarism* versus *determinism* views. The voluntarism view asserts that the human being is intelligent, autonomous and free-willed. Therefore, humans are viewed as agents able to create their environment and context by their thoughts and actions (Miller, 1996). The determinist view, by contrast, suggests that man and his activities are restricted in cognition and action and is consequently completely determined by the situation or environment in which he is located (Ott,

1989:143). Therefore, the deterministic view posits that people are products of their environment and that they function in an almost mechanistic way to their context.

Finally, the methodological debate (the manner in which one investigates and obtains knowledge of the social world) is characterised by the *idiographic* versus *nomothetic* approach to social science. The ideographic perspective attempts to understand some event in nature or society by obtaining firsthand knowledge of the subject under investigation. Therefore, this methodology is characterised by approaches that let the subject under consideration unfold its nature and characteristics during the process of investigation. The nomothetic approach, by contrast, seeks only general laws and employs only the research methodology of the natural sciences (Luthans and Davis, 1982). Table 2.1 captures the central differences between a subjective and an objective philosophy of science.

	Subjective	Objective
Ontology	Nominalism	Realism
Epistemology	Anti-positivism	Positivism
Nature of reality	Voluntarism	Determinism
Methodology	Ideographic	Nomothetic

Table 2.1: Differences between a subjective and an objective philosophy of science (adapted from Burrell and Morgan (1979))

2.3.2. Nature of society

Nurminen (1997) asserts that just as the philosophy of science is characterised by the so-called subjective-objective debate, the nature of society is characterised by the so-called *order versus conflict* debate. As stated earlier, all social studies are based on a set of assumptions that reflect a particular view of the subject under investigation, which consequently informs the methodological approach. Social theorists have generally attempted to either explain the nature of social order and equilibrium or have focussed on problems of change, conflict and coercion in social structures (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). In sum, the order (or integrationist) perspective of society emphasises stability, integration,

functional coordination and consensus. The conflict (sometimes called the coercion) perspective emphasises change, conflict, disintegration and coercion.

Burrell and Morgan (1979:17) argue that this order conflict is somewhat simplistic and misleading. They have introduced the term 'sociology of regulation' to define theoretical perspectives that are primarily concerned with providing explanations of why society works in the way that it does and that consequently emphasise underlying unity and cohesiveness. According to Wood (2004), theories within this perspective seek to understand the maintenance of the status quo by emphasising stability, functional coordination and consensus. By contrast, the *sociology of radical change* asserts that conflict and contradiction, the use of power to dominate and states of alienation are inherent to society. Accordingly, any social analysis must aim to provide explanation for the radical change, deep-seated structural conflict, modes of domination and structural contradiction that seem to characterise modern society (Milam, 1991).

There are also polarised views in each of these dimensions. Within the sociology of regulation, the debate emerged between what was termed interpretive sociology and functionalism. While both are interested in the preservation of social order, the primary and somewhat simplified distinction lies in their approach (Scherer, 2003:31). According to Hatch and Yanow (2003:70), interpretivism is an overarching umbrella that subsumes many different schools of thought. However, in common across these various schools of thought, is a concern with studying the contextual life world of the actor and the role of language and artefacts in constructing meaning. Therefore, social realities are interpreted and constructed

by social actors and cannot be seen as facts, since the social world is what its agents interpret it to be (Scherer, 2003). A feature of functionalism (also an umbrella for many associated theories), by contrast, is its emphasis on the scientific method to study the social world in the way one would the physical world. As a result, there is a belief that as the social world exists outside of humans, it can be viewed objectively and value-free so that the structural laws that sustain the status quo can be uncovered (McClelland, 2000).

Burrell and Morgan's (1979) model now assumes a matrix structure: the subjective-objective debate along the *x axis*; the sociology of radical change-sociology of regulation on the *y axis* with four distinct quadrants or paradigms (see Figure 2.1 on page 38). These are labelled the *radical humanist*, *radical structuralist*, *interpretive* and *functionalist* paradigms and present fundamentally different perspectives, assumptions and methodologies for the investigation of social phenomena. Prior to elaborating on each paradigm, the nature and limitations of paradigms as means of analysing social phenomena are examined.

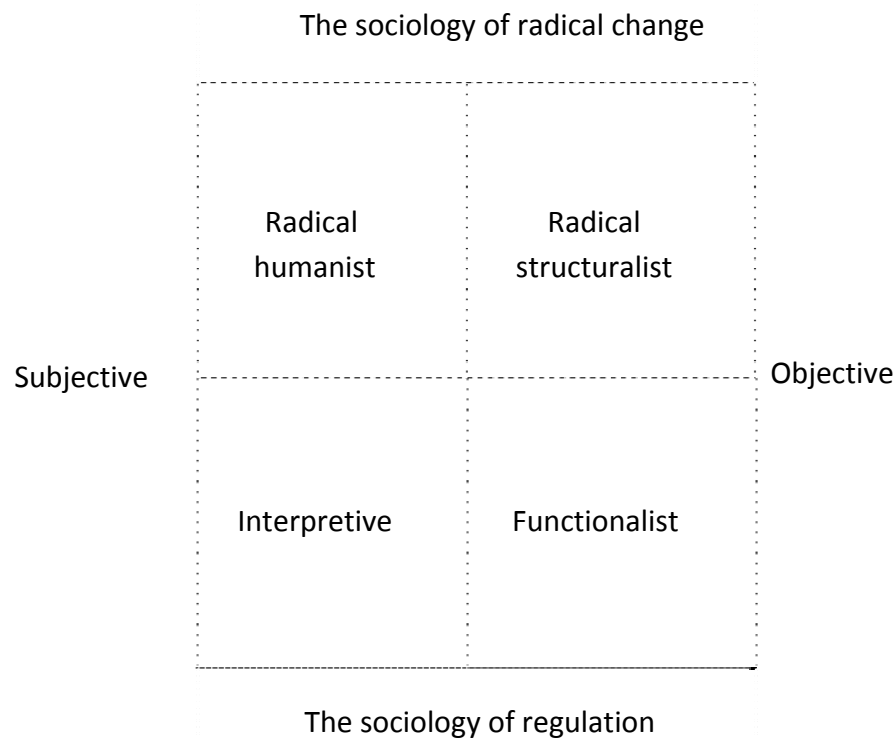


Figure 2.1: Four paradigms for the analysis of social theory (Burrell and Morgan, 1979)

2.3.3. Paradigms

Kuhn (1970) used the term 'paradigm' to demonstrate that in social science, and indeed in organisational studies, a variety of different schools of thought have emerged to theorise about, analyse and investigate social phenomena and that these schools of thought were generally considered incongruous and incompatible. While within each paradigm there will be theorists who will adopt different standpoints along a continuum, an underlying unity of thought binds them together. Burrell and Morgan (1979) extended Kuhn's work by suggesting that their four paradigms in social theory present four sets of basic assumptions

that represent quite different social realities. In other words, the four paradigms delineate four views of the social world based on assumptions about the nature of science and of society.

Taken collectively, these paradigms present an analytical tool with which to examine the subject under investigation. They also present a means to locate the frame of reference used by social theorists as well as the similarities and differences in their approach. More importantly, it provides an opportunity for the researcher to declare any predispositions to one or other frame of reference in order to contextualise analytical and methodological preferences. In sum then, paradigms define basic meta-theoretical assumptions that underpin a frame of reference, a mode of theorising and a research methodology (Parker, 2000). They are also useful to categorise or classify the work of social theorists by making explicit their philosophical leanings. Paradigms afford scholars an analytical tool to critically analyse the extant literature on their subject and a means to direct their research and analytical methodologies.

2.3.4. Limitation of paradigms

It is important to note the following caveats with regard to using paradigms in social theory and organisational studies. First, as McLean (1999) cautions, paradigms are somewhat simplistic tools when attempting to interpret the complexities of organisations and indeed the social world. Second, Parker (2000:60) uses the term 'conceptual violence' to indicate

the difficulties associated with attempting to categorise the work of the social and organisational theorists into boxes in order to facilitate neat analyses. Third, several sociological and organisational theories may find a home in one or other paradigm owing to a set of common characteristics. However, as these theories may differ from each other, it is clear that a significant amount of disagreement and diversity would be possible in each paradigm. In addition, the framework is somewhat limited when attempting to categorise literature within certain paradigms. For example, the literature on organisational culture and external quality assurance within the radical structural paradigm is very sparse.

Fourth, Gareth Morgan conceded in an interview with Mills (1990) that on reflection, 'sociological world view' might have been a less controversial term than 'paradigm'. Morgan further added that broken lines, as indicated in Figure 3.1 (page 114),² should have been used to indicate that the paradigms were more of a classificatory scheme rather than a deep structure of social theory. Furthermore, the use of paradigms does not place them on a hierarchy or continuum to indicate the relative superiority of one or other perspective. While Burrell and Morgan's (1979) use of paradigms suggest incommensurability and mutual exclusivity, this study adopted a more pragmatic and pluralist approach, in line with the work of Schultz and Hatch (1996), by using the framework in a suggestive rather than an exclusive manner, as the social world is considered far too complex to be forced into neat boxes for analytical purposes. As a result, the term 'perspective' rather than paradigm is preferred in

²Burrell and Morgan's original framework had solid lines delineating the four perspectives, suggesting an immutable and fixed categorisation. The real world, however, does not always fit into neat boxes.

this study to indicate that these present approximations rather than fixed and immutable Newtonian laws as used to explain phenomena in the physical world.

A final caveat relates to the researcher's own predisposition to one or other of the paradigms. While Burrell and Morgan (1979) did not make any value judgements or favour any of their paradigmatic approaches, the researcher's own socio-political frame of reference would indicate the preferred research methodology and analytical schema to approach the subject under investigation, which, in turn, reveals a preference for one or other perspective. The key point here is that the researcher's subjective and paradigmatic biases would have influenced the research, analysis and subsequent theorising of the social or organisational phenomenon under study. Martin (1992), to underscore this point, asserts that different researchers, with different paradigmatic predispositions, observing an organisation, may arrive, with the same degree of rigour, at different interpretations of their observations. She goes on to argue that even arriving at the conclusion that organisational members share a common value is a subjective judgement.

2.4. Four perspectives on organisational analysis

2.4.1. The functionalist perspective

The functionalist perspective is located in the sociology of regulation and approaches its subject matter from an objectivist perspective. According to Burrell and Morgan (1979:26),

this perspective is primarily concerned with providing explanations of the “status quo, social order, consensus, social integration, solidarity, need satisfaction and actuality”. Its standpoint tends to be “realist, positivist, determinist and nomothetic” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979:26). In essence, this perspective posits that since the social world exists outside of humans, it can be observed objectively to uncover the structural laws underpinning it in order to provide rational explanations for the social world. In addition, concrete artefacts that interact with each other make up the social world. Consequently, methodologies typical of the natural sciences are generally employed within this perspective to investigate and explain the relationships between these artefacts. The primary aim of such investigations would be to find generalisable solutions to problems in order to maintain order and stability within society.

2.4.2. The radical structuralist perspective

Radical structuralism is located in the sociology of radical change and approaches its subject matter from an objectivist perspective. Burrell and Morgan (1979:34) posit that this perspective is primarily concerned with “radical change, emancipation, and potentiality and emphasises structural conflict, modes of domination, contradiction and deprivation”. It approaches these concerns from a “realist, positivist, determinist and nomothetic perspective” (Burrell & Morgan, 1979:34). The main point of contention with the radical humanist perspective is its focus on structural relations within a realist social world and its views that such relations occur within a prison of structural political and economic forces. In

essence, theorists within this perspective contend that society is characterised by fundamental conflict, which brings about radical change through political and economic crises.

2.4.3. The interpretive perspective

The interpretive perspective is located in the sociology of regulation and approaches its subject matter from a subjectivist perspective. According to Burrell and Morgan (1979:28), while this perspective is concerned with issues relating to the nature of “the status quo, social order, consensus, social integration and cohesions, solidarity and actuality”, it does so from the perspective of the participant rather than that of the observer of the action. Consequently, its methodology tends towards being “nominalist, anti-positivist, voluntarist and ideographic” (Burrell & Morgan, 1997:28). The thinking within this perspective is that the world is cohesive, ordered and integrated, which consequently disregards or downgrades conflict, contradiction and change from the theoretical framework. However, the interpretive perspective does question whether organisations exist in any other form but in a conceptual sense. As a result, it approaches organisational studies on a fundamental level as stating that it is what its agents interpret it to be.

2.4.4. The radical humanist perspective

Radical humanism is located in the sociology of radical change and approaches its subject matter from a subjectivist perspective. Burrell and Morgan (1979:32) assert that it is similar to the interpretive perspective in that it views the social world from a “nominalist, anti-positivist, voluntarist and ideographic” perspective. However, the primary concern of this perspective is with “radical change, modes of domination, emancipation, deprivation and potentiality” (Burrell & Morgan, 1997:32). In essence, the radical humanist perspective is concerned with the ways in which the human is bound by the social arrangements and its effect on human development. In other words, social structures and patterns prevent the human being from attaining his/her full potential. This perspective lays the foundation for the so-called anti-organisation theory and consequently presents a diametrically opposite position to that of the functionalist perspective.

2.5. The four-perspective approach to organisational culture

2.5.1. The development of organisational culture literature

While the construct organisational culture has evolved over time in the academic and popular literature, it has attracted a number of controversies. Martin and Frost (1996:599) go as far as to refer to the “organisational culture war games” in reference to the struggle for

dominance by the intellectual polarities in organisational culture research and theorising. They point to fundamental differences in epistemology, ontology, political ideology, theory and methodology among researchers. In addition, they lament that the absence of a systematic meta-analysis and an empirically-based theoretical underpinning deprives organisational culture of academic discipline status. Furthermore, they highlight the lack of paradigm consensus within the field. The proliferation of paradigms may be attributed to the nature of the construct itself, that it is context-specific, multidimensional, exists on a number of levels and is somewhat “slippery” (Kekale and Williams, 1988:10) in nature.

The early influential literature, such as Peters and Waterman’s bestseller *In search of excellence* (1982), was managerially oriented and aimed at the popular audience. The key message was that effective leaders could create a strong unified culture built around their own values. The top managers could build such a culture by articulating and reinforcing a set of values with formal policies, informal norms, stories, rituals and jargon. Strong cultures were therefore homogenous, unitary and centred around a set of shared values (as defined by the leader or top management), and would lead to improved financial performance. Within this view, there was very little space for ambiguity, dissent, conflict or subcultures. When any of these emerged, they were rationalised as anomalies and presented as evidence of weak organisational culture.

After the early proliferation of literature extolling the virtues and benefits of a strong, unitary organisational culture, a second group of scholars unconvinced by the seductive language of managerialist culture promises began focussing on the anomalies previously rationalised.

According to Martin and Frost (1996:604), this group of scholars displayed a willingness to acknowledge inconsistencies, argued that consensus was only possible within subcultural boundaries and exposed conflicts of interests with clarity. In later years a third perspective emerged, which posited that relationships between cultural manifestations were too complex and contained elements of consensus, contradiction and confusion (Martin, 2003). Furthermore, consensus was neither organisation-wide nor evident solely in subcultural boundaries. In view of the controversies raised briefly in these introductory paragraphs, the four-perspective approach was used to delve deeper into their commonalities and differences.

2.5.2. The functionalist perspective of organisational culture

The functionalist perspective resonated with the early views of organisational culture as a unified set of shared values. Scholars then expanded on the notion of what is to be shared: patterns of meaning (Martin and Siehl, 1983a); beliefs and values (Davis, 1984); customs and traditions, historical accounts and common meanings associated with objects and rites (Sergiovanni and Corbally, 1984); important understandings (Sathe, 1985); and communication rules (Schall, 1985).

Schein's (1992:14) consolidated definition perhaps best exemplifies the functionalist view of organisational cultures:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems.... it is the assumptions which lie behind the values and which determine the behaviour patterns and the visible artefacts such as architecture, office layout and dress codes.

Schein's writings on organisational culture are well documented and appear to have significantly influenced the substantial body of knowledge on the topic. The above-mentioned source is cited in 4 339 scholarly works ("Google Scholar," 2008). A deconstruction of this definition leads to it being viewed as a near perfect fit with the description of the functionalist perspective elucidated earlier in this chapter.

Martin (1992:53) points out that while there is generally a divergence among writers on organisational culture within this perspective on *what exactly is shared*, there is consensus that organisational culture is defined as *that which is shared*. A further point of consensus inherent in these definitions, as Kilmann (1985:5) points out, is the notion of organisational culture as a homogenous entity that glues things together, in other words a reference to the shared philosophies that knit a community together. Therefore, this perspective argues that all organisational members share a set of basic values or assumptions and enact them consistently via a wide range of cultural manifestations, and that organisation members know what to do and why they do. Martin (1992:45) sums up this view as organisation-wide consensus, consistency and clarity.

Consequently, this perspective ignores the existence of organisational subcultures, the various permutations of conflict, harmony and indifferent interrelationships, their capacity to influence organisational decision making and the relative power differentials among the various subcultures. The so-called consensus and shared values are generally limited to a dominant subculture. In addition, there appears to be a commonly held view that culture is unique to a given organisational context. Ott (1989:52) succinctly points out that “each organisational culture is relatively unique”. In view of the uniqueness of organisational culture, organisational theorists attempted to classify culture and then make predictive statements about the best fit between the different cultures and the different organisational contexts.

Handy (1985), for example, suggests that there are four types of culture that are suitable for particular organisational contexts and contingencies. The *power culture* found in small organisations is generally oriented towards the charismatic founder. The *role culture* is found in larger, stable organisations that has clearly defined roles and functions. The *task culture* is characteristic of organisations in flux that need to respond quickly to a rapidly changing external environment. The *person culture* seeks to serve the interests of the individual – an apparent contradiction to the notion of shared values. In attempting to explain how these cultures come to be, Handy (1985) examined the contingencies that underpinned each of the culture types mentioned above. Four types of activities, namely steady state, innovation, crisis and policy, can be used to describe what the organisation is supposed to be doing.

The key point here is that in order to bring about consensus, social order, social integration, solidarity and need satisfaction, the key elements of the functionalist definition, the effective manager must be able to understand the nature of the predominant organisational activity in order to respond in a culturally appropriate manner to the organisational context. Organisational culture from this perspective focuses on that which is shared in and unique to an organisation in order to bring about stability and to maintain the status quo. It is about communicating a dominant set of values, ensuring organisation-wide consensus to that set of values and, as Parker (2000:66) asserts, “find[ing] a technology to control the system of beliefs”. Wood (2004) adds that according to this perspective, there is one set of truth underpinning the working of an organisation, and the role of the leadership is to find, protect, manage and bequeath that set of truth to ensure the unchanging social order. Organisational culture is formulated as the institutionalisation and legitimation of power that supports the status quo.

In sum then, culture from this perspective is a homogenous monolith made up of a set of clear and unambiguous values perceived, enacted and shared by all in an organisation-wide consensus. When ambiguity, conflict, dissent and subcultures emerge, they are rationalised as anomalies and evidence of individual deviance, the sort of thinking that underpins the notions of “if you are not with us, you are against us” and “weak culture”. The bottom line, according to Martin and Frost (1996:602), is that homogeneity, harmony and a unified culture is not possible. The seductive promises of a strong culture with its attendant spin-offs of greater productivity, efficiency and financial performance were particularly alluring to

managers in search of a soft tool to impose a dominant set of values on all organisational members.

One of the key weaknesses of the functionalist approach is succinctly encapsulated by Ott's (1989:177) contention that, common to virtually all writers on organisational culture, culture functions as a control mechanism, requiring (forcing) and prohibiting certain beliefs, assumptions and behaviours. Trowler (1998:29) argues that the functionalist definition is one-dimensional and more akin to corporate culture, which is seen as merely the way work is organised, the hierarchy defined and power distributed. Ogbor (2001) extends this view by alluding to the hegemony of corporate culture that entrenches and legitimates the power of the managerial elites to determine which set of values is most desirable for the organisation and shapes the organisational behaviour accordingly. As Parker (2000:61) argues, uncovering the "deep understandings" and understanding the "underlying structures" make it amenable for management and manipulation from above. Davis (1984) further suggests that management must keep an eye on the organisational culture for its effect on organisational performance.

In addition, Chia (1996:36) extends the Burrell and Morgan (1979) view of functionalism by introducing two types of ontology, namely "being-realism" and "becoming-realism", which mirror the *nominalism versus realism* perspectives. According to Chia (1996:33), the being-realism suggests that reality exists independently of observation and as "static, discrete and identifiable 'things', 'entities', events and generative mechanisms". Martin (2003:384) contends that this approach views ideas such as organisations and culture (and by extension

quality) as unproblematic objects of analysis as if “their ontological status were not a critical issue in its own right”. Chia (1996:39) suggests that this view is analogous with the so-called representational ontology whereby language can be used to unproblematically communicate what is “out there”.

The becoming-realism ontology, by contrast, focuses attention on how the concept was categorised or labelled and argues that we can only know what is put into language (Chia, 1996:33). Martin (2003:385) explains that the process of becoming, that is, how things come to be, defines what they are. Therefore, in using representational ontology, researchers reify the idea or concept. Reification implies viewing an abstract concept as though it were real. Therefore, culture from this perspective is a ‘thing’ than can accurately be known and described and, by implication, be subject to manipulation.

The caveat, however, in using representational language, is a lack of awareness of how language shapes the thinking behind a concept or idea. Martin (2003:395) contends that when researchers, knowingly and/or unknowingly, write about culture, they use words to “alter meanings, hide ambiguities and circumvent problematic contradictions and uncertainties”. In addition, Ott (1989:179) suggests that “basic assumptions” may vary from consciously held and publicly stated organisational beliefs and values. This view is consistent with Argyris and Schon’s (1978:16) distinction between the so-called espoused theory and the theory-in-use. They assert that espoused theory is the worldview and values people believe their behaviour is based on; that is, their stated beliefs and values. The theory-in-use is the worldview and values implied by their behaviour, or the maps they use to take action;

that is, their actual behaviour. They suggest that people are unaware that their theories-in-use are often not the same as their espoused theories, and that people are often unaware of their theories-in-use.

These observations often point to the existence of subcultures that attempt to either find consensus with the dominant set of values or espouse an expedient set of values, which may or may not be aligned to the dominant set, to preserve the accumulated cultural capital and power status acquired over time. By ignoring the existence of subcultures, the functionalist perspective forces the notion of homogeneity onto multicultural organisations. Subcultures may reflect the cultural groupings of society, be they professionally or occupationally directed and/or geographically bound. These subcultures are not necessarily fixed groupings and may exert different levels of power and influence depending largely on their interests and values. The notion of a homogenous, unitary organisational culture should therefore be viewed as a myth in large complex organisations.

There is a claim, in many definitions of organisational culture (and to a certain extent in subcultures), to the uniqueness of such cultures (Ott, 1989). Martin (1992:110) points out that “cultural members often claim uniqueness by referring to manifestations that are in fact not unique. This is the ‘uniqueness paradox’”. Organisational cultures are similar and unique in that they respond to the general pressures of their external social, political, economic and structural contexts. However, their uniqueness lies in the manner in which they mediate, respond and reproduce those pressures internally (Parker, 2000:92).

It appears therefore that the functionalist perspective of organisational culture generally ignores or rationalises dissent, treats power as unproblematic and uncontested, discounts organisational sites as contested terrains, disregards the existence of subcultures and negates the possibility of multiple meanings and interpretation of organisational life. Finally, as Parker (2000:66) states, “it pathologises conflict or normalises it by reframing it as actually not conflict at all, but instead positively functional at some other level of understanding”.

2.5.3. Radical structuralism and organisational culture

Burrell and Morgan (1979) place radical structuralism on the same vertical axis as functionalism in their framework in order to illustrate their common realist, positivist, deterministic and nomothetic epistemological assumptions. In common with functionalism, this perspective views organisations as real things that can be studied using appropriate methods. While it may be located on the objective side of the framework’s horizontal plane, the radical structuralist perspective is more consonant with the sociology of radical change. As Nurminen (1997) points out, the structuralist element of the perspective indicates that it deals with objective and structural change. The radical element indicates that such change is sudden, often revolutionary and offers a near complete break from the past.

According to Parker (2000), this perspective suggests that society is characterised by fundamental conflict, which brings about radical change through political and economic crises. Whereas the functionalist perspective contends that organisational culture is largely a

consequence of organisational context, such as size, technology, structure, level of maturity and other factors, the radical structuralist perspective suggests that it is subordinate to the capitalist system. In other words, organisational culture is an outcome of the prevailing economic system and the class struggles that occur within the larger socio-economic milieu of the organisation. McLean (1999) argues that the radical structuralist role is to transform the social impact (of organisational culture) from one of domination to one of emancipation. It is insufficient merely to understand the organisational culture without transforming the exploitative social structures. Wood (2004) adds that, like the functionalist approach, there is one set of truth to discover, and the only way to bring the organisation to that truth is through radical change of the capitalist economic system.

However, it appears that literature on research conducted from within this perspective is somewhat sparse.³ Much of the organisational culture research has focussed attention primarily on cultural manifestations within organisations. Where connections have been made to external influences, these have been used to anchor or explain elements of culture in organisations. Very little has been written on the influence of globalisation and international capital on the production and/or reproduction of certain patterns of identity and social and cultural structures within organisations. Therefore, according to McLean (1999), the radical structuralists argue that society and organisations are by nature

³ A literature search conducted on 10 October 2008 with the keywords organizational culture, Marxist theory, capitalism and conflict revealed no articles.

characterised by conflict, where systematic inequalities limit the capacity of marginalised groups to achieve their full potential.

The central weakness of this perspective is its neglect of the local context by contending that organisational culture is merely a consequence of the struggles over capital and class. In other words, organisational culture is viewed as merely a tool of capital, and the action at the level of the organisation is viewed as subordinate to the class struggles of the wider society. Such a view, then, posits that all organisations are similar monoliths and are at the mercy of the capitalist system. Issues regarding multiple perspectives on the interpretation of cultural manifestations become secondary, as do notions of subcultural resistance. Other actors and actions are seen to be mere consequences of the wider capitalist society. While organisational culture may become arenas for power contestations, class becomes the primary line of division and not other defining notions of culture.

2.5.4. Interpretivism and organisational culture

The functionalist and radical structural perspectives have treated organisational culture as something an organisation has, have reified it into a thing with properties and have suggested that with the right methods, it is amenable to manipulation to a predetermined (often by management) ideal type. In addition, both perspectives suggest that culture is secondary to external realities – the external environment in the case of functionalism and the capitalist system in the case of radical structuralism.

The *interpretive* perspective, by contrast, has two fundamental distinctions from the structuralist perspectives. First, it is located on the subjective side of the framework, thereby making the organisational member (or actor) the key focus. The issue here is how the actor understands the organisation, which should therefore not be confused with the researcher's or observer's understandings. Second, contrary to the functionalist notion that organisational culture is something an organisation *has* (the reification of culture into a thing), the interpretive view suggests that organisational culture is something an organisation *is* (Smirchich, 1983:347). Consequently, this perspective stresses the local nature of cultural processes, and the object of inquiry is reduced from the level of the organisation to the level of the organisational member by examining how organisational members make sense of what happens inside the organisation.

The interpretivist approach suggests that the study of the organisational milieu and its often neglected aspects, such as architecture, furniture, meetings, images and clothing, is key to understanding the meanings that organisational members assign to those elements which in turn provide an insight into the organisational culture (Martin, 1992). The key objects of study are symbols, languages, actions and the actors' understandings thereof. Furthermore, the study of language is central to understanding an organisation, as its culture is often manifested in and through its local language. The role of the researcher, then, is to decode the symbols in order to uncover the meanings that organisational members have assigned (consciously or subconsciously) to those symbols. In order to do this, the researcher often relies on ethnographic or participant observation techniques and/or qualitative analysis of

texts. Culture is perceived as the common understanding that actors within an organisational context have of these elements. However, these meanings or understandings are constantly being reformulated through actions within the organisation. Therefore, culture cannot be viewed as a set of prescriptions about organisational behaviour.

The interpretive perspective cautions against oversimplifying abstract concepts through reification in order to facilitate neat analysis and generalisations. However, it also has three major weaknesses: First, it may run the risk of merely reconfiguring the organisational member's account into more formal academic speak with the aim of seeking empirical legitimacy (Parker, 2000:73). Second, notions of power and constraint are absent given the tacit assumption that there is local agreement over the meanings associated with the symbols. Third, the focus on the internal organisational milieu may ignore the wider socio-political location of the organisation.

2.5.5. Radical humanism and organisational culture

The key feature of this perspective is that organisational culture is not monolithic and/or unitary; rather, the meanings that various groups within the organisation attach to everyday organisational life are varied. Wood (2004) explains that organisational culture is conceptualised as the contested relation between the distinctive meanings and understandings held by various social groups. Furthermore, as Trice and Beyer (1993:174) assert, it would be unwise to think that any organisation has a single, homogenous or

monolithic culture, as most organisations have multiple subcultures embedded within an overall culture.

Such subcultures cut across vertical and horizontal boundaries and functions, and may be made up of people who share the same age, gender, social class, race, occupational category and geographical location. They are characterised by distinct clusters of ideologies, cultural forms and behaviours. In addition, they may differ from other subcultures and from the overall culture in which they are embedded (Ott, 1989). Martin and Siehl (1983b:53) suggest that there are three types of organisational subcultures: “Enhancing subcultures” are those where the assumptions, beliefs and values are compatible with, and are often stronger and held with greater fervour than the unitary culture. “Orthogonal subcultures” are those that accept the basic assumptions of the unitary culture and, while they hold some unique assumptions, they generally adopt a neutral position. “Counter subcultures” are those that are generally in conflict with that of the unitary culture and are therefore constantly engaged in power struggles.

However, the development of the notion of subculture to counter the view that organisational cultures are unitary and monolithic is not without its limitations. The implication of the classificatory tag (race, gender, occupational category) is that membership of such cultures is relatively fixed and immutable. However, Martin (1992) points out that some types of cultures do not fit easily into the categories mentioned above. The contention here is that membership of cultures is more fluid than restricted to demographic identities. People can be part of many cultures at the same time depending on how they engage with

others who share the same or similar understandings of a particular context and time. The suggestion that it is a group and not an organisation that is doing the sharing is subject to the same shortcomings of the monolithic view, as subcultures are not as homogenous as originally thought, since they too are contested processes; sometimes united, sometimes divided and sometimes indifferent.

Parker (2000:86) suggests that the term 'subculture' is somewhat pejorative in that it is viewed as subordinate and different from the primary or main culture. The implication of the subculture label suggests deviance from the norm and a rejection of the generally accepted practices and ways of doing things. Consequently, the subculture label may imply that those who are associated with that subculture need to be convinced to join the mainstream culture. Adams and Ingersoll (1990) suggest that it may be more useful to view organisations as being characterised by a 'macro culture' with different levels of nested, embedded and overlapping cultures.

The key to understanding the fluid nature of subcultures is that organisations have 'vertical' and 'horizontal' slices that cut across many different cultures, which transcend racial, gender, geographical and occupational categories. These subcultures may share similar or dissimilar viewpoints, but usually coalesce around a common issue. Martin (1992:85) further points out that power, domination and potential for conflict also characterises subcultures, as everyone is "always either in power (enabling or prohibiting) or subordinated". However, as Abravanel (1983) argues, groups have the power to resist in different ways. Resistance may range from a subtle approach such as non-compliance, deferred decision making and

the withholding of information, to more overt acts of sabotage and subversion. As power is diffused across the hierarchy, the claim of a unitary culture that can be manipulated from above becomes somewhat spurious.

Therefore, organisational culture from this perspective is a struggle for supremacy as various competing groups (and groupings⁴) attempt to define the primary purpose of the organisation in a way that supports and enhances their station and that is to their benefit. According to Parker (2000), the strength of this perspective lies in its twin stress on power and meaning, as certain groups have more power to enforce a particular meaning. The assertion that certain groups have more power than others suggests that organisational culture may be used as a means to advance the cause of a particular group or coalition. This view is supported by Abrahams (1983:275), who views organisational culture as “organisational ideology”, which is defined “as the beliefs of the dominant group or groups within an organisation that are intended to articulate control rationalities”.

The twin emphasis on power and meaning advances the arguments raised in the interpretive perspective. Firstly, as indicated earlier, Smircich’s (1983) notion that organisational culture is something an organisation is (and not has) is particularly instructive here. The reification of culture into a thing amenable to external and managerial intervention and manipulation, as seductively promised by the functionalist perspective, is no longer convincing. Culture is now

⁴ Groups are more fixed in terms of classificatory tags, whereas groupings would suggest a more fluid membership around an issue within a particular context.

something an organisation is, and the lack of consensus and consistency and the presence of ambiguity indicate that it is no longer fixed or immutable. Consensus, conflict and ambiguity are neither organisation-wide nor confined to subcultures. They are transient, issue-specific and context- and time-bound as groupings form and dissolve around the issue at hand.

In sum then, the radical humanist perspective posits that there are varied meanings that groups and groupings assign to culture and its manifestations within an organisation. While early notions of subculture were helpful in attempting to understand that such cultures are sometimes shared, contested or simply indifferent, later research has revealed that these subcultures are themselves neither fixed nor immutable in terms of their classificatory tags.

While the radical humanist perspective appears to hold the most promise with its democratising rhetoric and attempts at bringing about genuine and fundamental change by altering patterns of domination, it is not without its weaknesses. Perhaps the most strident critique of the radical humanist view is encapsulated in the notion of the “psychic prison” (Morgan, 2006:395). It is argued that social participants have predetermined cognitive sets of thoughts, abstractions and ideological positions that hamper their ability to empathise with, let alone embrace, divergent viewpoints. The second weakness lies rather ironically in its strength, that of a somewhat impossible idealism. Given the uneven power relations, heavily weighted in favour of the political and corporate elite, it would seem that the idealised values inherent in the radical humanism would remain unattainable. Therefore, the radical humanists would likely remain at the sidelines, offering scathing criticism of the

status quo while offering little in terms of the 'practical solutions' demanded by pragmatic policy and management.

2.5.6. Defining organisational culture

The attempt of this chapter thus far has been to show that there is no single approach or definition of organisation culture. There is no Newtonian law that provides a neat mathematical truth in its definition. A wide range of ontological, epistemological, political and methodological standpoints and approaches mediate its definition. The critical factor is that its meaning for a particular writer is determined by a particular philosophical standpoint, historical context and organisational milieu. Therefore, this study follows Kuh and Whitt's definition:

Culture in higher education is defined as the collective, mutually shaping patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs and assumptions that guide the behaviour of individuals and groups in a higher education institution and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus. (Kuh and Whitt, 1988:13)

According to Kuh and Whitt (1988:95), culture is a holistic, context-bound and subjective set of attitudes, values assumptions and beliefs. The meaning of events and actions cannot be interpreted independently of the institutional context in which the events and actions take place. What people attend to and how they interpret actions and events are filtered through

lenses coloured by experiences, current circumstances and personal agendas. Much of what constitutes culture exists beneath conscious thought, as culture shapes realities and is shaped by realities. Each person constructs reality for him- or herself. Therefore, multiple realities exist, subjectivity is valid and it is a myth to suggest that a single objective reality exists. Interpretations are context-bound and person-specific and generated by individuals making sense of what they observe and experience. Therefore, management control of culture and the extent to which cultural properties can be changed intentionally are not as easy as has been suggested.

This study, consistent with Parker (2000), Trowler (1998) and Martin (1992), views organisational culture as fragmented unities, where organisational members are united at times and divided at others. Organisational culture is seen as involving both the lived experience of the organisational member as well the organisation's environmental milieu (sector, state, society). The study argues against the commonly held view that organisational culture is largely consensual and is therefore amenable by management. It is aligned with the contrary view that sees organisational culture as contestations within an organisation, influenced by its actors, its history and its relationship with the dynamics of its context.

The literature review continues in Chapter Three, in which the other central construct, namely external quality assurance, is examined using the analytical framework developed in this chapter. As there is little consensus on what constitutes quality, the chapter begins with a brief exploration of its origins in the corporate world and progresses to trace its development in the higher education sector. The analysis is then contextualised to the South

Chapter Two

Paradigmatic analysis of organisational culture

African situation and a definition of quality is suggested. The chapter uses the four-perspective analytical framework to examine the outcomes of using varied analytical lenses to conduct a critical review of the literature on external quality assurance in higher education.

Chapter Three: Paradigmatic conceptualisation of quality in higher education

3.1. Overview

The previous chapter alluded to the controversies in organisational theory as well as a critical assessment of the use of paradigms in the analysis of organisations. The chapter also introduced the framework that was used to analyse the literature as well as the conceptualisation of organisational culture, one of the central constructs of this study. This chapter uses the same framework in analysing the literature and conceptualisation of external quality assurance, the other construct central to this study. The chapter begins by alluding to the quality movement in the business environment, where its development and evolution attracted popular and scholarly attention. Thereafter, attention is turned to quality in higher education in general and to the South African context specifically. The next part of the chapter is devoted to subjecting the literature and conceptualisation of quality in higher education to the paradigmatic framework developed in Chapter Two. The chapter ends by locating organisational culture and external quality assurance onto a common analytical framework.

3.2. Development of quality⁵

Before embarking on the four-perspective analysis of quality, it would be prudent to examine some of the critical issues that have characterised the rise of the quality movement. Like organisational culture, quality too has been plagued with definitional and methodological controversies. More so has been the issue of “what is quality?” Lindsay (1992:153), for example, states the following:

[A]lthough quality has become the focus of attention, its meaning is not always clear nor its usage consistent. Indeed, the notion of quality in higher education has no agreed technical meaning and its use usually involves a heavy contextual overlay of some political or educational position.

This is a profound statement and although it had been made over a decade ago, there has since been little to suggest that there has been significant movement in providing greater clarity to the question “What the hell is quality?” first posed by Ball (1985) two decades ago.

Before beginning with an analysis using the classificatory schema discussed earlier, it may be prudent to provide a brief overview of the developments with regard to quality. This section alludes briefly to the rise of the quality movement in the business and industrial

⁵ A definition of quality has not been offered at this point. The intention is to demonstrate the elusiveness of the construct in its development in recent decades.

environments and then attempts to contextualise some definitions on quality in higher education.

3.2.1. The rise of the quality movement

According to Kenny (2006), the quality movement can be traced back to the nineteenth century to the Eli Whitney plant in the United States of America where that company attempted to create a trusted brand by assuring the quality of the product. The quality movement gained prominence in post-World War II Japan, where quality-control and quality-assurance processes were applied in the manufacturing value chain, from the sourcing of raw materials to the final product. By the 1950s, quality shifted from the shop floor to the management and organisational components of the business, as it was increasingly seen as a vital driver in the pursuit of competitive advantage and market share.

And so began the period of the quality experts or 'gurus'⁶ who have cumulatively added to the development of the quality movement and to its body of knowledge. A selection of American and Japanese experts and their contributions to the thinking on quality is briefly highlighted and presented thematically. Arguably, the foremost of these gurus is W Edwards Deming, who was largely credited with General Douglas McArthur and Homer Sarasohn as the leading protagonists in Japan's post-war industrial revival and expansion (Kenny, 2006).

⁶ The study focussed on the contributions of the so-called quality gurus rather than models such as Baldrige, Excellence and ISO 9000, as their contributions collectively inform these models. Terms such as Total Quality Management (TQM) have been avoided owing to definitional and methodological controversies.

Deming's (1982) contribution is a fourteen-point plan that places focus on the role of management, at corporate and individual level, as the cause of quality problems and that offers a philosophy of management that could be applied virtually to any organisation, regardless of shape, size or sector. Deming also introduced the so-called PLAN-DO-CHECK-ACT quality cycle, which was referred to as the Shewhart cycle, after Walter Shewhart who originally developed the concept. The cycle provides for an iterative approach, as it is implemented in spirals of increasing knowledge in pursuit of the ultimate goal. Therefore, the cycle is about continuous improvement through learning what works and what does not work in a systematic way.

Another major player in the development of quality is Joseph Juran, who developed the quality trilogy: quality planning, quality control and quality improvement and whereby good quality management requires quality actions to be planned out, improved and controlled. Juran (1988) believes that quality is directly related to customer satisfaction and the importance of ongoing quality improvements is emphasised. Furthermore, each person within the organisation is a customer and a supplier as that person will be part of a process carrying out some activity. In contrast to Deming, Juran proposes a ten-step approach to quality improvement.

The third major player in the quality movement was Armand Feigenbaum (2004), who is credited with the development of the concept 'total quality control' to indicate that quality is the responsibility of all groups within an organisation. In addition, quality management is

viewed an effective system for integrating quality-development, quality-maintenance and quality-improvement efforts of the various groups within an organisation, so as to enable production and service at the most economical levels that will allow full customer satisfaction. Feigenbaum (2004) sees it as a business method and proposes a three-step approach to quality.

Among the Japanese who significantly added to the body of knowledge on quality, is Kaoru Ishikawa. Ishikawa's (1990) most noteworthy contribution is the total quality viewpoint, company-wide quality control, emphasis on the human side of quality, the Ishikawa diagram⁷ and the assembly and use of the 'seven basic tools of quality'. Everyone in an organisation should know and use these seven tools to analyse problems and develop improvements. Ishikawa's countryman, Shigeo Shingo (1990), advanced the understanding on quality by introducing the concepts *just-in-time* (JIT), *single-minute exchange of dies* (SMED) and *zero quality control*. Shingo (1990) also introduced the concept *poka-yoke*, or mistake-free concept. Taken together, quality is assured by reducing set-up times from hours to minutes, and through the *poka-yoke* system, defects are examined, the production system is stopped and immediate feedback is given to prevent recurrences. Shingo also distinguishes between errors and defects; errors in the manufacturing process are inevitable and turn into defects when they reach the customer. The critical aim of the *poka-yoke* is to prevent error from becoming defects (Shingo, 1990). Among the Western experts, Philip Crosby (1979:112-119)

⁷ Perhaps the most noteworthy of Ishikawa's contribution is the Pareto diagram, also known as the fishbone diagram, which is a powerful tool for analysing cause and effect relationships.

is most well known for introducing the concepts *quality is free* and *zero defects*. Crosby based quality improvement on four so-called absolutes of quality and fourteen steps to quality improvement.

While the work of these quality gurus found expression in the business and academic literature, Tom Peters and Robert Waterman (1982) have popularised quality with the publication of their book *In search of excellence*. They identified eight themes that underpin excellence or quality. Finally, a consequence of the work that Peters had done for Mckinsey Consulting while employed there led to development of the so-called Mckinsey 7 S Framework for the intelligent organisation of seven variables for optimum performance (Bryan, 2008)

This brief journey into a select few of the so-called quality experts was intended to provide an overview of the development in the thinking on quality. While these concepts have been around for the last six decades, the serious academic discussions in Western management literature only began in the 1970s, and higher education followed a decade later. In Srikanthan and Dalrymple's (2003) view, industry and universities regarded quality management as a means to resolve their respective problems. However, as Jauch and Orwig (1997:280) point out, the uncritical importation of (total) quality management into higher education is somewhat problematic. They point out that such practice is aimed at reducing variability in the "product transformation process", which contradicts the learner-centred model that requires active participation of the learner rather than being a passive recipient.

Furthermore, the requirement of a customer focus is also something of a conundrum, as the identification of the customer is complex and not easily resolved. Finally, the academics may reject the 'empowerment' philosophy, as they are already empowered in their key functional areas.

The main point was to show that it had evolved in a manufacturing environment and then appropriated into management approaches. The critique of these approaches and their applicability to higher education is examined in detail in the sections on the four-perspective analysis. Suffice to say, virtually all these theorists and the literature on quality have strong functionalist leanings. There are also remarkable similarities with functionalist perspectives on organisational culture, as both are presented as neutral, value-free and objective means to bring about change and improvement. The taken-for-granted assumptions governing such an approach view quality and culture as non-problematic technologies to effect greater efficiency and effectiveness in a unitary organisation free of conflict and power relations. At this point, it would be prudent to consider some of the developments with regard to quality in higher education.

3.2.2. Quality in the university

According to Srikanthan and Dalrymple (2003), the early university was subservient to religious dogma and political ideologies, and during the course of the history of the university, these same ideologies and dogmas were often the source of fundamental

confrontation and contestations. Consequently, in order to protect the university from the autocratic exigencies of the time, the Humboldtian reforms in Germany in the 1800s enshrined the freedom of teaching and learning (academic freedom) via the “*lehrfreiheit*” and “*lernfreiheit*” principles⁸ (Du Toit, 2007:12). The key point here is that while academic freedom became a hallmark of the university, the tacit understanding was that it would be accompanied by academic excellence. Therefore, notions of quality and academic freedom became deeply embedded in the core of academic ethos (South Africa, 1997:128). Consequently, academics became the custodians of quality. The emphasis therefore was on an internal form of quality assurance with the academy being responsible for its quality.

Vroeijensteijn (1995) states that while the concept of quality has always been part of the academic tradition, the changing relationship between higher education and society has led to its external stakeholders demanding attention to quality. Newton (2007:14) elucidates that changes in society has had a profound impact on higher education in relation to growth and diversity, the size and shape of higher education, massification, changes in funding regimes, pressures for increased efficiencies and economies of scale and diverse student populations. In addition to societal changes and demands, national states from the United Kingdom to Australia began taking an overt interest in higher education, especially with regard to demands for increasing accountability by HEIs. Newton (2007) states that from the 1990s, concern for quality in higher education became global, as many countries established

⁸ These principles are discussed later in the chapter. They may roughly be translated into freedom of teaching and freedom of learning respectively, in other words, the early notion of academic freedom.

national quality-assurance agencies and, according to (Bradley, 2005), deployed fairly similar methodologies.

Harvey (2006) and Harvey and Newton (2007) indicate that quality in higher education in the United Kingdom over the last two decades evolved around the need for higher education to contribute more effectively to improving the performance of the economy, raising academic standards and paying continuous attention to the quality of teaching. It would appear that such motivations also holds true for developments in most Western countries (Brennan and Shah, 2000). Consequently, the evolution of formal quality-management arrangements, including external quality assurance, was in part a result of states wanting to make higher education more responsive to social and economic needs, to widen access and to ensure comparability of provision and procedures within and between institutions, international comparability and accountability for public money.

Houston (2008:62) succinctly concludes that the quality imperative in higher education came from the market and from national states. In addition, the politics of quality have been dominated by macro and micro agendas towards legitimising changes to the higher education sector, its institutions and their funding; focusing on value-for-money practices; reducing the autonomy of HEIs; and questioning the extent to which they produce work-ready graduates. Now the primary responsibility for preserving and enhancing quality rested with each institution and they needed to be more explicit and transparent in specifying systems for monitoring and controlling quality. In addition, institutions needed to have in

place a wide range of validating arrangements that demonstrates the extent to which they were able to control their own standards. Furthermore, greater efficiencies were to be realised by improvements in institutional management, changes in the management system and the development and use of performance indicators.

A number of countries, such as Australia, New Zealand, India, the United Kingdom and South Africa, have in the last two decades introduced external quality assurance (or quality monitoring) of their HEIs. Such quality assurance generally includes the accreditation of institutions and programmes, institutional quality audits, national programme reviews and research reviews usually conducted by an external statutory or quasi-governmental agency (South Africa, 1997). The rationale advanced for the introduction of external quality assurance is that it is primarily concerned with quality improvement and enhancement. Furthermore, as the CHE in South Africa asserts, it aims to engender public confidence in higher education's ability to demonstrate greater responsiveness to societal needs as well as to provide comprehensive information to the public on the manner in which HEIs maintain the quality and standards of their core business (Higher Education Quality Committee, 2004c).

Brennan and Shah (1997:11) observed that most national quality agencies assume the role of a coordinating body with legal status, but independent from the state, responsible for setting the quality-assurance agenda, quality standards and criteria and associated quality instruments. HEIs are expected to conduct an institutional self-evaluation using the

aforesaid standards and criteria. The institution is then expected to submit the self-evaluation report with supporting evidence to the quality-assurance agency. The self-evaluation is validated by an external panel of peers (and representatives of the quality-assurance agency) via a site visit, staff and student interviews, document review and facilities inspection. The external agency then publishes a report that includes commendations, affirmations and recommendations on the status of quality management at the institution. The final act requires the institution to submit a quality improvement plan to the external agency.

The external audit process (common to most countries) does not evaluate or assess quality. It focuses rather on institutional quality-assurance systems with documentary evidence that demonstrates how such systems observed and reported on quality arrangements, and the extent to which such reporting led to improvements within the institution. By the mid-1990s, self-assessment, supporting documentation, peer review and a public report were the mainstays of external quality-monitoring processes.

3.2.3. The South African context

Prior to the promulgation of the Higher Education Act (South Africa, 1997), approaches to quality assurance in higher education differed across the technikon and university sectors. The establishment of two different systems of quality assurance was largely a consequence of the binary system of higher education existing at the time. While universities were largely

autonomous, technikons were still subject to central control of national examinations and certification by the Department of Education and consequently did not have the same degree of autonomy as universities.⁹

In the technikon sector, external quality assurance was vested in the Certification Council for Technikon Education (SERTEC), a statutory body established in 1988. This arrangement had much to do with the origins of the technikons as senior technical colleges and the centralised control of syllabus, national examinations and certification by the National Department of Education. SERTEC's role was to ensure equal standards across the technikon sector and to certify them accordingly (Council on Higher Education, 2000).

The university sector was somewhat different, as universities enjoyed considerable autonomy in terms of their private acts and consequently assured the quality of their programmes and certification internally. The Committee of University Principals (CUP), later called the South African Vice-Chancellors' Association (SAUVCA), became concerned about the wide variety of standards across the sector and consequently began discussions about external quality assurance, which led to the founding of the Quality Promotion Unit (QPU) in 1996 (Kistan, 1999).

In addition, all HEIs that offered programmes such as medicine, nursing, engineering and accounting closely aligned those programme with the requirements of the respective

⁹ This discussion excludes colleges of education, agriculture and nursing colleges, as they were controlled by various apartheid-based departments of education and had virtually no autonomy.

professional bodies. These professional bodies were, as defined in their respective acts of parliament, statutory or voluntary associations. They executed their mandate accordingly to accredit providers, evaluate and approve courses, administer qualifying examinations and competence assessment prior to professional registration, set standards for registration as practitioners and develop a code of conduct for practitioners.

3.2.3.1. The Certification Council for Technikon Education

The establishment of SERTEC as an external quality agency by the Committee of Technikon Principals was largely in response to the technikon sector's search for improved status and autonomy. SERTEC was established via the promulgation of the Certification Council for Technikon Education Act (No 88 of 1986) (South Africa, 1986) as an autonomous statutory body. The primary purpose of the Council was to ensure that technikon certificates issued by the Council would represent the same standard of education and examination across all technikons. However, the Council did not execute this function fully, as it decided at its first meeting in July 1988 that the monitoring of the quality of education would be its primary function (Council on Higher Education, 2000:15). The Council further decided that it would execute this function via peer reviews – an emerging practice internationally. Consequently, the review of the Council's purpose resulted in amended legislation, the (Certification Council for Technikon Education Amendment Act, No 185 of 1993) (South Africa, 1993), which now recognised SERTEC's role as an accreditation body as well as its certification function.

SERTEC interpreted its mandate to focus on minimum standards rather than equal standards for academic programmes. As a result, its initial focus was on the regulations and conditions for examinations, which then extended to the requirements regarding resources centres, staff qualifications, course content, research and institutional aims, goals and objectives. The CHE (2000) report on SERTEC and the QPU of universities indicate that despite the wide-ranging powers vested in SERTEC to hold technikons accountable for quality, SERTEC's approach was essentially a 'soft touch' one. The primary reason for this approach was the early developmental stage of the technikons as HEIs, as well as the need to secure their cooperation rather than incite resistance to a process that essentially sought to 'interfere' in the internal workings of an institution.

The SERTEC approach was to establish evaluation committees whose membership included Council staff, academic peers from other technikons, employer/industry representatives, professional body representatives and students. The SERTEC manuals provided guidelines and a framework of norms and standards to evaluate programmes guided the functioning of these committees. In the main, the committees would examine descriptive reports submitted by a technikon prior to evaluation site visits. These evaluations were based on a four-year cycle with the SERTEC Council following up on the implementation of the evaluation committees' recommendations. The picture that emerged is one of continuous redefining of the specific nature of the SERTEC evaluation, with a strong focus on compliance in the period 1988 to 1996 (Council on Higher Education, 2000).

However, the SERTEC approach was found to be wanting, as the CHE (2000) evaluation report indicated that its singular focus on reviewing academic programmes overlooked a more holistic view of the institution, its constituent structures and their workings. In addition, the failure to elaborate sufficiently on the minimum standards for academic programmes led to varied and multiple interpretations between the reviewers and the institution. SERTEC also relied heavily on vast amounts of repetitive information which, while demanded, was not read critically by the panel members in order to arrive at informed decisions. The site visit was limited to two days, which may have compromised the rigour of the process, as the evaluation committee may not have had sufficient time to critically appraise the vast amount of information demanded. The over-emphasis on the site visit often led to crude judgements without an in-depth appraisal of the institution (Council on Higher Education, 2000). Furthermore, the lack of training and orientation of the panel members and the chairpersons led to subjective interpretations of the standards as well as stronger personalities exerting undue influence on the panel. SERTEC panels were also criticised for their lack of representivity in terms of race, gender and institutional background, which may have led to insensitivity towards institutional and local contexts of technikons. Finally, self-evaluation reports lacked critical self-reflection, as institutions tried to present themselves in the best possible light to prevent potential embarrassment for their senior management and institutional reputation.

3.2.3.2. The Quality Promotion Unit

In 1995, the CUP established the QPU to investigate a quality-assurance system for South African universities (Kistan, 1999). Lategan (1997) contends that the following considerations underpinned the notion of quality within universities: First, quality is always influenced by political and economic developments. Second, quality, in terms of audits, should be adaptable to suit the circumstance of individual universities. Third, quality in audits should be flexible in its degree of emphasis of the various concepts of quality. Finally, the openness and flexibility does not imply a lack of certainty and clarity of approach.

The QPU (1997:5-7) did not provide an overt definition of quality; rather it suggested that a notion of quality would be more helpful in view of the uneven South African higher education landscape (a euphemistic statement alluding to the real or perceived quality status of the various institutions) at the time. It therefore posited that the following seven concepts of quality should inform the notion of quality and guide a system of quality assurance for South African universities:

- The *ISO 9000* concept, where quality was defined in terms of the product being delivered to customers and where quality was evaluated against customer satisfaction.
- The *value-for-money* concept, where quality was measured in terms of performance indicators such as pass rates.

- The *quest for zero defect* concept, where comparisons were made against preset standards.
- The *exceptionally high standards* concept, where universities could compare themselves against role models who had a reputation for maintaining high standards.
- The *fitness for purpose* concept, where an institution was measured against its stated goals and mission.
- The *fitness of purpose* concept, where the institution's goals and mission was measured against national policies, regional requirements and societal expectations.
- The *quality as transformation* concept, which was founded upon the notion of a qualitative change and where the student was enhanced and empowered.

The QPU was of the opinion that, given the fragmented higher education system at a time when universities were classified as historically advantaged institutions or historically disadvantaged institutions, with the attendant apartheid-based resourcing and financing, it would have been difficult to compare standards across the entire university sector (Kistan, 1999). Therefore, the QPU's proposed methodology involved a panel of external peers examining an institution's system and procedures for assuring quality, using that institution's vision and mission as the point of departure. The focus therefore was on systems, rather than on quality.

The QPU further decided that the following considerations, consistent with Lategan's (1997) propositions mentioned above, would guide its approach to quality (QPU, 1997). First, cognisance must be taken of the local and national context within which the institution functioned. Second, the voluntarism of the process necessitated a broad and flexible approach to suit the particular circumstances of each institution. Third, the existence of different interpretations of the concept of quality must be acknowledged. Finally, it was desirable to achieve openness and flexibility while retaining clarity.

While there was sufficient flexibility, as it remained the prerogative of each institution to decide on its approach to quality, the QPU nevertheless believed that the notions of 'fitness for purpose', 'fitness of purpose' and 'transformation' would be at the core of any approach to quality in the South African context. The QPU based its approach to the institutional audit on the generic model on external quality assurance described earlier in this chapter. The process included institutional self-evaluation and the generation of a self-evaluation portfolio based on the QPU audit manual guidelines, followed by an audit site visit by a panel of external auditors seeking to validate claims made in the self-evaluation portfolio. Thereafter, an audit report would be written by the external audit panel containing comments on the ways in which the institution assures its educational quality, as well as recommendations for improvement. A final report, once approved by the management board of SAUVCA, would become a public document.

The QPU advised that the primary responsibility for quality rested with the universities and that they therefore were required to focus firstly on demonstrating how they assured themselves of the quality of their educational provisioning and secondly on how such systems could be improved. The universities were encouraged to engage in critical self-reflection of their vision, mission, teaching and learning, research and support arrangements and activities. They were further advised to ensure that the entire university community, all levels of management as well as staff and students engaged with the self-evaluation exercise and that the purpose was to generate a critical report highlighting strengths and weaknesses and not simply a descriptive narrative.

The external audits would be conducted on a three-year cycle by panels comprising academic staff and administrators. Generally, these panels comprised of five members, namely a chairperson, expected to be an expert on quality, three persons with university experience, one from outside the university sector, preferably with business or industrial experience and expertise and one from a foreign country with university experience or expertise in quality. The panel members participated in induction workshops using the portfolio of the institution to be audited as the case study. The audit visit, of about two to three days, involved the examining of institutional documentation, interviewing those involved in the compilation of the audit portfolio, a range of university officials, academics and students, as well as visiting facilities. The chairperson (assisted by some panel members) wrote the audit report, and then circulated it among the entire panel for comments,

observations and corrections. The QPU sent the report to the institution to correct any factual errors and to solicit comments on the report. The final report, once approved by the management board, was placed in the public domain.

The following summary highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the QPU approach (Council on Higher Education, 2000). While the QPU kept the notion of quality flexible given the fragmented and unequally resourced university sector, it did not provide clear statements on which definition of quality it would use in the audits. Consequently, universities interpreted quality in ways that best suited them, resulting in the notion of quality becoming somewhat tenuous and open to multiple meanings. Many institutions had a commonsense understanding of quality, usually loosely conceptualised as standards, rather than a coherently defined and widely understood notion. As a result, the assessment of the institutions' activities and their quality arrangements became tenuous at best. The lack of a coherent understanding of quality among institutions was evident in their self-evaluation portfolios, which were largely descriptive narratives rather than reflective and critical analyses.

While audit panel members received audit orientation and preparatory training, it would appear that some members lacked expertise and sensitivity when dealing with institutions. Furthermore, some panels were criticised for their lack of diversity or balance in terms of race, gender and institutional experience.

The QPU manual was deficient in that its guidelines for generating the self-evaluation report did not sufficiently advise institutions to be reflective and critical in identifying strengths and weaknesses, the centrality of teaching and learning, and the steps to be taken to effect remediation measures and of course avoid voluminous narratives. Audit reports were found to be brief and superficial and in some instances failed to acknowledge the extensive work of the self-evaluation exercise. In some cases, judgements were made on anecdotal evidence, as findings were not accurately reflected and inadequately addressed the strengths of the institutions' quality arrangements. Finally, the reports reflected a disconnection between the observations noted in the body of the report and conclusions with regard to strengths and weaknesses.

3.2.3.3. The contribution of SERTEC and the QPU to quality assurance in South Africa

Both SERTEC and the QPU found their roles overtaken by developments in the national policy environment in the period 1996 to 2001 in a dynamic environment of systemic transformation. A number of policy documents and acts, ranging from the National Commission on Higher Education Report (1996) and the Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (1997) to the Higher Education Act (No 101 of 1997) (South Africa, 1997). The South African Qualifications Authority Act (No 58 of 1995) (South Africa, 1995) made substantial comments on the establishment of a national system of quality assurance for the higher education sector. The establishment of the CHE

signalled the demise of SERTEC and the QPU, as there was now a unitary higher education sector that did not need two separate bodies charged with quality assurance. The Higher Education Act (No 101 of 1997) mandated the CHE to advise the Minister of Education on matters relating to higher education in general as well as to quality assurance. The Act further made provision for the CHE to establish a permanent sub-committee, the HEQC, to discharge the quality-assurance mandate.

SERTEC and the QPU nevertheless made significant contributions to the establishment of national external quality-assurance arrangements. SERTEC's legacy includes certification, programme accreditation, minimum standards, accountability and stakeholder involvement. Furthermore, it increased the autonomy and credibility of technikons, especially after 1998, when technikons were granted degree-awarding status. SERTEC heightened awareness of external quality assurance and self-evaluation and brought to the fore issues on best practices and deficiencies, which led to infrastructural improvements. However, it was criticised for, among other things, following a somewhat mechanistic checklist process to quality. In addition, SERTEC's approach was largely accountability-driven, which was not surprising given its statutory obligations (Council on Higher Education, 2000).

The QPU by contrast approached quality at the institutional level and emphasised the formative and developmental aspects of quality assurance. It created a positive response to quality issues in universities and gave reasonably clear guidelines to support self-evaluation. The QPU focussed on quality-management systems rather than quality per se and viewed

quality in relation to the institution's objectives and its definition of quality. However, its overly developmental approach undermined its quality agenda in that it defined quality too loosely and failed to convey and convince its constituency of its purpose (Council on Higher Education, 2000).

3.2.3.4. The Higher Education Quality Committee

The CHE established the interim HEQC in June 1999 and published the HEQC Founding document in 2001. The founding document (2004b:6) states that the HEQC will

- promote quality among constituent providers in higher education in order to facilitate the development of quality awareness and quality responsiveness in public and private provision;
- audit the quality-assurance mechanisms of HEIs;
- accredit providers of higher education to offer programmes leading to particular National Qualifications Framework (NQF)-registered qualifications by certifying that they have the systems, processes and capacity to do so. In relevant cases, this was to be done cooperatively with professional councils and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs); and
- coordinate and facilitate quality-assurance activities in higher education within a partnership model with other Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs).

According to the HEQC, the purpose of a national quality-assurance system is to ensure that higher education and training programmes at undergraduate and postgraduate levels are relevant and responsive to the needs of students, employers and other stakeholders within the context of the social, intellectual and economic requirements of societal development. Quality, together with equity and redress, democratisation, development, effectiveness and efficiency, academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability would be the key drivers of post-apartheid higher education transformation. Given the history of discriminatory exclusion in this country, it was important to ensure that the quality-assurance system enhanced access for all prospective students to higher education and to high standards of educational provision and its concomitant intellectual and economic benefits (Higher Education Quality Committee, 2004b:1). The HEQC's primary responsibility would be to ensure that the quality of higher education provisioning is maintained and enhanced. The HEQC would execute this mandate by evaluating and monitoring the capacity of HEIs to deliver those programmes effectively and efficiently.

One of the major debates with regard to external quality assurance is the tension between accountability and development or improvement orientations (Woodhouse, 1996). While these orientations may appear to be contradictory, others have viewed them as the two ends of the quality continuum. The question then arises as to where in that continuum would a national quality agency place its emphasis. It would appear that this tension would continue to exist as external quality agencies and the higher education sector grapple with

finding a balance between the two. In the foreword to the second edition of the HEQC's founding document, Dr Mala Singh, the then executive director, stated that

... quality assurance in many countries has grown more accountability orientated through the shift to "accreditation-like" requirements and where "value for money" demands on higher education have become sharper. The HEQC, however, has sought to straddle the ambivalent divide between accountability and development and between quality and equity. (2004b:v)

In the South African context, the rationale advanced for the introduction of external quality assurance was that it was primarily concerned with quality improvement and enhancement. Furthermore, it aimed to engender public confidence in higher education's ability to demonstrate greater responsiveness to societal needs as well as to provide comprehensive information to the public on the manner in which HEIs maintain the quality and standards of their core business (Higher Education Quality Committee, 2004a). It must also be noted that the state signalled that together with funding and the programme and qualification mix process, quality will be used to 'steer' higher education. Where it would be steered to was not exactly defined. Finally, as Strydom and Strydom (2004:103) caution, the introduction of a new quality regime in South Africa was complicated by close political and historical ties to commonwealth countries who had taken the lead in education standards settings in their transnational higher education provisioning, and subsequently influenced conformity to dominant models of quality assurance.

3.2.4. Defining quality

Sahney *et al.* (2004) state that the word 'quality' is derived from its Latin root "*qualis*", which roughly translates into "what kind of". As the question begs several interpretations even before an attempt at an answer, such as who decides the "what" and the "kind", it makes sense that there will be a wide variety of meanings, connotations and contestations attached to it. As a result, several authors have indicated that quality in higher education is, among others, "a slippery concept" (Pfeffer and Coote, 1991:31), "elusive" (Neave, 1994:115) and "slippery and value laden"(Harvey and Green, 1993:10).

However, Harvey and Green's (1997) definitions of quality as exceptional, perfection (or consistency), fitness for purpose, value for money and transformative are well known and generally accepted within the quality discourse in higher education. Vroeijsensteyn (1995:xvii) has defined quality as the "systematic, structured and continuous attention to quality in terms of quality maintenance and quality improvement". This definition captures the dual nature of quality assurance alluded to earlier as fitness for purpose and continuous enhancement. The HEQC (2004c:5) defines quality as

- fitness of purpose within the context of national goals for the higher education system, including equity, access, effectiveness and efficiency;
- fitness for purpose in relation to a specified mission within a national framework that encompasses differentiation and diversity;

- value for money judged in relation to the full range of higher education purposes set out in the White Paper. Judgements about the effectiveness and efficiency of provision will include but not be confined to labour market responsiveness and cost recovery; and
- transformation in the sense of developing the capabilities of individual students for personal enrichment, as well as the requirements of social development and economic and employment growth.

However, a distinction must be drawn between internally and externally driven quality assurance. The former is seen as that which resides with those closest to the action, the academics in this case, and the latter is that which is introduced in some form or other by a governmental or quasi-governmental external agency. Pressures at the end of 2000, however, focused attention on those elements of the definition that have emphasised fitness of purpose. These pressures have emanated from a growing concern that the current balance between institutional autonomy and public accountability may be at variance with national needs. Watty (2002) suggests that a possible reason is that academics conceptualise quality differently from other stakeholders. She consequently raises two fundamental questions regarding quality in higher education. First, as there are multiple stakeholders with vested interests in higher education, where is the legitimacy of defining, assessing and measuring quality located? Second, to what extent does the political agenda influence the definition, practice and judgements regarding quality?

This study focuses on the quality assurance introduced by an external agency and the way it affects and is affected by the organisational culture of an HEI. Therefore, when quality is alluded to from here on, it refers to the introduction of external quality assurance. External quality assurance will refer to the philosophical assumptions, definitions, approaches, methodology, criteria and reporting on quality in an institution in the form of the external institutional audit. The sections that follow analyses quality using the framework developed in Chapter Two to analyse organisational culture.

3.3. The four-perspective analysis of quality

3.3.1. The functionalist perspective of quality

The functionalist approach, as alluded to in the previous chapter, aims to bring about consensus, social order, social integration, solidarity and need satisfaction stability and to maintain the status quo. It is about communicating a dominant set of values, ensuring organisation-wide consensus to that set of values and, as Parker (1997:66) asserts, “find[ing] a technology to control a system of beliefs”. The technology that is referred to, in this case, is the introduction of quality assurance in higher education. Like organisational culture, quality assurance is presented as a benign good to the benefit of all, as an unproblematised technology or indeed as a culture, aligned to notions of administrative excellence and effectiveness.

The establishment of quality-management systems (QMSs) is aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the university as an organisation. Interestingly, from a functionalist perspective, the emphasis in QMSs is not on 'quality' but on a quality 'management system'. This is not necessarily negative, as a QMS can assist in institutions developing more robust management information systems, improved monitoring and evaluation of their core, support and management functions, and greater transparency in decision making. The improved efficiencies punted by this approach appeared particularly attractive to stakeholders such as national states seeking greater returns on investing in higher education in an era characterised by greater financial stringency and the need for value for money.

The changing relations between the university, the state and civil society has resulted in increasing calls for greater accountability for public funds, efficiency and effectiveness, and improved financial performance by those parties. These demands have led to the corporatisation of universities, as they are seen as business entities (Lomas, 2007). Remarkably, the vice-chancellors of some universities are now referred to as the chief executive officer, indicating a noticeable shift to a managerial and entrepreneurial ethos expected in universities. In keeping with the shift to corporatisation, there is greater emphasis on centralised control as power shifts from the academics to the managers, leading Kogan (2002) to remark that institutional and managerial values predominate over academic values. As a result, the traditional notion of the academic using professional authority over

the discipline to sustain quality has been superseded by the managerial authority of central administrators.

The functionalist approach is perhaps best exemplified by the notion of new managerialism in higher education. Kogan (2002:57) defines new managerialism as the shift of academic authority from senior academics and their departments to the central institution. This is usually a consequence of the institution's need to meet new demands with fewer resources, resulting in management systems eroding academic values, as academics have to do more with less. The focus of managerialism is on strengthening the hand of the central administrators, as the emphasis is on ensuring institutional financial success (Lomas, 2007). It uses the seductive language of excellence, performance and efficiency, borrowed from the business sector, to underpin the introduction of quality assurance. It would therefore appear that the primary beneficiaries are the senior managers who would use quality assurance to measure their level of efficiency and determine the level of goal achievement.

O'Brien and Down (2002), commenting on Australian schools, argue that governance structures of that country's schools have been redefined and aligned to the principles of the market and its corollary, new managerialism. While their focus has been on the changing nature of the governance of schools, their comments easily resonate with the shifts in higher education towards managerialism. They go on to argue that this structural and ideological shift has resulted in a corporate-style bureaucracy whereby public sector activity is reduced to the effective, efficient and economic management of human and capital resources. In

addition, they point to the shift in the educational discourse from the public good or public welfare with its emphasis on collective relations, equity and social justice to the managerial concerns with its customer-oriented ethos and concerns for efficiency, cost-effectiveness and competition.

This approach is usually sold to senior management by the external quality agency as well as the national state via a combination of reward and sanction. Management is seduced by an approach that supposedly gives them institutional intelligence to tighten managerial control (to tighten the so-called loosely coupled arrangements characteristic of universities (Weick, 1976:3) and to placate the external quality agency as well as the national state, who hold the purse strings, which is indicative of the uneven and unequal power relations within this model). The externally derived accountability approach with its supposedly objective goal of benefiting all stakeholders is used to justify moving the quality-assurance function from the academy to the central administrators and so-called quality experts.

Critically, external quality assurance is used as the means to centralise and tighten control over the institutions, usually at the behest of the state and its external quality agency. As senior managers see external quality assurance as a means to strengthen their control they may willingly engage in the processes as dictated by the external agencies.¹⁰ Typically, external assurance is based on the fitness for purpose definition of quality and is used as a

¹⁰ This must be qualified, as senior managers (and academics) are neither passive recipients nor are they easily manipulated – they will appropriate whatever means to ensure that their authority and power are not diminished.

summative assessment of the institution against its vision, mission and stated goals. These are usually management's goals. The methodology followed is based on the exemplar described earlier: institutional self-assessment, the generation of the self-assessment report and portfolio of evidence, validation of the report by external peers, a summative report of commendations, affirmations and recommendations written by the external quality agency and finally a quality-improvement plan from the institution.

The primary beneficiaries of this approach appear to remain senior management, the state and the external quality agency. Senior management benefits because they can apply a template over their management of the institution to strengthen and centralise control. By using an external instrument and supported by its 'state policy' approach, they can now hold academics managerially accountable without appearing to enforce blunt hierarchical power. Harvey (2006) concurs with Morley's (2003) view that such external agencies have become so commonplace that academics have adopted a matter-of-fact attitude, surrendering to the inevitability of such agencies, as critical engagement or resistance appears futile since these agencies work with what seems to be invincible moral authority.

States benefit by ensuring that a standardised higher education quality-assurance system is applied across the sector and using the assurance outcomes to inform funding and other strategic decision making. Consistent with the functionalist approach, states believe the application of a predetermined set of criteria across the sector will generate knowledge that is value-free, generalisable and comparative – so-called scientific knowledge. External quality

assurance is then seen as an instrument to 'steer' or 'monitor', or whatever other euphemism is used to denote governments' increasing desire for direct control over higher education and universities. The external agency, its processes and its reason for being are all validated and legitimated by the active participation of academics from the sector as well as international 'experts' to lend additional credibility.

Despite its democratising rhetoric, there is a distinct top-down approach to external quality assurance, as senior management and the quality-assurance experts within the institution are usually the drivers and act as agents of the external quality agency. Virtually every aspect of external quality assurance is dictated to from an external source (usually the quality agency). The criteria, the format of the report, the nature of the evidence, the dates of the site visit, the category of people to be interviewed and the peer review panel are all determined by the external quality agency.¹¹ In view of this, there is the likelihood that the academics may view the process and its outcome with a degree of suspicion (Cooper, 2003; Newton, 2007). Furthermore, they may see it as an imposition, as something they have little control over, and finally as a form of performance management by stealth. Consequently, their level of commitment or indeed belief that the process will lead to improved quality may be somewhat diminished.

¹¹ While academics have participated in the generation of the audit criteria and institutions were consulted on the audit dates and review panel, the unequal power relation between the external agency and the institution mediates against any real engagement and negotiation.

While peer review has traditionally been a feature of academic and internally driven quality assurance, peer review in external quality assurance is questionable, as the locus of accountability of the reviewers is to the agency concerned and, by implication, to the state. In addition, the standardised approach does not necessarily provide sufficient leeway or discretion to the review panel. Harvey (1999) provides a strident critique of the peer review panel, where it is asserted that it is neither an effective nor an efficient means of finding out what is going on within the institution or in the academic programmes. The members make their judgements based on what they read in the self-assessment report, so-called lines of enquiry and what they are told by interviewees, and they look for discrepancies between what was stated in the self-evaluation report and what was learned during the site visit under the scientific inquiry guise of 'triangulation'.

Within the functionalist perspective, external quality assurance is legitimated by convincing HEI senior managers that this is in their best interest via the promise of greater and more centralised management and control. Furthermore, as Morley (2003) suggests, senior academics and institutional managers lend credibility to the process by becoming members of the external panels and by serving on the boards and committees of the external quality agency. This approach is particularly attractive, especially to the state, as it consolidates state control by using a standardised model of accountability across the sector. In addition, it allows for the 'steering' of higher education towards state-defined goals. However, the

trappings of neutrality and of the public good lend it credibility and legitimacy that it does not appear to deserve.

There is also that strong possibility of academics resisting and in some cases subverting external quality regimes. Morley (2003:70) uses the term “counterfeit reflexivity” to describe how academics are forced to present themselves in the language and discourse of the quality assessor. The introduction of the external quality regimes brought with it a new terminology set and particular ways of writing and responding in the ‘language of quality’. Academics may then use this language and terminology set to describe their activities to satisfy the requirements of external quality assurance without necessarily changing their practice. The difference between ‘espoused’ and ‘tacit’ theories (Argyris and Schon, 1978) described in Chapter Two may in part account for this behaviour. Publically articulated sentiments may not necessarily coincide with privately held views or practices, as academics have to account to panellists who may not have the disciplinary background or to peers who have conflicting accountability obligations. Consequently, academics may very well slip into a compliance mode to ensure that the audit moves along smoothly by providing the ‘answers’ that the audit panel is looking for – a path of least resistance.

The managerialism that is characteristic of the functionalist approach requires voluminous and detailed policy documentation, descriptions of standardised practices and documentary evidence to facilitate ‘audit trails’. Lomas (2004:159) is of the opinion that the direct and opportunity costs associated with managerialism’s strict application of control and direction

could be particularly high, as it may limit staff creativity and flexibility and impact on their motivation. Finally, Newton (2007) asserts that there is a clear lack of a shared vision within institutions and, more importantly, a mismatch between the quality-assurance techniques and education processes resulting in the “withdrawal of trust” (Trow, 1996:5) as new managerialism becomes commonplace in HEIs (Kogan, 2002).

3.3.2. The radical structuralist perspective of quality

The main point of contention with the radical humanist perspective is that this perspective focuses on structural relations within a realist social world. In essence, theorists within this perspective contend that society is characterised by fundamental conflict, which brings about radical change through political and economic crises. The radical structuralists then focus on structures, modes of domination, deprivations and contradiction in the real world. Nurminen (1997) posits that the term ‘structuralist’ suggests that change is objective and structural in nature, while the term ‘radical’ suggests that the change is sudden and in most instances signals a complete break from the past. Furthermore, change within this perspective is generally viewed as ‘progressive’, as it serves the class interests of workers, hence the radical label. However, Nurminen (1997) also argues that there is sufficient space within the perspective to locate structural change in the opposite direction, that is, change that serves not to emancipate but rather to introduce new forms of domination.

This approach is typical of states using external quality assurance as a means of driving state-defined change and steering HEIs to meet policy imperatives, as evidenced in the United Kingdom (Harvey, 2006), Australia, (Vidovich, 2001) and South Africa (CHE, 2007). Such change assumes a structural form and is imposed by states that do not have the patience for change to occur incrementally. According to Boshier (1999), the primary concerns with regard to higher education would be the commodification of education, the corporatisation of universities and the effect of the global economy on higher education. Boshier (1999), referring to Noble's (1997) work on online learning, further argues that education has become a commodity to be sold on the free market. In addition, it is argued that the commodification of education requires its participants to perform in a quantifiable and measurable way despite vision statements containing noble (but empty) promises of increasing access and equity.

Barnett (2003) argues that various ideologies and external forces that have intruded into higher education are eroding the traditional notion of the university as a public good. Universities have through the ages engaged with some form of ideology, overtly or covertly, in support of or in resistance to their political, social and economic contexts. Barnett (2003) asserts that the newer ideologies of quality, managerialism and entrepreneurship have become more pervasive. These ideologies have become part of the discourse on higher education because states no longer trust HEIs. The source of this distrust perhaps lies in the

range of stakeholders with competing (and cooperative) interests trying to impose their purpose on higher education.

Most striking has been the changing relationship between the state and the university. While in most liberal democracies the university enjoyed a fair degree of autonomy, and indeed jealously guarded that autonomy, states now want universities to be aligned to national human capital-development goals and, as Vidovich (2001:249) argues, become servants of the economy. In view of this, states, as the primary funder of universities, have increasingly demanded greater responsiveness to national goals and accountability with regard to their 'return on investment'. Therefore, as Gordon (2001) asserts, the increasing call for public accountability, as well as the expansion and diversification of many higher education systems, have contributed to the introduction of external monitoring and assessment of the work of universities.

Neave (1998:268) speaks of the "evaluative state" and suggests that this allows states to steer higher education using a form of remote control. While in some liberal democracies, this notion of steering higher education is couched in more euphemistic terms, higher education policy in South African is quite explicit in that it is the purpose of the state to 'steer' higher education via three instruments, namely funding, the programme and qualification mix, and quality assurance, in order to transform the higher education landscape. Quality has therefore become an instrument of the state to move higher

education in a predetermined direction, which may not be entirely consistent or aligned with those of the individual institutions and their internal stakeholders.

According to Houston (1997:62), the increasing uniformity in the external monitoring of quality in higher education can be attributed to the state's demands for HEIs to demonstrate fitness of purpose, one of the more generally accepted definitions of quality. There are however are contestations around the definitions of 'fitness' and 'purpose', as they are rarely defined. Consequently the links between accountability and quality improvement remain unclear (Houston, 2008). The reasons advanced for the lack of clarity is that the definitions and interventions associated with quality improvement do not necessarily address the concerns and interests of those directly involved. Juran and Gryna (1988:2) advise that "the prime need is to discover the realities under the labels, that is, the deeds, activities, or things the other person is talking about". In disregarding the needs of those closest to teaching and learning, research and community engagement, the very purposes of seeking quality improvement may be somewhat compromised.

Houston (1997:62) states that the rhetoric and rationale of quality management, that is, quality is defined by customer satisfaction, is aimed at the reduction of waste and variation and must be measurable, were accepted uncritically. While user-based definitions of quality (customer expectation and satisfaction as well as transactional value) are commonplace in industry, those definitions become problematic in higher education owing to the complexity in defining the customer. This complexity is largely a consequence of the social, economic

and political context in which the university operates and the multiple role-players and stakeholders with competing (and sometimes complementary) needs, interests and demands. The key point here is that these relationships are neither fixed nor homogenous, as they are often subject to vagaries of expediency and situational changes.

In Houston's (1997) view, none of the external stakeholders has a pure market relationship with the university where the notion of the student-as-customer to illustrate this point is cited. If one considers Harvey and Knight's (1996) notion of quality as transformative, that is, a concern for student growth, then this moral dimension is missing from the customer-supplier relationship, as posited by the student-as-customer quality approach. Houston (1997:63) asserts that labelling any group as the customer who defines quality oversimplifies the demands on higher education and presents a distorted picture of context in which it operates and limits thinking about quality. Furthermore, customer-focused definitions of quality fit poorly with higher education.

In some ways this approach resonates with the political frame of organisational culture as described by Bolman and Deal (1991). They point out that organisations are characterised by contestations around scarce resources. While their political frame is somewhat limited to contestations and power relations within the institution, the basic premise can be extended to explore the relationship between the institution and the state. Here too, the battle is over scarce resources as the state demands that the university does more with less, align itself with national goals and adopt a fitness of purpose approach to quality.

3.3.3. The interpretive perspective of quality

The interpretive perspective aims at understanding the social construction of reality, that is, the ways in which people create and share meaning. According to Burrell and Morgan (1979), the interpretive perspective is informed by a concern to understand the world as it is and to understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience. The thinking within this perspective is that the world is cohesive, ordered and integrated, and where conflict, contradiction and change are disregarded from the theoretical framework. Just as the functionalist perspective provided an intellectual home for the managerialist approach to higher education and quality, the interpretive perspective similarly provides a home for the collegial notion of higher education.

Bergquist's (1992) and Bergquist and Pawlak's (2007) description of the collegial culture of HEIs indicate that academics owe a greater loyalty to their discipline than to the university. In addition, a premium is placed on the autonomy of the faculty, where academic freedom is considered one of the central pillars of the collegial model. Another characteristic described by Bergquist (1992) alludes to the individualistic nature of the collegial model, where academics are encouraged to pursue their own academic interests and their teaching and research agendas. Academics are viewed as professionals and therefore independently in control of their work, which requires little or no managerial oversight from the central administration.

The collegial approach to quality resonates rather easily with the notions of “*lernfreiheit*” and “*lehrfreiheit*” (Du Toit, 2007:13), the original concepts that underpinned the modern conceptualisation of academic freedom. The tacit understanding of academic freedom was that the academic, while exercising this right, would also uphold the corresponding values of academic excellence and quality. In other words, the academics became self-regulators as the custodians of their disciplinary, research and teaching quality. Consequently, the academics owned and drove the evaluation of their activities (quality assurance) by establishing the frames of references, evaluation criteria, methodology and nature of the reporting. Despite Bergquist’s (1992) remark about academics being soloists, the long-standing convention of using peer review (academic or disciplinary peers) provided contextualised judgements about the quality of their academic endeavours and outcomes.

While the functionalist managerialist use of peer review was criticised for the lack of disciplinary knowledge, thereby rendering statements about the relative quality of teaching and learning somewhat suspect, the use of disciplinary experts lends credibility to the evaluation process and its outcomes by providing so-called context validity. This approach is consistent with the interpretive perspective, as the use of disciplinary peers may imply a shared set of norms, values, rules and regulations that are widely accepted.¹² The internally driven nature of the interpretive collegial approach excludes institutional managers and

¹² This does not imply that all academics within a discipline share the same set of ontological and epistemological assumptions. The example cited in Chapter Two of meta-theoretical wars with regard to organisational culture is particularly illustrative. The point here is that internally driven quality evaluation may in all probability make use of peers who share the same set of philosophical assumptions about teaching and learning to the exclusion of those who may hold contrary views.

external role-players, such as the external quality agency (though external academic peers would be involved to lend the credibility as alluded to earlier in the chapter), from direct involvement in the quality evaluation. The institutional management's role would be limited to providing safe, supportive and enabling conditions to facilitate self-evaluation without the threat of punitive action following its outcomes.

It would appear then that academics may be most comfortable with the interpretive collegial approach to quality evaluation, as they would be the owners and custodians of the process and outcomes of the evaluation. They would be in position to negotiate or even dictate the role and function of external role-players (intra- and extra-institutional) in the evaluation. Often these roles would be relegated to support and facilitative functions, such as logistical arrangements, without direct involvement and engagement. One of the most attractive features of this approach for academics, as the primary consumers of the quality-evaluation report, is that they would retain the discretion to determine what aspect of the report would be released into the public domain. Therefore, it would appear that quality from this perspective would hold the most promise, as it would appeal to traditional notions of academia, wherein academics were in control of their professional destiny and would manage and improve their practices on their own terms and by themselves. According to Nurminen (1997), this approach would be more likely to foster creativity and excellence (quality), as it supports strong involvement without necessarily coupling it to change processes. However, this approach is not without its limitations.

Consistent with the interpretive approach, the temptation within this perspective would be to merely describe conditions and relations rather than seek to change fundamentally. Nurminen (1997) points out that collegial norms and practices that characterise academic work may be the main resistance to the radical change that the institution or indeed an external agency or state would like to carry out. The focus on the internal milieu may ignore the wider socio-political location of the institution. The tendency to concentrate on the local, and indeed the primary loyalty to the discipline and to the faculty, may ignore or indeed militate against necessary institutional change.

Harvey (1995:35) makes a distinction between “cloisterism” and “new collegialism”, whereby the former is seen as traditional, isolationist, individual, defensive and wary of change while the latter is viewed as open and responsive to change and new ways of doing things. Middlehurst (1997) is more strident in her comment that academics who view quality assurance and accountability as a chore and an imposition rather than a feature of good practice and manifestation of professional pride may have a detrimental effect on the whole academic community and its perceived professionalism.

Notions of power and constraint are absent in the interpretive approach given the tacit assumption that there is local agreement over the meanings associated with the academic processes. For example, the use of internally developed criteria may subconsciously be influenced by prevailing institutional conditions, intellectual and philosophical biases and prejudices and/or a desire to surface only that which is commendable in order to satisfy

academic ego. Furthermore, powerful personalities may determine, tacitly or overtly, the direction and outcomes of the self-evaluation. This approach is somewhat naive in believing that all academics that participate in internally driven quality assurance subscribe to the same values of professionalism and commitment to their discipline, their students and the academy.

The use of self-identified peers is also problematic. While the use of peer review has been one the traditional hallmarks of quality within the university, their introduction to the quality movement may not necessarily have the same critical value it traditionally enjoyed. Peers may be tempted to provide sympathetic evaluation to protect, tacitly or overtly, their colleagues, as it could very well be their turn next and they too would expect the same 'professional courtesy'. Consequently, the possibility to water down public reports may be tempting. A critique of SERTEC, which was externally driven yet heavily peer-reliant, provided evidence of this. There was a disconnection between what the reviewers reported orally, what was said privately and what finally appeared in the public report (Council on Higher Education, 2000).

3.3.4. The radical humanist perspective

In essence, the radical humanist perspective is concerned with the ways in which the human being is bound by the social arrangements and its effect on human development. In other words, the human being is prevented from attaining full potential by the social structures

and patterns. According to Burrell and Morgan (1997:33), this perspective lays the foundation for the so-called anti-organisation theory and consequently presents a diametrically opposite position to that of the functionalist perspective. Boshier (1999) argues that radical humanists want to upset existing and pervasive power relations, usually by overthrowing or transcending existing social relationships. In addition, people carry ideological superstructures that limit their cognition and act as constraints to their decision making and action. Consequently, people need to reconstruct their view of reality and take appropriate action in order to bring about transformation, emancipation and a critical analysis of the modes of domination (Boshier, 1999).

The notion of praxis, reflection followed by action, has particular resonance within this perspective. Boshier (1999) cites Paulo Freire's work on popular education, cultural action and agrarian transformation, and the notion of conscientisation as examples of this worldview. According to Boshier (1999), Freire believed that transformation was more than the mere mechanical replacement of one system with another, as the act of transformation requires critical thinking that focused on the act of transformation and its consequences. More importantly, the people are not empty vessels into which knowledge is poured by external experts. As they are products of their own beliefs, any transformatory act cannot be divorced from the cultural universe in which they find themselves.

A further example of thinking within this perspective is found in the ideological and ontological roots of participatory action research, which is critical of the top-down nature of

traditional university research, which entails that the research agenda is predetermined and imposed on those lower down the hierarchy. In addition, the traditional approach appears to disregard the way people subjectively construct and construe their world by relying rather on the imposition of the external values, indicators, performance-measurement instruments and cost-benefit analysis in determining the value and worth of research.

Furthermore, theorists within this perspective contend that traditional education systems primarily serve the interests of the corporate and political elite. More importantly, as Boshier (1997:16) argues, there is a deep suspicion of so-called neutral technologies touted as panaceas to the problems in education. Although the above-mentioned refers to diverse fields of study, it does resonate with the current modes of introducing external quality regimes into higher education. Furthermore, education informed by this perspective is sensitive to the local and culturally constructed way-of-knowing and is therefore committed to a transformation of consciousness. Therefore, it would appear that this approach would resonate with the notion of quality as transformation, as defined by Harvey and Green (1993). Warn and Tranter (2001:191) extend this definition by asserting that a critical purpose of higher education is to develop students to be “adaptive, adaptable and transformative”.

While this approach appears to be particularly attractive, especially to academics, given its seemingly genuine attempts at bringing about meaningful and empowering change via quality in higher education, it is not without its flaws. With the unequal distribution of power

favouring the national states, external quality agencies and institutional central management, who control access to and distribution of resources, it seems highly unlikely that any of these parties would relinquish control of the increasingly politicised higher education. Consequently, the democratising idealism, which characterises the radical humanist approaches to quality, appears to consign it to the sidelines as so-called pragmatic policy to manage multiple competing priorities and will continue to occupy the centre stage.

3.4. Organisational culture and quality

Chapters two and three examined both constructs using a common analytical framework that was adapted from Burrell and Morgan (1979). Given the various definitional, epistemological, ontological and methodological contestations, such an analytical framework is central to providing a critical overview of both constructs. By bringing both onto the same analytical plane, the researcher sought to address the commonsense view that the right organisational culture and the introduction of external quality assurance appears to be intuitively attractive in creating quality HEIs and, by extension, quality teaching and learning, research and community engagement.

Within each of those perspectives is a lens to view organisational culture and quality, to be used to guide the research methodology and analysis. The intention was to create a framework to analyse the literature on both constructs as well as to build a model to underpin the research methodology. The lenses within each quadrant not only shares the

characteristics of that quadrant, but its location relative to the other lenses indicates that there is some degree of overlap, hence the pragmatic pluralist approach to using paradigms alluded to earlier in the chapter. Figure 3.1 below presents an overview of the framework and subsequent analysis of both constructs.

Analytical framework		Organisational culture	Quality in higher education
Functionalism	Ontology	Tangible, reified, unified and homogenous set of shared values	Technology-controlled system of behaviour
	Epistemology	Causal relationship between culture and organisational efficiency and effectiveness	Causal relationship between quality and higher education efficiency and effectiveness
	Human relations	Shapes the behaviours and values of organisational members to maintain consensus and the status quo	Unproblematised ways of shaping behaviours to comply with predetermined values
	Methodology	Researched using quantitative methods from the natural sciences to use culture to shape behaviours	Researched using qualitative methods from the natural science to use quality to shape behaviours
Radical structuralism	Ontology	Conflicting cultures based on the unequal distribution of political and economic resources	Quality to free the university from different forms of domination
	Epistemology	Culture shaped by political and economic forces	Quality to drive fundamental and sudden change in higher education
	Human relations	Organisational members force radical change by challenging class and economic (capitalist) superstructures	Organisational members challenge external forms of domination
	Methodology	Researched using quantitative methods from the natural sciences	Researched using quantitative methods
	Ontology	What the organisation is (rather than what the organisation has)	A social construct of higher education

Analytical framework		Organisational culture	Quality in higher education
Interpretivism	Epistemology	Questions the existence of organisation as concrete and tangible	Defined by participants, usually in terms of the academic discipline
	Human relations	Cohesive, ordered and integrated world	Seeks collegiality
	Methodology	Qualitative analysis of organisational members understanding of symbols, languages, actions and stories	Qualitative analysis of academics creating quality
Radical humanism	Ontology	Contested, consensual and ambiguous meanings and understanding of organisational members	Transformation and emancipation
	Epistemology	Struggle for supremacy of purpose and ideologies	Meaningful and empowering change
	Human relations	Social structures and patterns limit organisational members from attaining full potential in creating cultures that emancipate	Subjective construction of the academic worlds
	Methodology	Qualitative analysis of meanings and understandings that organisational groups and groupings attach to culture and its manifestations aiming to emancipate from modes of domination	Qualitative analysis of members' construction of the academic world aiming to emancipate from modes of domination

Figure 3.1: Four-perspective analysis of organisational culture and quality

The aim of subjecting organisational culture and external quality assurance in higher education to the analysis described in chapters two and three was to demonstrate that both constructs were multidimensional and that any interpretation was largely dependent upon a particular philosophical and theoretical orientation. The literature review also suggests that a

study of both constructs reveals that real and/or potential conflicts should be viewed in terms of the broader organisational fabric and not as isolated and unconnected events. Furthermore, structural and operational contradictions give rise to and are consequences of organisational tension, suggesting that HEIs are not homogenous and unitary cultures. In addition, external quality assurance is not merely the introduction of a neutral technology aimed at the general good. Filippakou and Tapper (2007) point out that external quality assurance may not yield its purported benefits as multiple interpretations of its impact and effect on HEIs become evidence. As Anderson (2006) and Ogbor (2001) point out, neither construct is value-free or impervious to ideological influences. Therefore, an understanding of organisational culture and external quality assurance is necessary to provide insights into why different groups and groupings hold varying perceptions about external quality assurance.

Chapter Four: Research design and methodology

4.1. Introduction

This chapter details the research design of the study which, according to Mouton (2001) and Trafford and Leshem (2008), is the research 'blueprint' or 'strategy', and incorporates the research methodology, which directs the data-collection and data-analysis processes and procedures. The chapter begins with a brief exposition of the theoretical and philosophical orientations used to ground the research design before moving on to a more explicit elucidation of the research methodology. The study followed Willis's (2007) and Guba and Lincoln's (1994) advice that critical decisions regarding ontology, epistemology and methodology should underpin any research. The value of using this approach is that it presents a framework for justifying the choices made in the research design and subsequent research methodology. In providing a brief discussion of philosophical and theoretical considerations, the researcher aimed at developing a coherent and cogent rationale for the research design and methodological decision making, as well as the analytical tool used to examine the research question.

4.1.1. Philosophical and theoretical orientations

In the previous two chapters, a theoretical framework, adapted from Burrell and Morgan's (1979) four paradigms, was developed to examine the literature on organisational culture and external quality assurance. The framework's four perspectives provided a set of theoretical assumptions with which to view the world generally, and the research subject matter specifically. In brief, ontologically, the realist perspective, views the world as separate from humans and their appreciation of it, while the nominalist view holds that the social world is purely a product of human description, consciousness and action. Epistemologically, the positivist view is that causal laws perceived by an objective observer may be deduced, while the humanistic view holds that knowledge is concerned with the significance that humans attach to the actions. From a human nature perspective, the deterministic view posits that humans, as products of their environment, act in an almost mechanistic way, while the voluntarist view holds that humans are more creative and are able to create their environment through thought and action. Lastly, methodologically, the nomothetic approach promotes the measurement of general concepts while the ideographic approach attempts to surface the unique insights and interpretations that individuals have of their world (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; McLean, 1999; Lane, 2001). These differences have been presented in a simplified form in Table 4.1.

	Functionalism	Radical structuralism	Interpretivism	Radical humanism
Ontology	Realist	Realist	Nominalist	Nominalist
Epistemology	Positivist	Positivist	Anti-positivist	Anti-positivist
Human nature	Determinist	Determinist	Voluntarist	Voluntarist
Methodology	Nomothetic	Nomothetic	Ideographic	Ideographic

Table 4.1: Four sociological paradigms (Burrell and Morgan, 1979)

Within these paradigms, there are various schools of social theory. Lane (2001), for example, locates French existentialism, critical theory and anarchist individualism in the radical humanism paradigm; contemporary Mediterranean Marxism, conflict theory and Russian social theory in the radical structural paradigm; phenomenology and hermeneutics in the interpretive paradigm; and integrative theory, social system theory, interactionism and social action theory in the functionalist paradigm. Lane (2001) also locates solipsism in both the radical humanism and the interpretive paradigms, lending credence to Parker's (2000:60) notion of "conceptual violence" to indicate that schools of thought do not necessarily fit into the prescriptions of paradigmatic thought. Furthermore, like Schultz and Hatch (1996), Lane rejects notions of paradigm incommensurability.

There are sufficient points of commonality between the model developed from Burrell and Morgan's (1979) four sociological paradigms in the previous chapter and Willis's (2007) three dominant research paradigms to map them onto a single framework, as illustrated in Figure 4.1. The three dominant research paradigms will be briefly discussed in order to ground this study in its philosophical, theoretical and methodological orientations without straying from the overall paradigmatic approach developed in the previous chapter.

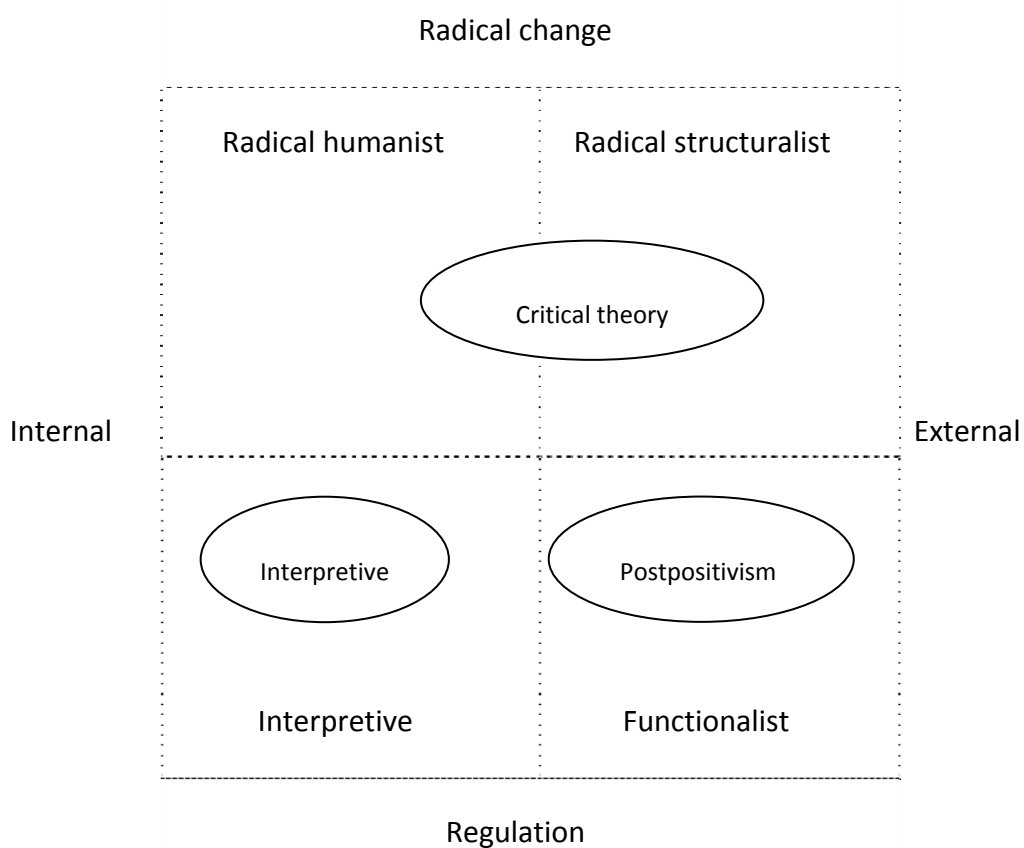


Figure 4.1: Embedded research perspectives within sociological paradigms

4.1.2. Postpositivism (positivism)

Positivism has a long history and was for many years the dominant research methodology in the social sciences. Social scientists believed that credibility and legitimacy of their research lay in appropriating the methods of inquiry of the natural sciences and mathematics. In believing that an objective world exists, positivism sought facts and attempted to identify causal relationships. While postpositivism emerged as a result of a critique of the limitations of the positivist view of the world, it does not represent a single school of thought or alternate paradigm to positivism. Rather, there are two broad schools of thought on what constitutes postpositivism: one that rejects positivist assumptions in totality and proposes alternate paradigms such as interpretivism and critical theory, and a second that retains the essential characteristics of positivism but presents a more modern and modified version (Bettis and Gregson, 2001).

In this study, postpositivism refers to the latter definition. In explaining the difference, Willis (2007) states that while positivism argues that scientific research verifies theories that reflect the true nature of the world, the postpositivism position is that there cannot be enough research to eliminate all doubt about the theory, as a single research study can falsify a theory. A second distinction lies in the relationship of theory to data. Positivists posit that theory can be derived from observations, that is, objective data unpolluted by theory can be collected and used to develop a theory. Postpositivists argue that data and data interpretation are theory-dependent. However, they test their theories using

scientific research. While postpositivism rejects the rigidity of positivism, it retains the same beliefs, values and assumptions of how the universe operates and what it means for research. For example, while postpositivism believes that laws governing the universe do exist, it does concede that such laws are difficult to ascertain. While pure experimental designs are not favoured as they do not reflect the social world, quasi-experimental designs are preferred.

Guba (1990) provides a succinct overview of the postpositivist view of the nature of reality by drawing a distinction between realism and critical realism. The former, associated with positivism, asserts that the nature of reality is fixed and exists independently of humans. Reality can be understood in terms of absolute truths and generalisations and can be uncovered using the methods of the natural sciences. Critical realism, characteristic of postpositivism, concedes that reality is assumed to exist, but is only imperfectly apprehendable and understood. The researcher can come close to apprehending reality, but can never perfectly succeed in doing so. As Racher and Robinson (2002) argue, a single true reality is not apprehendable in one study; each study is part of a broader effort to get closer and closer to the truth.

Willis (2007) contends that the postpositivist approach is founded upon a theory-first model, whereby prior to conducting the study a specific hypothesis must be developed for testing. The logic of this approach demands that every aspect of the research study must be planned in detail even before the data collection begins. Once collected, the data

is interpreted and analysed relative to the implications of the stated theory. Therefore, the theory comes first and the research is conducted to prove theory.

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), postpositivism research rigour is founded upon internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity. Internal validity demonstrates that a causal relationship between the variables exists. External validity refers to the generalisability of a causal relationship between variables from unique settings. Reliability refers to the extent to which the research instrument yields the same set of results in repeated trials. The voice and political position of researchers in postpositivism is that of disinterested scientists, who are obliged to express in objective, value-free and scientific language universal and accurate statements about the world. In so doing, they develop a specialised language and jargon that is quite different from everyday language in order to perpetuate and underscore the scientific approach (Willis, 2007:74).

Therefore, the postpositivist approach was not considered appropriate for this study. First, the objective goal of this form of research is nearly impossible in a social or organisational setting, as reality is subjectively interpreted by the participants as well as the researcher. Second, the value-laden judgement of people in organisational settings who construct their own realities makes the finding of generalisable causal relationships in multiple settings and contexts very difficult. Finally, social settings are complex and forever in a state of flux, whereby the participants and the phenomena are constantly interacting and changing, often in unpredictable ways, thereby rendering observations and analyses subjective interpretations rather than indisputable facts.

At the other end of the spectrum lies critical theory, which is a broad church of movements that developed largely as a challenge to the dominant hegemony of postpositivism in the social sciences.

4.1.3. Critical theory

According to Jackson and Sorenson (2003), while critical theory has its roots in classical Marxism, it has moved beyond merely focussing on capitalist-worker relationships to examining a wide range of power relations. Guba (1990) succinctly states that critical theory researchers focus on issues relating to power, inequality, oppression, suppression and alienation related to, among others, race, socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, disability or age. According to Willis (2007), critical theory shares only one characteristic with postpositivism, namely a belief in an external knowable reality. However, Guba and Lincoln (1994) counter that apprehendable reality has been shaped over time by social, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender hegemonies and then reified into a series of structures that are now taken for granted as immutable and natural. The dominant views are presented as the general good. Such a view of historical realism without insight into the controlling hegemonies are limiting and confining, as the general state of affairs is expected to be accepted without question.

Critical theory adopts an unapologetic and inherently political stance by declaring that knowledge is not and cannot be morally, politically or ideologically neutral (Jackson and

Sorenson, 2003). Guba and Lincoln (1994) go further by stating that knowledge is value-mediated and hence value-dependent. In so doing, the neat distinction between ontology and epistemology that found expression in postpositivism becomes somewhat blurred in critical theory, since what can be known is intertwined with the interaction between observer and the observed. In Jackson and Sorenson's (2003) view, critical theorists seek knowledge for a political purpose: to liberate humanity from oppressive structures and hegemonic powers.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) indicate that critical theory generally is founded upon the dialogic and dialectical methodology aimed at a reconstruction of previously held constructions. The transactional nature of inquiry requires a dialogue between the observer and the subjects of the inquiry. Gephart (1999) states that the criteria for assessing critical theory research include theoretical consistency, historical insights, transcendent interpretations, basis for action, change potential and mobilisation. Guba and Lincoln (1994) add that the historical situatedness of the inquiry, cognisant of the social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender contexts, lends credibility to the research. The critical theory researcher adopts a political position and assumes the role of an instigator, activist and facilitator by promoting the ideology of emancipation in order to bring about social and political revolution (Jackson and Sorenson, 2003).

While the purpose of this study resonated with elements of critical theory, in that the study touched on issues relating to power relations, it was not considered a prudent choice owing to its overt and unapologetic political and ideological position, as it presents

a dilemma for the academic independence and integrity of scholarly research (Jackson and Sorenson, 2003). In other words, if critical theory is founded upon the notion that theory is for someone and for some purpose, how can it be judged as a good theory in scholarly terms? If it is purely political then what happens to the neutral assessment of the worth of the theory (of course critical theorists argue that there is no such neutrality in any case)? Since the theory is based on a set of political values, how does it relate to other political and ideological beliefs? Furthermore, if academic debates are reduced to political debates, can it make statements on knowledge or do they remain merely political statements and sloganeering?

In contrast to critical theory, interpretivism aims to provide an insight into the complex life world of participants from their perspective.

4.1.4. Interpretivism

According to Schwandt (2000), interpretivism is synonymous with constructivism, constructivist and interpretivist and refers to a loosely coupled family of methodological and philosophical persuasions. Interpretivism seeks to understand values, beliefs and meanings of social phenomena, thereby developing a deep and sympathetic understanding of that phenomena (Kim, 2003). Consequently, interpretivist theorists and researchers share the goal of understanding the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it.

The interpretivist perspective, according to Willis (2007), accepts an external, physical reality while rejecting the notion that it is an independently knowable reality, as reality is believed to be socially constructed. Guba and Lincoln (1994) add that interpretivism is founded upon a relativist ontology, comprising multiple apprehendable and sometimes conflicting social realities that are the products of human intellect. What we now have are multiple, intangible mental constructions that are social and experienced, as well as local and specific in nature. In other words, the nature of reality is dependent on individuals and groups for their form and content. The important issue here is that there is no absolute truth, rather more or less informed truths, and that it may change as humans become more informed and sophisticated.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) indicate that the investigator and the investigated are interactively linked and that findings and their meanings are created as the investigation proceeds. As knowledge is created in the interactions between the researcher and the informants, the traditional distinction between ontology and epistemology becomes blurred. The nature of knowledge then takes the form of mental constructions over which there is relative consensus among those competent to interpret the substance of the constructions. Gephart (1999) contends that interpretive research is fundamentally concerned with meaning and it seeks to understand social members' definition of a situation. The important caveat to note here is that multiple knowledges can coexist when equally competent interpreters disagree or when the meaning and interpretations

are mediated by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender factors. Consequently, constructions are under constant revision.

Therefore, this study is aligned to interpretivism, as the aim was to look for meaning in a local context. The study follows Gephart (1999:4) in emphasising the *situatedness of knowledge*, with the goal to understand the local context rather than discover universal laws and generalisations. Therefore, this kind of research should lead to the construction of contextual knowledge.

Having provided an overview of the three dominant approaches to research, namely postpositivism, interpretivism and critical theory, the study now outlines its philosophical and theoretical orientation and provides the rationale for adopting a qualitative research approach.

4.1.5. Philosophical and theoretical orientation of this study

Following the arguments above, it is now necessary to ground this study within its philosophical and theoretical orientations. In order to do this, it would be prudent to briefly allude to the purpose of the research, which was to examine how organisational members sought to assign meaning to an externally driven intervention within a specific organisational context. Consequently, the study did not adopt the postpositivist aim of

discovering universal laws and generalisations to be applied across different contexts to explain, predict and control human behaviour (Kim, 2003:12).

Since the research sought to understand a specific context and the complex world of the lived experience of those that occupy it, the study was clearly located in the interpretive research paradigm. Furthermore, Willis (2007:240) refers to the notion of "*verstehen*", the German word for understanding, which indicates that the understanding of local contexts is an honourable purpose of research, thereby countering postpositivist claims that research should be aimed only at generating universal laws and generalisations that can be scientifically tested.

A further purpose of the study is found in the voice and political position of the researcher, which, in this case, was one of advocacy and activism. However, this role was expanded to uncover issues of power relations. By introducing notions of power relations, the study resonates with some elements of critical theory. While the study did not assume an overt purpose to liberate the participants from the potential oppressive and hegemonic powers and relations at the research site, it did nevertheless aim to surface some of these to negate the assumed unitary and neutral notions of organisational culture and external quality assurance.

Therefore, while the study was located in the interpretive research approach, it followed Shultz and Hatch's (1996) view by rejecting the incommensurability of paradigms and by adopting elements of the critical theory approach. The study did not limit its purpose to

merely understanding the beliefs and underlying assumptions of the actors within the institution with regard to organisational culture and external quality assurance. While there was an additional focus on issues relating to power inequalities and dominant hegemonies (within intra-institutional relations and between the institution and external quality agency), the study did not assume an overtly emancipatory function. The study's location within the paradigmatic framework is illustrated in Figure 4.2.

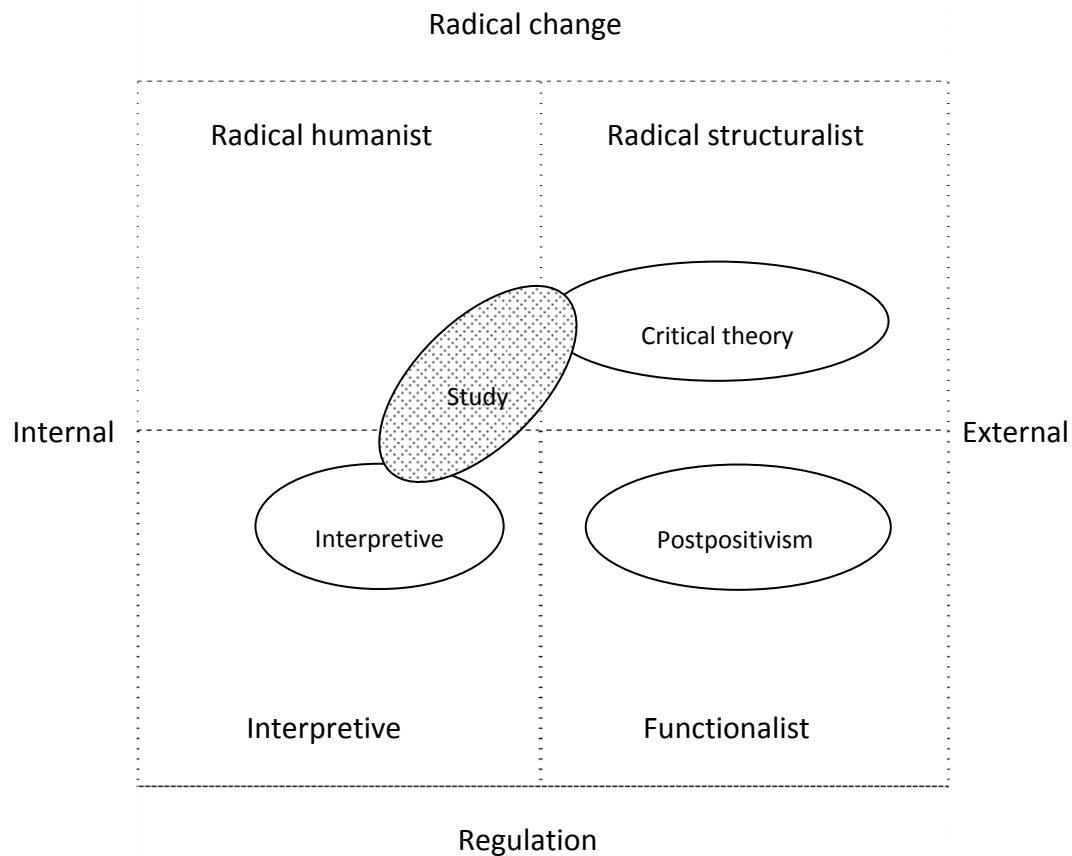


Figure 4.2: Study location within research paradigms and sociological perspectives

Having located the study within its research paradigms and sociological perspectives, it is necessary to briefly motivate the choice of a qualitative rather than a quantitative approach.

4.1.6. A qualitative approach

Marshall and Grossman (2006:3) state that while qualitative research is complex, cuts across disciplines, fields and subjects and encompasses a range of genres, there is a set of common considerations and procedures that characterises its conduct and approach. Notable is the concern for the social interactions that find expression in daily life and the meanings that participants attach to those interactions. They add that qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive and is grounded in the everyday lived experiences of people. Furthermore, qualitative research takes place in the real world, uses multiple methods that are interactive and humanistic, focuses on context, is emergent rather than tightly prefigured and is fundamentally interpretive. In addition, the qualitative researcher views social phenomena holistically, systematically reflects on who he or she is in the inquiry, is sensitive to his or her personal biography and the way it shapes the study and uses complex reasoning that is multifaceted and iterative.

In addition, Merriam (2001:211) suggests that the following characterises qualitative research: First, it is imperative to understand the phenomenon from the participants' perspectives (the emic or insider view). Second, the researcher is the primary instrument

for data collection and analysis. The advantage is that the researcher can be more responsive and flexible to the context, process data immediately and use the emergent data to modify the study accordingly. Third, the research involves fieldwork, that is, the researcher observes and interacts with participants in their real-world setting. Fourth, the research adopts an inductive approach, as the aim is to build theory rather than to find data to test theory. Fifth, the outcome of the study is usually a rich or ‘thick description’ of what was learned. Finally, the design of a qualitative study is emergent and flexible, responsive to the condition in the field and generally uses small non-random and purposeful sampling.

In view of the criteria listed above, the qualitative approach was considered prudent for this study as it was situated in a specific context in a real-world, organisational setting, namely a newly merged UoT. Furthermore, there has been very little research examining the relationship between organisational culture and external quality assurance in HEIs. As there was no recognised theory to provide variables that could have been tested quantitatively, this study was exploratory and its findings were more relevant to its context and for theory building.

Patton’s (2002:150) assertion that the qualitative approach is particularly useful in “illuminating the nature and meaning of quality in particular contexts” further strengthens the study’s preference for a qualitative inquiry. As external quality assurance and organisational culture are inextricably linked to nuance and detail, an in-depth description and analysis are in Patton’s (2002) view more insightful than the difference

between the points on a standardised questionnaire. The key issue was one of meanings that required in-depth and holistic descriptions and analysis, which represented organisational actors in their own terms and got as close to the action as possible to surface the nuances of external quality assurance and organisational culture.

4.2. The research methodology

Credibility and trustworthiness are generally seen as the heart of assuring the rigour of a qualitative study and are characterised by a systematic research design, data collection, interpretation and communication. The researcher used Mays and Pope's (1995) credibility and trustworthy criteria to assure the rigour of the qualitative study. The initial criterion of an explicit theoretical framework underpinning the research has been addressed earlier in this chapter. The subsequent criteria of a specific research methodology with a clear description of the context, a justifiable sampling strategy, a graphic description of the fieldwork, traceable and independently verifiable data and evidence, and a theoretically justifiable and precise overview of the data analysis are discussed in the subsections that follow. The final criterion of the systematic presentation of original evidence is presented in Chapter Five.

4.2.1. Restatement of the research purpose

The purpose of the study was to examine the interrelationship between the organisational culture of a recently merged HEI and external quality assurance in the form of an external institutional audit. The research aimed to investigate whether a set of underlying values and assumptions were consistent across the institution, that is, whether a homogenous and unitary culture existed or whether the institution was characterised by a more fragmented organisational culture and, secondly, how this would define the interrelationship with external quality assurance.

4.2.2. Restatement of the research question

Research question

The research question of the study was: “What is the nature of the organisational culture of an HEI and how does it determine the relationship with external quality assurance in the form of an institutional audit?”

Sub-questions

The sub-questions were formulated as follows:

- How do the assumptions and values of organisational members define the organisational culture of an HEI?

- What model or framework could explain the relationship between the organisational culture and the implementation and eventual outcomes of external quality assurance in the form of the institutional audit?

4.2.3. The case study

As this study reported on a specific context, the case study was considered most appropriate to approach the research questions. Merriam (2001), citing her earlier work, defines a case study as a holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon or social unit. While there appears to be divergent views on what constitutes a case study, in Merriam's (2001) opinion the defining characteristic of the case study is that it is a single entity around which there are boundaries. In focusing on the single entity, the aim was to uncover the interaction of the key factors of that entity, thereby focusing on holistic description and analysis. As the study was restricted to a single HEI of a specific type, the case study was considered the most appropriate approach. The value of using the case study approach is that it enabled the researcher to uncover and gain access to information and insights that may not be easily visible to casual observers.

Merriam (2001) indicates that case studies can be described by the purpose of the research, that is, whether the research is descriptive, interpretive or evaluative. Merriam

cites Lijphart's (1971) explanation that descriptive studies occur within a theoretical vacuum, as they are neither guided nor established by generalisations or theory, nor is the purpose to formulate generalisations or generate theory. Interpretive studies, by contrast, use descriptive data to determine conceptual categories and/or to illustrate, support or challenge theoretical assumptions held prior to data gathering. Where no theory exists, the researcher may collect as much information as possible to analyse, interpret and theorise about the phenomenon. Therefore, interpretive studies range from suggesting relationships among variables to constructing theory. As a result, interpretive studies differ from descriptive studies by their complexity, depth and theoretical orientation. Evaluative studies are one step further, as they involve description, explanation and judgement.

The purpose of this research was not merely to provide a 'thin description', that is, a literal description of the constructs under study. The purpose was to examine the relationship between the central constructs within a particular context and to use the data collected to theorise about that relationship, as there is very little theory on organisational culture and external quality assurance in HEIs. Therefore, this research was an interpretive case study that included elements of the evaluative type, especially with regard to the issues of power relations.

According to Merriam (2001), the case study is one of the most effective ways of investigating complex real-life social units that have multiple and not always controllable variables. Therefore, the case study provides a holistic account of a phenomenon, and

while it may generate only tentative hypotheses, it does provide an impetus for future research, the advancement of a field's knowledge base and theory building. Patton (2002:447) suggests that the case study may be nested or layered, as was the case with this research. In order to understand how the institution responded to the external quality-assurance audit, the researcher first needed to understand how the informants felt about external quality assurance. Therefore, the single institution case ($N = 1$) subsumed a number of individual case studies ($n = 40$). Therefore, the analysis began with the individual cases (informants), and the patterns that emerged informed interpretations about the main case (the HEI). This relationship is depicted in Figure 4.3.

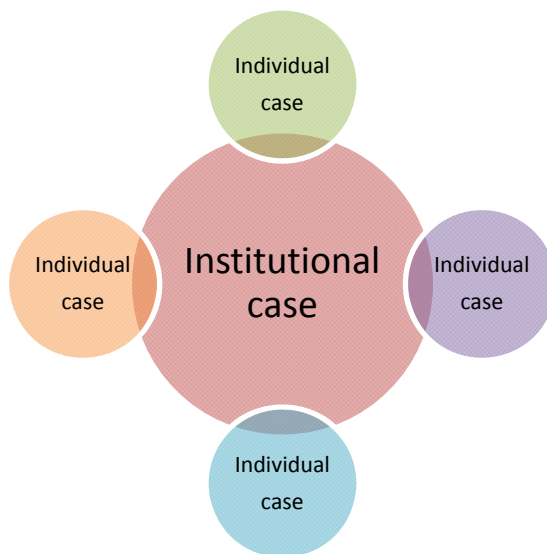


Figure 4.3: Layered relationship between individual case and institutional case

The strength of the case study approach also paradoxically illuminates some of its weaknesses. Pursuing a thick and rich description is resource-intensive and requires time and money in order for the researcher to be successfully immersed in the case being investigated. Furthermore, the overly detailed product or outcome of the study, which is usually produced after a significant time lag, may compromise the currency of the research. A further limitation, according to Lincoln and Guba (in Merriam, 2001), is that the case study may oversimplify or exaggerate a situation leading the reader to incorrect conclusions about the situation. In addition, the case study is not an account of the whole; it is, in fact, a part of the whole, as it was conducted in a specific temporal and spatial context.

In order to address these limitations and assure the trustworthiness and credibility of the study, the researcher acknowledges that the time spent in the field was mediated by time requirements of the programme of study. However, the time spent and the number of interviews conducted may be considered sufficient to inform theorisation about the nature of the relationship of the central constructs. With regard to the currency of the study, it should be noted that at the time of writing up the research, not all HEIs had been quality audited. Despite the time lag, the findings of the study may still have value for those institutions. The researcher also took special care to interview multiple informants to ensure that a comprehensive picture of the context emerged. This approach was consistent with Mathison's (1988:14) contention that data triangulation, which refers to using multiple data sources (for example from more than one informant), is an effective

means of ensuring the rigour of the study. While the temporal and spatial context may be considered a limitation with regard to the generalisability of the findings, it must be remembered that the purpose of this study was theory building rather than theory confirmation or falsification.

4.2.4. Role of the researcher

Merriam (2001:22) cautions that in a qualitative study, the researcher must be sensitive to inherent biases that may threaten the rigour, credibility and trustworthiness of the research. Such biases stem from the fact that the researcher is the primary research instrument. As a result, the observations and analysis are filtered by that researcher's philosophy of life, values and perspectives. Furthermore, as alluded to earlier in the chapter, the interpretive qualitative study rejects the notion of the objective reality, supporting instead multiple interpretations of reality. What this means is that the researcher brings a construction of reality to the research, which then interacts with the informant's constructions of reality. The situation is further compounded when the researcher presents the findings, which is another interpretation of the informant's views. Sensitivity to how these biases may shape the study and its outcomes, and the steps taken to acknowledge and/or limit those biases lend credibility and trustworthiness to the study.

In order to overcome some of the issues that may have the potential to compromise the credibility and trustworthiness of the study, it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the researcher's role within the institution. The researcher occupied the position of 'quality professional'¹³ at the research site where the primary responsibility was to oversee the institutional quality-assurance arrangements. This included overall responsibility and oversight of the institutional quality-management system, quality audits, assurance and reviews, quality promotion and capacity building, the office of the student ombudsman, surveys and impact studies. One of the key functions was to coordinate all institutional activities in preparation for external institutional quality assurance. External quality assurance would generally involve programme accreditation by the HEQC or professional bodies such as the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA). However, the HEQC institutional audit conducted in 2007 represented the most significant external quality-assurance exercise for the institution since its establishment in 2004.

The researcher was the overall project manager of the institution's preparations for the external audit managing each phase of the audit, from the institutional self-assessment to the preparation and submission of the institutional audit portfolio. In addition, the researcher (as well as other quality professionals who reported to him) conducted workshops and seminars, held staff, student and media briefings and consultation sessions and edited and compiled the institutional audit portfolio. In some ways then, the

¹³ First as deputy director and then as director.

researcher (and his staff) became the face of the audit within the institution and come to be viewed as the champion of the audit as it was requirement to provide regular updates to the management and governance structures of the institution.

While the audit preparations began in 2005, continued into 2006 and ended in 2007, this study originally began in 2004 with the establishment of the new institution following the merger of three erstwhile technikons. The study began by examining the organisational culture of the new institution following the merger and then evolved to include the external institutional audit, which was the next most significant event and process following the merger.

Therefore, the researcher's role as the 'quality professional' that managed the audit preparations for the institution had the potential to compromise the trustworthiness of the data. For example, four of the informants selected to be interviewed declined the invitation citing personal and professional reasons. In other cases, some informants were wary and cautious at the beginning of the interviews.

In order to overcome these potential threats to the study, the researcher provided each of the informants with an unequivocal commitment to protect their anonymity. Furthermore each of the informants were assured at the beginning of each interview that their contributions would be treated fairly and without prejudice. It was pointed out that the purpose of the study was to uncover perceptions about a novel development in South African higher education, namely external quality assurance, and to understand their view

of the organisational culture(s) of their organisation. The researcher also undertook to send each informant a transcript to verify that it was a true record of his or her interview.

4.2.5. Unit of analysis

The unit of analysis for the study was a UoT situated in the northern metropolis of an inland province of South Africa. The institution was established in 2004 following the merger of three technikons. Each of the erstwhile technikons had very different historical antecedents. One was a historically white institution, situated in an urban area, and was one of the largest contact technikons, with approximately 35 000 students. This institution also had three satellite campuses in two other provinces about 300 kilometres away. The other merging institution was located in a Black township about 30 kilometres north of the one mentioned and was a medium-sized institution with approximately 12 000 students. The final institution was situated about 30 kilometres north-west of the first institution mentioned. This was a relatively small institution with approximately 5 000 students (Department of Education (DoE), 2003).

This institution was selected as the subject of analysis for the following reasons: First, as a newly created (merged) institution it offered a case that was not previously researched, as much of the previous research on organisational culture were done in well-established HEIs (internationally). Second, there has been very little research done on this

institutional type, namely a UoT, as it was only introduced in 2004¹⁴ in South Africa. Third, and most critically, as one the first merged institutions to be audited by the HEQC, the institution presented a seminal case study with regard to how the organisational culture of a newly merged UoT engaged with the external audit as well as the intended and unintended outcomes of such an audit. Finally, the researcher's employment at the institution in a capacity closely linked to the quality-assurance function afforded access to both elements of the study, the organisation culture and external quality assessment.¹⁵

4.2.6. Sampling strategy

According to Patton (2002:230), one of the fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative inquiry lies in the strategy, logic and purpose of sampling; statistical probability sampling in the case of the former and qualitative purposeful sampling for the latter. Quantitative studies are characterised by large samples, selected randomly using appropriate statistical techniques, in order to generalise with confidence by controlling selection bias and errors from the sample of the population it represents. Conversely, qualitative studies typically focus on small samples in order to access the research site and allow for an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon rather than empirical

¹⁴ The statute indicated that the new institution was a university of technology offering technikon-type programmes. However, those institutions designated as university of technology had to begin a process of defining a university of technology with an appropriate vision, mission and programme and qualification mix.

¹⁵ However, this did present some problems, as some informants were not comfortable with the dual role as researcher and project manager of external audit preparations. Four informants refused to participate and a few were reticent in their responses. This was overcome by sending the transcripts back to informants as well as some of the coded analysis for comment and verification.

generalisations. In order to facilitate in-depth understanding and analysis, qualitative studies select what are termed 'information-rich cases' from which (or whom) a great deal can be learned about the purpose of the research. Hence, sampling in qualitative studies is usually termed 'purposeful sampling'.

Patton (2002) presents a range of purposeful sampling types with distinct characteristics for specific purposes. Examples of purposeful sampling types include extreme or deviant cases, intensity, maximum variation, homogenous, typical case, critical case, snowball or chain, criterion, theory-based, confirming and disconfirming, stratified purposeful, opportunistic, purposeful random, politically important case, convenience case and combination or mixed purposeful sampling. These sampling types are not mutually exclusive. The underlying principle is to seek information-rich cases that provide insights into the inquiry. Furthermore, the sampling strategy should lend credibility to the study.

As this study was carried out soon after the merger, the sampling strategy was designed to reduce the influence of organisational cultures that may have resided in the original merging partners. The purpose of this research was not to examine how the organisational cultures of merging partners differed from one another, but rather to investigate the culture(s) that potentially existed in the new institution after the merger. Furthermore, the study did not aim to investigate the role of race, gender, age, geographical location or any other demographic tag, which are generally recognised attributes of organisational culture and which, in any case, have been previously researched (Chatman et al., 1998; Chatman and Flynn, 2001; Martins et al., 2003; Chuang

et al., 2004). This study therefore aimed to look beyond traditional demographic tags in its sampling strategy to surface insights into the prevailing organisational culture(s) within the institution.

As a result, the following principles guided the development of the sampling strategy used in this study:

- The purpose of the study, namely to ascertain whether a set of underlying values and assumptions were consistent across the institution, that is, whether a homogenous and unitary culture existed or whether the institution was characterised by a more fragmented organisational culture and the relationship of these culture(s) with the external quality audits.
- The delimitation of the study, that is, restricting the study to academic staff only, as the external audit focussed on the core academic functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement.
- Reinforcing the credibility of the study rather than seeking representativeness (Patton, 2002).
- The use of information-rich sources rather than representatives of a particular demographic tag (race, gender, geographical location), as membership of culture(s) is not necessarily informed solely by demographic classificatory tags (Martin, 1992). In addition, the sampling aimed to reduce race, gender and geographical location as cultural influences on the outcomes of the study.

In view of the principles alluded to above, the study used purposeful stratified sampling, followed by purposeful random sampling. Purposeful stratified sampling was used to ensure that voices from all the academic occupational categories were heard. Informants were limited to the academic occupational categories as the external quality audit focussed mainly on the institution's core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement. Students were also excluded from the study as the researcher, in the course of interactions with them, found that they had very limited understanding of the HEQC and the external audit. For the purposes of the study, the academic occupational categories were divided into academic management (deputy vice-chancellor and deans), senior academics (principal and senior lecturers, including heads of departments), academics (lecturers and junior lecturers) and academic development staff (curriculum, staff and student development). The use of the occupational categories as the purposeful stratified sampling criterion was informed by the theoretical framework developed in the previous chapter that alluded to multiple constructions of reality as well the role of power relations in organisational culture and external quality audits among the key academic role-players.

A spreadsheet with all the possible informants in each category, as indicated in the management information system of the institution, was drawn up as was applicable in 2004. The total number in each category is indicated in Table 4.2.

Academic management	Senior academics	Academic staff	Academic development
72	232	490	69

Table 4.2: Staff distribution across occupational categories

Purposeful random sampling was then used to identify informants within the categories mentioned above. The researcher followed Miles and Huberman's (1995:31) advice to be selective in the classes of data and to seek data that identified new leads, extended the area of information, related or bridged already existing elements and reinforced main trends.

Initially five informants were chosen from each category by dividing the total number of informants by five and choosing the first name that appeared at the beginning of each quintile. The informants were approached telephonically, at which time the researcher outlined the purpose of the study and requested their participation. Where further information was required or when the informant sounded reticent, a meeting was arranged to provide additional information. However, four informants chose not to participate in the study. All four indicated concerns regarding the protection of their anonymity despite the researcher providing written guarantees thereof. The next informant on the original list was then selected and all four informants willingly participated in the study. In total, 40 interviews were conducted, which ranged from 45 minutes to 2 hours.

4.2.7. Data collection

4.2.7.1. Data-collection method

The primary data-collection method used in the study was the semi-structured interview. According to Patton (2002:340-341), interviews are used to find out things that are not easily observable, for example people's beliefs, assumptions, feelings and thoughts, the way in which they organise the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. The purpose of interviewing then is to access the perspective of another person in order to find out what is on his or her mind. In so doing, the researcher acknowledges that that person's perspective is meaningful and can be made explicit (Merriam, 2001; Patton, 2002).

In qualitative research, there are three main interview types arranged on a continuum in terms of their degree of structure, namely highly structured and standardised; semi-structured; unstructured and informal (Merriam, 2001). The highly structured interview is viewed as an oral form of the written survey; where the questions are fixed and generally require closed or minimum variation responses. Such interviews are mostly used to gather demographic data and when a response to a particular statement or a definition is required from all the informants. According to Patton (2002), the disadvantages of the highly structured interview is that it does not permit the interviewer to pursue topics or issues that were not anticipated when the questions were drawn up. In addition, it limits the extent to which individual differences can be pursued.

The informal or unstructured interview is located at the other end of the continuum. Here there are no predetermined questions and such interviews take the form of informal conversations. Although these interviews may be unstructured, it does not necessarily mean that they are unfocussed. While the purpose of the inquiry would provide an overarching context, the researcher is free to go where the data and the informants lead. Unstructured interviews are generally used in exploratory studies or when the researcher remains in the field for a substantial period of time, conducts multiple interviews with the same informants and uses subsequent interviews to build on previous ones (Patton, 2002). However, unstructured interviews are rarely used as the sole means to collect data, as it can yield widely divergent and sometimes unconnected information, which renders analysis and subsequent theorising difficult.

The semi-structured interview is found at the mid-point of the continuum alluded to earlier, as it contains more flexibly worded questions and there are fewer structured than less-structured questions. Generally, such interviews would contain questions that require specific responses from all informants. However, a greater part of the interview would consist of ideas or issues to be explored without fixed wording or order. An interview guide is prepared to ensure that the same basic lines of enquiry are pursued with each informant. Merriam (2001) indicates that such flexibility allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to emerging views of the informants and to new ideas. The advantage of using the interview guide is that it ensures that the limited scheduled time for the interview is used optimally. Furthermore, it ensures that a

systematic and comprehensive approach is used with multiple informants by delimiting the issues to be explored beforehand.

Patton (2002) cautions that interviews have limitations that could compromise the credibility of the study. Such limitations include poorly constructed interview guides that do not allow for individual responses while remaining consistent with the inquiry themes. Furthermore, responses may be distorted responses due to personal bias, anger, organisational micro politics and lack of awareness on the part of the researcher as well as the informants. In addition, data credibility may be subject to recall error, the rapport, or lack thereof, between researcher and informant, and the self-serving interests of the researcher. In order to limit the threats to the credibility of the interviews, the researcher undertook the steps described below.

The data-collection process began with the identification of the potential interviewees using the sampling strategies described earlier. An eight-week period was set aside for the interviews. During each week, over four days (usually Mondays to Thursdays), one interview was conducted with one informant from one of the identified categories per day. The purpose of conducting interviews from all four categories during each week block was informed by the theory-building approach of the study. In addition, by ensuring that the voices from all four categories were heard in each week block, the researcher aimed to reduce potential bias to any one of the categories.

4.2.7.2. Interview guide

The researcher used the approach depicted in Figure 4.4, which was adapted from Bryman (2004), to develop the interview guide in order to ensure consistency and alignment with the purpose of the research and the research questions, and to serve as an important indicator of the credibility of the study.

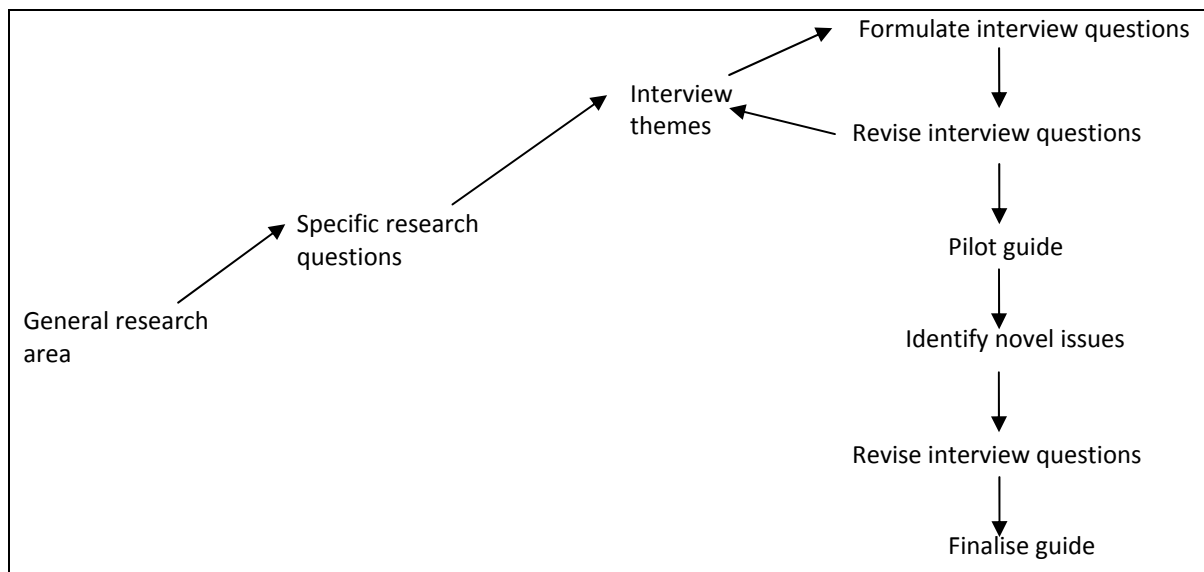


Figure 4.4: Formulation of questions for the interview guide (Bryman, 2004)

The study then turned to Tierney's (1988) conceptual framework (Kuh and Whitt, 1988; Hall, 1997; Kezar and Eckel, 2002) for studying organisational culture in HEIs. While Tierney (1988:8) concedes that there are many possible avenues for researching organisational culture, environment, vision and mission, socialisation, information, strategy and leadership are considered the essential themes to underpin any study of an HEI. The researcher found Tierney's (1988) organisational culture framework and themes particularly useful, as it resonated with the key criteria of the HEQC's institutional audit

criteria (2004a). Figure 4.5 is a simple illustration of the HEQC's institutional audit criterion 1 and its associated minimum standards within the cultural framework, as example.

Cultural Framework		HEQC institutional audit criterion 1 and minimum standards (adapted)
Environment	←	Engagement with local, regional, national and international imperatives (including national policy frameworks and objectives) in order to establish the fitness of purpose of the institution
Vision and mission	←	Fitness of purpose of the mission of the institution in response to local, national and international context
Socialisation	←	Adequate attention to transformational issues in the mission and goal-setting activities of the institution, including issues of community engagement
Information	←	Involvement of internal and external stakeholders in this process
Strategy	←	The translation of the mission into a strategic plan with clear timeframes and resources for the achievement of goals and targets in its core functions
Leadership	←	Allocation of responsibilities at senior management level for implementation, monitoring and responsive action

Figure 4.5: Cultural framework and institutional audit criterion 1

The cultural framework was then used to formulate the questions of the interview guide. In developing the questions, the researcher followed Merriam's (2001) suggestion that a good interview guide would include hypothetical, devil's-advocate, ideal-position and interpretive questions. Hypothetical questions ask informants to speculate about 'what if' scenarios; devil's-advocate questions are used when the topic is controversial to prevent

embarrassing the informant; ideal-position questions elicit information and opinion; while interpretive questions provide a tentative summary of what the informants were saying and then seek confirmation as well as additional information on, opinions of and feelings about the topic.

An interview guide was developed (see Appendix 1) with a sample of questions, and two colleagues were invited to participate in a trial interview. One acted as the informant while the other played the role of a silent observer whose role was to judge the clarity of the questions, the pace at which they were asked and to note the interviewer's (the researcher's) verbal and non-verbal cues and responses to the informant. These observations were recorded and later discussed with the interviewer. The informant also provided feedback regarding the clarity of the questions and on whether any question made him/her feel uncomfortable and unwilling to offer a response. Once both sets of feedback were received, the researcher amended the interview guide accordingly and took special note during the interviews to maintain a neutral stance to the informants' answers, especially with regard to non-verbal cues such as smiling and nodding of the head.

4.2.7.3. Informed consent and confidentiality

Prior to the commencement of the interviews, the researcher undertook steps to acquire the informed consent of the informants and to inform them of the steps taken to protect the confidentiality of their responses. The researcher followed Patton's (2002:407) advice

on addressing some of these ethical concerns. The first step was to get the institution's permission to conduct the interviews. As a qualitative study using a semi-structured interview guide, it was not possible to list the exact questions beforehand. However, the institution was satisfied with the following steps to be taken:

- The institution was not identified.
- The broad themes that formed part of the interview guide were acceptable.
- The right of informants not to participate was acknowledged.
- The researcher would undertake steps to ensure that informants had the right to a written transcript of their interview.
- All informants would remain anonymous.

The researcher met with each informant, usually in his or her office, or in a location that he or she chose. Each informant was enlightened about the purpose of study, namely a doctoral research study attempting to understand the institution's organisational culture and its relationship with externally driven quality assurance. The informants were also advised that the data collected would be used in theory building in a field that was under-theorised. Each informant was notified that he or she would remain completely anonymous throughout the study and would only be identified by their occupational category and number. Owing to the large number of staff in each occupational category, they were assured that it would be nearly impossible to identify specific informants.

The informants were then told that the interviews would be recorded using audio tapes. They were assured that the raw data would only be heard and seen by the researcher, the dissertation promoter and the data-capturer and once the interviews were transcribed, the informants would be given an opportunity to verify the accuracy of the transcription. Once the data had been transcribed and verified, the audio tapes were destroyed. The informants were advised of the broad themes of the interview guide and one or two sample questions were discussed to ensure that that they were comfortable with the line of enquiry. In addition, informants were also told that they reserved the right not to respond to any question, to request that the tape recorder be switched off and to make 'off-the-record' statements and bring the interview to a halt at any moment, where after all the data collected will be destroyed in their presence. Informants were assured that all necessary steps to minimise any potential risk to their participation in the study would be taken to protect their anonymity. Finally, they were informed that their participation would enable a better understanding of the organisational cultures in the institution.

4.2.8. Data management

At the end of each interview, the researcher listened to the tapes to check for any malfunction in the recording, to make sense of the interview as well as to uncover any ambiguities or uncertainties. In scheduling the interviews in this manner the researcher followed Yin's (2003:59) advice that while case study data collection follows a formal plan, specific information germane to the case is not easily predictable. Therefore, as

Patton (2002:384) recommends, the immediate post-interview review was to record the context of the interview, which in this case was captured from the field notes. Information such as the date, time, where the interview took place, the informant's reactions to the questions as well the researcher's impression of the rapport with the informant was recorded. In addition, this period allowed for reflection, elaboration and time to ensure that the data was useful, reliable and authentic.

As indicated earlier, after the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed by a data-capturer. The researcher listened to the recorded interviews and read the transcriptions simultaneously to ensure that no information was omitted. In addition, the researcher examined field notes on each interview and added the relevant information to the transcriptions in the form of comments. The researcher then contacted all the interviewees and asked whether they would want to examine the transcripts and listen to tapes to verify that the tape-recording was a true reflection of their interview and the transcription was a true reflection of the tape-recording. Of the 40 interviewees, 9 requested the tapes and transcriptions. All nine informed the researcher that they were satisfied with the veracity of the recording and transcription of the interview. The researcher used the verbatim record of the interview in the data-analysis process for two reasons: first, to ensure that any data critical to the research was not lost and second, not to compromise the analysis by using data that been filtered or altered by some form of pre-analysis.

4.2.9. Data analysis

4.2.9.1. Analytical approach

Yin (2003:111) asserts that a general analytical strategy is necessary to treat evidence fairly, produce compelling analytic conclusions and rule out alternate interpretations as central to the credibility and trustworthiness of the study. Qualitative data analysis follows either an inductive approach whereby patterns, themes and categories are discovered in the data or a deductive approach whereby the data is analysed according to an existing framework. While the inductive approach is considered a central characteristic of qualitative research (Patton, 2002:454), this study followed what is termed an *analytic induction* approach. According to Taylor and Bogdan (in Patton, 2002), the analytical induction approach begins with the researcher's deduced propositions or theory-derived hypothesis as a procedure for verifying theories or propositions based on qualitative data. The qualitative analysis therefore starts with a deductive premise and then moves to be inductive, during which the data is examined in terms of theory-derived concepts and a framework that was previously developed is applied. The researcher looks at the data afresh for undiscovered patterns and emerging understandings. This study used the theoretical framework developed in the previous two chapters to review the data collected. The Tierney (1988) cultural framework, the modified Bergquist (1992) and Bergquist and Pawlak (2007) cultures of the academy and the adapted four sociological

perspectives of Burrell and Morgan (1979) were mapped onto a matrix to enable data analysis. This matrix is depicted in Figure 4.6.

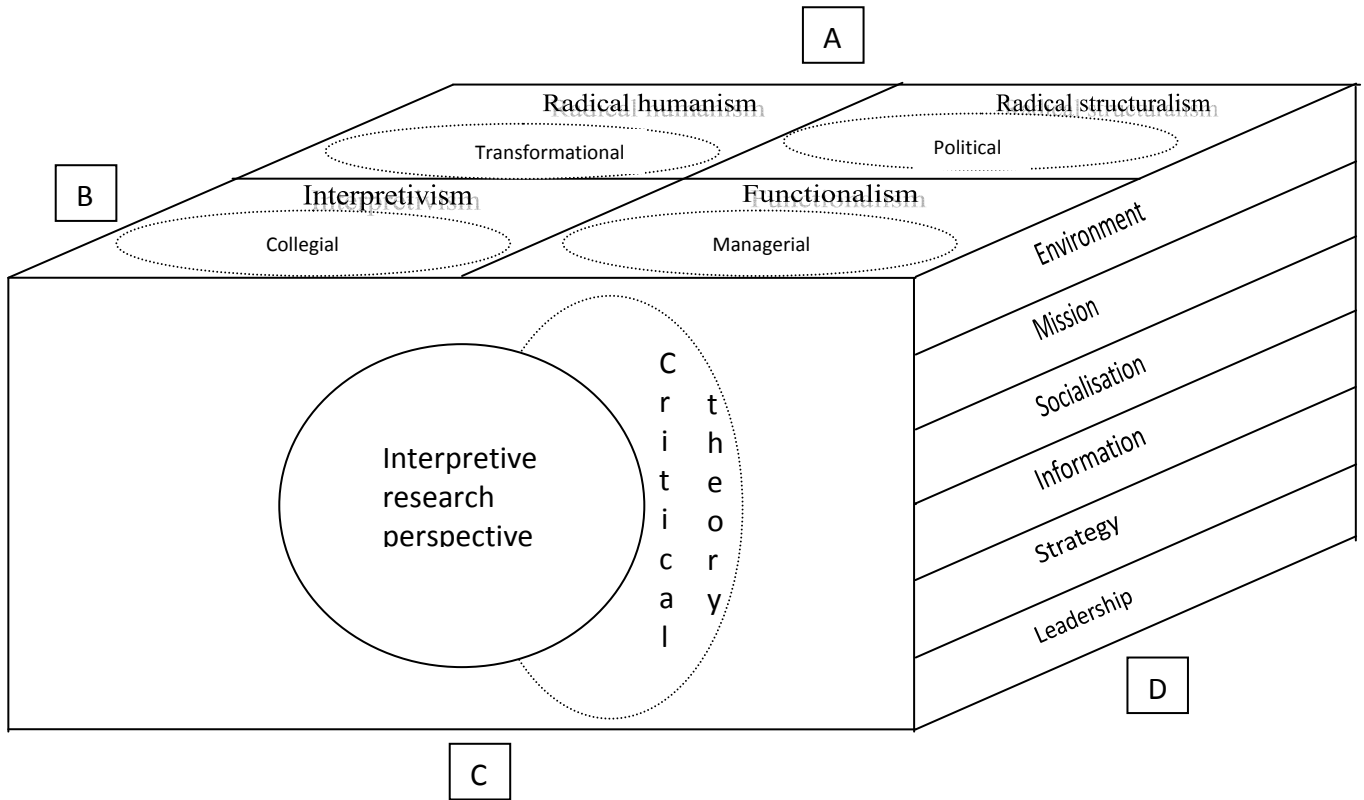


Figure 4.6: Three-dimensional data-analysis model

Key:

A: Four-perspective model (Burrell and Morgan, 1979)

B: Adapted cultures of the academy (Bergquist and Pawlak, 2007)

C: Research perspectives

D: Cultural framework (Tierney, 1988)

The three-dimensional model above used the cultural elements (Tierney, 1988) to provide the broad themes to direct the data collection in eliciting assumptions about organisational culture from the informants. The research perspective (interpretivism and elements of critical theory) provided the paradigmatic locus in interpreting the data. The four-perspective framework provided the philosophical cardinal points to analyse the data. While there have been number of models depicting culture types within HEIs (Land, 2004), the researcher sought to develop a model that was a suggestive rather than an ideal type, aligned to the overall theoretical model developed in Chapter Two and which aided in data analysis and theory building. To this end, the researcher found that the amendment of Bergquist and Pawlak's (2007) six cultures of the academy, namely collegial, managerial, developmental, advocacy, virtual and tangible to transformational, collegial, political and managerial cultures would resonate with the theoretical model as well as the philosophical orientation of the research.

The transformational, collegial, political and managerial cultures were embedded into the radical humanist, interpretivist, radical structuralist and functionalist perspectives respectively and were consequently aligned to their assumptions, as described in chapters two and three. In aligning the transformation culture to the radical humanist perspective, it is posited that such a culture aims to bring about radical change by ensuring that social arrangements that bind participants to forms of dominations are broken. In a higher education setting, this culture would be one that ensures that students are transformed to achieve their full potential. In addition, the transformation

culture would also ensure that the institution plays a central role in transforming student experiences and broadening access for those previously excluded from higher education with the aim of breaking socio-economic forms of hegemonic domination.

Likewise, by embedding the collegial culture within the interpretivist perspective, it is argued that the maintenance of the status quo, social order and cohesion, solidarity and actualisation and, more importantly, the assigning of local meanings to social phenomena would characterise such as culture. Such a culture in a higher education setting would elevate commitment to the academic discipline over centralised control. In other words, a collegial culture is one where loyalty to the academic department and discipline would take precedence over the concerns of the corporate management. Consequently, there would be an emphasis on the teaching and learning and research agenda, as well as the institution's role in knowledge generation and concern for the student (Bergquist and Pawlak, 2007:15).

The political culture resonates with the assumptions of the radical structuralist perspective. This perspective also seeks radical change by highlighting structural conflicts and modes of domination. The focus here is on bringing about fundamental change, especially following political, economic and social crisis. The change in the socio-political arrangements in South Africa after 1994 that sought to fundamentally alter existing conditions and arrangements would be an example of such crises. The difference from the structural humanist perspective is that it uses an objective approach and concerns itself with the role of the state in forcing socio-political change and the power relations

between the state and organisation (L'Etang and Pieczka, 2006:343). In a higher education context, the radical structuralist perspective would find expression in attempts by the state to 'steer' HEIs towards the national policies of the day. In other words, the radical structuralist perspective argues that it is the function of the state, as the custodian of the national social, political and economic agenda, to ensure that public institutions respond in a direct manner to stated policies of the day.

The managerial culture, it is argued, is unequivocally located within a the functionalist perspective (Tourish and Hargie, 2004). The functionalist perspective, as discussed in Chapter Two, concerns itself with maintaining the status quo, social order, consensus and need satisfaction. It is also uses the methodology of the natural sciences to uncover causal relationships and generalisation. The link between the functionalist perspective and the managerial culture finds expression in the articulation by management of a set of shared values that is most desirable for the organisation and that shapes the behaviour of organisational members accordingly. The implication for HEIs is that seductive language of business punting effectiveness, efficiency and excellence now dominates the discourse on their performance. The managerial culture within HEIs is characterised by the need to impose greater centralised control through the introduction of a corporate-style bureaucracy that appears to erode the traditional authority of the disciplinary experts (Deem, 2001; Reed, 2002).

The adapted four cultures informed the literature and theory-deduced hypothetical propositions about the nature of organisational culture in an HEI. These elements formed

the deductive elements of data analysis. Using this frame of reference the researcher analysed the data looking for patterns and emerging themes using the data-coding and data-analysis approach described below. This formed the inductive element of data analysis. This approach is consistent with Miles and Huberman's (1995:17) suggestion that the analysis of a pattern of relationships and conceptualisation requires a combination of the inductive and deductive approach.

4.2.9.2. Data coding and analysis

The use of computer-assisted qualitative data-analysis software (CAQDAS) as a tool to manage, code, search, analyse and present qualitative data in a user-friendly way has become fairly commonplace (Barry, 1998). Lewins and Silver (2007:7) add that such software packages assist in the analysis by allowing the reduction of data along thematic lines for coded retrieval as well as the testing of relationships between issues, concepts and themes to develop higher-order categories and build theory. The researcher chose the Nvivo 8 qualitative data-analysis software programme to assist in coding and analysing the data for two reasons. First, it provided a means to sort the imported data into nodes, establish relationships between the data chunks and develop models to present relationships, and second, the researcher was familiar with it as a data-analysis software programme.

The researcher created a new project in Nvivo 8 and imported all the transcribed interview data from the Word files. The transcripts were then coded as cases within the

occupational categories used in the sampling strategy (academics, senior academics, academic development and management) to facilitate interrogation within and across cases and categories. A first reading of the cases was conducted to flag interesting data as well as to assign comments and annotations to such data chunks. The use of comments and annotations allowed the researcher to attach thoughts and initial reactions to the data. In addition, it was also used to remind the researcher that the analysis was subject to predispositions and that they may not necessarily be neutral interpretations of the data. Therefore, the use of annotations was a step in assuring the trustworthiness of the analysis.

In keeping with the deductive element of the analytical approach described earlier, the researcher then conducted a second reading of the transcripts with the aim of identifying data chunks linked to the dimensions of Tierney's (1988) model, namely environment, vision and mission, socialisation, information, strategy and leadership. These dimensions were created as tree nodes in Nvivo 8 to attach related data chunks. Data chunks that did not appear at first reading to fit into any of the tree nodes were attached to free nodes. At this point, further annotations were attached to data chunks with the aim of developing theoretical memos by asking how, what and why questions of those data chunks.

After the coding of the data into the tree nodes, the researcher then looked for patterns within and across cases in each occupational category. By limiting the coding at this stage to occupational categories only, the researcher was able to organise and manage vast

amounts of data (patterns across occupational categories were looked at later). In order to look for patterns in the data, the researcher created a matrix and ran a coding query using the occupational category cases as the rows and the Tierney (1988) categories as the columns of the matrix. Each cell of the matrix then revealed the number of references (as well as hyperlinks to the data chunks in the original cases) that met the criteria of that cell and therefore represented a data set. The researcher then mapped the data from each cell onto a model, which was created for each of the cultural framework's categories (Tierney, 1988), with the aim of clustering data chunks around themes within the categories to enable data reduction as well as to seek patterns between the data. Prior to data reduction, the researcher checked whether the data were coded to the relevant tree node and subsequent mapping onto the respective model. In instances where data were incorrectly coded in the first sweep, the data chunks were moved to the more appropriate model. Where data had relevance to more than one model the data was captured on both models. The audit trail of data was maintained by saving the matrices and queries run in Nvivo 8, which maintained a record as well as the hyperlinks to the case from which the data was originally sourced.

Once the data was captured onto the respective models, the researcher then began the analytical dimension of the data-analysis strategy. The data chunks were clustered around common themes and then reduced to remove recurring data. The researcher then began examining the themes and introduced a second level of coding, namely the themes within categories. The themes within categories then enabled the researcher to do a

comparative study across the occupational categories to identify commonly recurring themes. These themes then provided a structure to demonstrate how the categories are related and also a means to develop a theory. Strauss and Corbin (1990:29), in illustrating the difference between theory and description, indicate that theory uses concepts whereby similar data are grouped and given conceptual labels implying some form of data interpretation. In addition, the data are related by statements of relationships while descriptions are more likely to be summaries of words taken directly from the data. Therefore, theory requires the interpretation of data and the subsequent connection of themes to form a conceptual scheme.

4.2.10. Verification of interpretation

The final section of this chapter summarises the steps taken to assure the rigour, credibility and trustworthiness of the research based on criteria established by Mathison (1988), Creswell and Miller (2000) and Patton (2002). The researcher began by establishing the theoretical framework of the philosophical orientation underpinning the study. By locating the study predominantly in a radical humanism perspective with elements of the interpretive and radical structuralist perspective, the researcher declared upfront ontological and epistemological orientations. The researcher used a purposeful random sampling strategy to access informants while ensuring that the credibility of the study was not compromised by selecting only those informants with the potential to merely confirm the researcher's conscious, unconscious or subconscious theoretical

predisposition. The sampling strategy also provided the researcher with an opportunity for data triangulation by using more than one individual as a data source in order to access multiple viewpoints of the constructs under study within the research context. In order to establish the accuracy of the researcher's portrayal of the informants' contextual realities with regard to organisational culture and external quality assurance, the researcher provided all informants with an opportunity to validate the veracity of their interview transcripts. Selected informants were provided an opportunity to comment on the analytical models and the subsequent themes that emerged in order to ascertain the validity of the inferences drawn from the data.

The following chapter presents an analysis of the findings organised within the elements of the cultural framework (Tierney, 1988). The second dimension of the analytical framework, namely the amended cultures of the academy, embedded within the sociological perspectives of the theoretical model, was then used to organise findings relating to the organisational culture of the institution and its relationship to external quality assurance.

Chapter Five: Presentation, analysis and interpretation of findings

5.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, the research design, methodology and the three-dimensional data analysis model were detailed in order to provide the philosophical, theoretical and analytical grounding to the study. This chapter uses the organising logic of the data-analysis model to structure the presentation, analysis and interpretation of the research findings. The researcher has acknowledged that philosophical and theoretical orientations lie in the radical humanism perspective and that this research was founded largely upon an interpretivist, with elements of critical theory, approach. By virtue of adopting such an orientation, the researcher takes cognisance of the existence and interplay of multiple perspectives as the research participants construct and interpret reality. Furthermore, the aim of the research was to determine whether multiple organisational cultures existed within the institution and to examine how they mediated the institutional relationship and engagement with external quality assurance.

The use of the elements of the cultural framework (Tierney, 1988), namely environment, vision and mission, socialisation, information, strategy and leadership, as the chapter's organising structure, had a two-fold purpose. First, it formed the deductive component of the analytical-induction approach to data analysis, that is, a theory-derived framework for

data collection that was logically extended to data analysis. Second, the researcher now had a framework with which to conduct the inductive analysis, that is, to identify undiscovered patterns of meaning and seek emerging understandings of the relationship between the central constructs of the study. The second dimension of the analytical framework, namely the amended cultures of the academy, embedded within the sociological perspectives of the theoretical model, allowed the researcher to organise findings relating to the organisational culture of the institution and its relationship to external quality assurance.

In this chapter, the first research sub-question, namely, how do the assumptions and values of organisational members define the organisational culture of an HEI, is largely addressed. The research findings are presented and analysed via a combination of description and quotation, which, according to Patton (2002:61), provides the foundation of qualitative reporting, as it allows the reader to enter the mind of the research informants. The description component assisted in organising the data to make it manageable for interpretation and analysis. The quotation element allowed for an articulation of the informants' actual sentiments and served as a referent point to ground interpretation and analysis.

Although each element of the cultural framework enjoys conceptual parity as an indicator of organisational culture, the organisation's relationship with its environment is particularly insightful as it points to the ways that the culture shapes and is shaped by that relationship.

5.2. Environment

The way the institution defines its environment often determines its attitude and relationship to, and with, that environment and consequently serves as a powerful indicator of its organisational culture(s). The environment is described broadly as the external context with which the institution enjoys either a direct or indirect relationship (Brennan and Shah, 2000). While this is a very broad definition referring to the historical, social, economic and political locus of an institution, for the purposes of this dissertation the environment refers to the relationship that the institution had with two key external agencies, namely the external quality agency and the Department of Education.

These two institutions were generally seen to be representing and advancing the national policy agenda of the government of the day. The case of the Department of Education was quite straightforward, as it is an organ of state and therefore unequivocally responsible for promoting state policy. The situation with regard to the external quality agency, on the other hand, is not quite so straightforward. While in some countries, notably the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, it enjoys, arguably, a degree of independence and autonomy from the state, in South Africa, the external quality agency in the form of the HEQC, is a permanent committee of the CHE, a legislated body established to advise the Minister of Education on matters relating to higher education (Higher Education Act 101 of 1997). Therefore, in this case the external quality agency is considered a quasi-governmental agency. This is an important distinction, as it raises

questions concerning whose interests the agency serves and who the primary beneficiaries of the external audit are. This issue is discussed later in the chapter.

With regard to the institution's relationship with its environment, the researcher identified the following subthemes following data coding and reduction within and across occupational categories: external quality assurance and national policy, external definitions of quality, institutional impact and response, external audit and transformation, the audit methodology, the audit and accountability and the external audit as a managerial tool.

5.2.1. External quality assurance and national policy

One of the dominant subthemes to emerge across all occupational groups was the notion of external quality assurance as a key instrument to drive national higher education policy. This finding was not surprising, as the HEQC's Framework for institutional audits (2004c) declared that the (external) audit system is responsive to and proactively advances the objectives of higher education transformation, as defined in the Education White Paper 3, A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (1997). Transformation in this context refers to the radical reshaping of South African higher education to reflect the corresponding political transformation from the apartheid system to a more democratic dispensation.

External quality assurance in the South African context was therefore construed as being unequivocally linked to the advancement of the larger socio-political agenda. It was argued by the CHE that this aim and the improvement of quality within the university were not mutually exclusive. It was further contended that external quality assurance would be able to achieve both aims simultaneously, as each would advance the other (Higher Education Quality Committee, 2004b, 2004c).

While there appeared to be consensus regarding the socio-political intent of external quality assurance, whereby the transformative and political cultures within the institution were confirmed, there were variations regarding the manifestation of that intent. The academic developers, for example, saw external quality assurance as a national policy driver that aimed at macro- and systemic-level change. The academics connected external quality assurance to the merger of South African HEIs as associated instruments to drive the transformation of higher education in order to reflect national policy directives. This view was shared with the senior academics who saw these as instruments to force higher education and by implication institutions to becoming what the government of the day requires them to become. The senior academics were more strident in their opinion that external quality assurance, as conceptualised, is aimed primarily at driving the national policy agenda rather than improving quality within the university.

The management view, by contrast, was tempered by the somewhat inevitability of external quality assurance since it was the legislated national policy and the responsibility of the institution to respond to and indeed implement those policy imperatives. The

inevitability of external quality assurance was also interpreted as a holding the institution 'hostage' by forcing compliance.

Man 2: In general, the universities are held hostage – they can't very well reject the audit – we have been told that this is national policy – national policy. So whether you like it or not, or whether it is something good or bad – you will do it.

Although the academic categories saw external quality assurance as a means to force institutions into a pre-determined fit and consequently as a threat to academic freedom and autonomy, management appeared to be more accommodating of the stated and inferred intents of external quality assurance.

5.2.2. External definitions of quality

While there appeared to be a belief among management that external quality assurance definitions of quality, namely fitness for purpose in advancing the institution's goals and mission, individual and socio-economic development transformation and value for money (Higher Education Quality Committee, 2004c:5), have noble intents, the other occupational categories expressed somewhat ambivalent views. The management view was that these were excellent definitions, as the purpose of higher education was to lead the national socio-economic transformation agenda and to do so effectively and efficiently, thereby highlighting political and managerial institutional cultures.

Man 1: Those are excellent definitions – we must bring about transformation, and do it

effectively and efficiently.

While there was an acknowledgement that external quality assurance definitions of quality had political undertones given the strong links to transformation within the larger socio-political context, management appeared to endorse this association. Some within the academic category supported the definition of quality as the transformation of student experience (this will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter).

The contrary view as to whether these definitions actually alluded to the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning, an indicator of the collegial culture, emerged quite strongly, especially from the academics and senior academics who saw a disconnection between what they perceived as quality and those proffered by external quality assurance. They raised questions relating to standards associated with the traditional academic enterprise, such as the requirements for scholarly publishing. In addition, they questioned the so-called efficiency quality dimension's relationship with the quality of teaching and learning.

Sen Acad 1: Those are interesting definitions, but do they speak to quality in teaching and research? I am not convinced. When I submit my research and articles for publication there are a different set of quality standards. So, in a way they may be more resonant with a national transformation agenda than with quality in the university. Anyway, what does fitness for purpose mean? It just means that we are efficient in what we do, and of course how does efficiency fit into an educational discourse? The bean counters can point to value for money, how you measure value for money, and is it a measure of quality, no, I don't subscribe to that view.

Related to repudiation of the efficiency dimensions was the rejection of the external quality assurance appropriation of 'audit' and its application to higher education. It was felt among the academic, academic development and senior academic categories that 'audit' did not fit well with higher education teaching and learning. In particular, the notion of 'audit' appeared to contradict the principle that external quality assurance served to verify the institution's self-assessment of its internal processes by using that institution's own systems, policies and procedures. The reference to the accounting notion of 'audit' implied compliance to an externally defined standard rather than institutionally defined and transformational elements of quality.

Sen Acad 1: These guys think that an 'audit' is an appropriate term. Do they know where 'audit' comes from? It's an accounting term verifying practice against a predetermined standard. Can you see how many of those issues just contradict good educational practice? You can see that I just don't buy into this audit thing – if we want to understand quality, then we need to look at our classroom interactions and quality of our research. I mentioned this already, but this is just about the national policy agenda rather than really improving quality.

In contrast to the discomfort with the 'audit' notion of quality, the senior academics were of the opinion that quality should be defined in terms of graduate attributes of the students, such as workplace productivity and citizenship.

Sen Acad 2: It's about the quality of our students – when they go out into the workplace can they be productive workers and it is about the quality of what we do here in the university.

Unfortunately, this view was not expanded on in terms of how the graduate attributes would assist in alluding to quality or lack thereof in a university, which points to the need for further research in this field.

5.2.3. Institutional impact and response

A strong subtheme that emerged from the academic, academic development and senior academic categories concerned the potential impact of external quality assurance on the institution. The first contentious point revolved around that taken-for-granted notion that benefits from external audits, automatically and by default, accrue to the institution by virtue of simply being subjected to an external quality-assurance exercise. Staff in the above-mentioned categories all pointed to the exponential increase in their workload and openly questioned the so-called return on investment (rather ironically using the earlier rejected efficiency argument), especially when the direct and opportunity costs are factored into preparing for and going through an external quality-assurance exercise.

This theme is not entirely off the mark when one considers that the current external audit methodology is somewhat resource-intensive. In other words, the resources needed to conduct the self-assessment and compile the institutional audit portfolio and preparations for the institutional audit site visit do add up, especially when considering the additional time that staff have to commit to the process – time that had to be sacrificed from their core function. The senior academics extended this theme by

questioning what the institution was going to get out of the exercise given its investment of resources and whether the external quality audit would actually make any difference to quality within the institution. The senior academics pointed to the mountain of paperwork generated by such audits at other institutions and commented rather sardonically to another forest being cut down.

Acad 3: This audit is just [going] to add to our work exponentially. While we are on that issue, there has been very little done on what are the benefits for the institution and the academics – we are supposed to just accept that these audits are good for us. Are we going to return on our investment – in terms of the direct and opportunity costs for this audit – I think we can better use this time to ensure that the lecturers are in the class doing what they are supposed to be doing.

The cost-benefit analysis of external quality assurance has not been subject to empirical research and this should be considered a gap in the understanding of the impact of external quality audits on HEIs.

In addition to questioning whether the audit would add any value to the institution, the academics suggested that as the audit was driven by an external agency, with a legislated mandate, there would be little overt resistance by institutional members. The academics were of the opinion that open dissent would be futile. The argument advanced is that in the face of the almost overwhelming formal and seemingly moral authority of external quality assurance (namely, the transformation of South Africa from apartheid to a democratic society), any dissent or opposition would be seen as opposing such high and

honourable intents. Therefore, it was suggested that while there would not be open dissent, academic resistance may be more subtle in the form of ‘surface engagement’, that is, merely going through the motions and returning to business as usual after the audit.

Acad Dev 2: My experience is that they will comply to an extent – the same thing happened when we went the SAQA and OBE route – when we had to rearticulate the programmes. There will be some complaining but they know this is something that has to be done – so they will comply but on their terms. They will do what is expected, but on the surface – there won’t be any real or fundamental engagement.

This theme was echoed by the senior academics, who expressed the view that as the audit was driven by a quasi-governmental agency, the institutional management, seeking approval and recognition, may buy into the external audit (this theme is explored in detail later in the chapter) while the academics may generally consider whether there would be anything worthwhile in the whole exercise to motivate their involvement.

In extending the surface-engagement theme, the academics, academic developers and senior academics all pointed to the institution’s failure to promote critical engagement in key decision making and policy formulation. They go so far as to claim that the institution actively discourages deep and critical debates on key issues. As a result, the institution would ensure that the audit moved smoothly, with little or no controversies, by providing the external agency with what was needed – a self-assessment report that acknowledged the need for small improvements, but neglected to provide any institutional information

of substance. An emerging subtheme related the audit to a theatrical analogy wherein the whole external audit was compared to a theatrical performance – a show, in other words. This would appear to support the notion of sifting institutional information by declaring minor shortcomings publicly while hiding the serious institutional failing privately.

Acad Dev 1: But really, the audit for me is going to be one big show, like a performance.

Acad Dev 4: At the institution there will be a performance like they always did – you watch, come the audit everyone will pull out all the stops and put on a performance.

The senior academics also related to the performance subtheme by questioning whether any change of substance occurs after the external quality audit. The view emerging was that little would change, as participation in the quality audit was founded on an almost grudging compliance, so that obligations were fulfilled and the illusion of participation or ‘deep engagement’ was maintained. They argued that they had been involved in external audits in the form of accreditation by external professional bodies and by SERTEC and that these audits were characterised by frantic preparations, a generation of relevant paperwork and institutional ‘spring-cleaning’. After the audit visit, it would appear that things returned to the way they were. They further pointed out that as the institution was a fairly new one (as a recently merged institution), there may be an attempt to make sure that everything appeared to be in place. The senior academics further questioned the credibility of the external process, as they found it difficult to accept that a panel would arrive at meaningful conclusions and judgements about the quality of teaching and

learning from documentation that the institution prepared and from interviewing a poor sample of the institution's stakeholders.

Sen Acad 1: Look, how can someone who has read through whatever nonsense we publish, interview a few people and arrive at judgements about quality in teaching and research?

Another subtheme to emerge from the occupational categories mentioned above was the appropriation of the external audit by the institutional management to conduct staff performance appraisal by stealth, to use the audit as an opportunity to spy on and control staff, and to get rid of those who are seen to be in opposition to management's way of thinking. In addition to suspicions of these somewhat sinister motives of management, it was further felt that academic staff would have to be given an account for things over which they had little or no control.

Acad 1: ... but one thing I know, we are going to be under scrutiny and you know it is not just for the quality it is to check up and spy on us. What has happened to academic freedom and autonomy?

However, the view from the management occupation category differed from the other three occupational categories in this regard. It was felt within this category that while the institution had nothing to hide, and had no desire do so in any case, it was nevertheless necessary to give a good account of the institution. Furthermore, as it was incumbent on the institution to demonstrate its commitment to quality, the institution and its staff involvement, which is why participation in the external quality-assurance audit was not negotiable. Furthermore, management expressed the view that the institution was

desirous of the external audit, not just as compliance exercise, but because it had nothing to hide. It was felt that while the external audit may shake things up, it was necessary to make sure that everything was in place in order to spare the institution any embarrassment. In addition, management were of the opinion that as the external quality agency may expose institutional limitations, the institution needed to be prepared to avoid the aforementioned embarrassment. Management conceded that the audit would result in more work, but were of the opinion that the effort would result in ensuring that quality systems were in place. A final point on this theme was the management view that the audit would serve as a wake-up call for lazy and unproductive academics and may be used as an opportunity to remove those staff members that were not adding any value to the institution.

Man 3: This audit works both ways – for us here in the university where we can use it to make sure that everyone is on the same page – this audit will help us as management to know where the weaknesses are – you know root out the problem cases and deadwood.

5.2.4. The audit and transformation

While the role of the external quality-assurance audit as a catalyst of transformation emerged as a strong subtheme, two strands of thought appeared to interpret the nature of transformation. First, there appeared to be a conflation of the national employment equity and affirmative action legislation and policies with the notion of transformation. This is not entirely surprising, as these are seen as legislative instruments to drive socio-

economic transformation in South African. Within this school of thought, there appeared two contrasting viewpoints. While some acknowledged the need to reverse the race-based exclusionary policies of the past, they felt that the system's rush to 'transform' by replacing one race of academics with another would not necessarily improve the quality of the institution, as academic quality is not something that is developed overnight.

Sen Acad 3: Its well known that the government is not satisfied with some of the universities – they feel that these universities are still too white – not transformed enough – so this way they make sure that the transformation is complete. Look I am not against transformation but you just cannot replace experienced and qualified people overnight and expect the same quality of research and teaching.

The contrary view sees the external audit as a necessary instrument to drive institutional transformation to reflect societal transformation.

Acad 2: Transformation is what is needed – here, people talk about transformation but nothing has changed – if the audit is going to bring about transformation and make sure that university is in line with the government and what the people want then that is a good thing.

While the relative merits of either viewpoint fall outside the scope of this research, the contestations around this view of transformation point to a fragmented political organisational culture. The key point here is while the external quality-assurance exercise was rejected for the range of reasons already alluded to, it seems that it would be acceptable if it was to ensure outcomes favourable to one grouping, even to the detriment of another.

The second strand of thinking is aligned with Harvey and Green's (1993) interpretation, whereby quality in higher education is considered transformation in terms of the value added to the students through their learning experiences. Those informants in support of this notion took into account the background of the students, especially those with a disadvantaged history, and argued that the institution must address the deficits with which the students entered higher education. In addition, this view was aligned with one of the traditional roles of the university, that is, to prepare a critical and socially responsible citizenry.

Acad 3: If you are looking at transformation in a broad sense of transforming the student experience then I would buy into that definition ... What is our role as a university, to transform our students from school leavers into critical thinkers and artists, to [be] responsible citizens, that's what I mean by transformation, so if we are doing that then we are a quality institution. Another point about transformation is what we do to take the student we get and the value that we add.

Consequently, the transformation element of the external quality definition is seen to be at odds with the way the academics interpreted quality, which was more often than not seen as synonymous with academic standards.

5.2.5. The audit methodology

The nature of the external audit and its methodology raised several interrelated subthemes, one of which connected the current audit methodology to that practised by

SERTEC. The academics expressed the view that as the approach to the audit appeared to be somewhat similar to that of SERTEC, that is, external validation by a panel of peers of a self-assessment report via staff and student interviews, document review and on-site assessment, the outcomes of the audit would be more or less similar, namely nothing much would change. The inability of the SERTEC type audit to bring about meaningful change was attributed to the credibility (or lack thereof) of such audits, as it was questioned whether any meaningful assessment of large and complex institutions could be done in a week. The academics further claimed that as they had participated in the SERTEC audits, they know how to 'play the game'. This underscores the observation made earlier about surface engagement and introduces an element of deception. In addition, reference was made to what could be interpreted as a key weakness of the current external quality assurance methodology, namely what happens after the audit? Since institutions of this type had engaged in some form of external audit in the past and had seen that the outcomes had little or no effect on the way in which the institution did things after the audit, they felt justified in commenting that little or nothing would change with this round of external quality assurance given that the audit had no real consequences for the institution in the form of sanction or reward.

Acad 1: ... if it is like SERTEC we'll go through the motions – prepare a fancy report ... Coming back to the audit, and if [it is] like SERTEC, nothing with change – we'll go back to doing things the way we did

Acad 3: Maybe it will be like the SERTEC visit – some vague recommendations with no real follow-up. But, I have my reservations that anything meaningful will happen after the audit – we will all get excited for a week or two before things fall back into place.

Sen Acad 1: Do you know what ‘wet paint’ is? I saw the same thing during the SERTEC days and no matter how good an auditor is, he is not going to pick up everything.

A related subtheme related to the nature of audit expectations of the informants. Academic developers were of the opinion that the whole process of external audits, given the unequal power relations that existed between a quasi-organ of state and a university, whose funding was largely dependent on the state, meant that the university would be under pressure to fulfil the external audit panel’s expectations. It was claimed that the external agency surely had a predetermined agenda as it would have been naive to assume that they would have arrived at the institution merely to verify and/or validate the institution’s approach to quality management. It was argued that the parties that comprised the panel, from officials of the external quality agency to the higher education peers, would all have prejudices and biases that they would not necessarily be able to entirely suspend. In other words, the audit panel would arrive at the institution with their so-called lines of enquiry, which are indicative of a particular agenda. While these lines of enquiry would in all probability have emerged from the panel’s assessment of the institutional audit portfolio, the possibility that the lines of enquiry may have been coloured by predetermined positions and agendas could not in all entirety be ruled out. Interestingly, the management view appeared to support this assertion, although

unwittingly, in their attempt to justify the role of the external quality agency and the nature of the response to the external audit.

Man 3: But for the HEQC, they have certain expectations – they must have – they can't just be coming here and say we are going to only verify what you are doing. They have their criteria and their standards – so they have expectations. No one can say we are just measuring you against what you say you do. That's why in a sense we have to give them what they want.

Related to expectations with regard to the audit and the so-called lines of enquiry, the senior academics were of the opinion that auditors would look at what they wanted to, as the audit would be founded upon their (the auditors') agenda. It was felt that the institution was largely at the mercy of the auditors as they would decide what was important. Furthermore, the question of misalignment between what the institution (and its various constituents) and the panel considered important also emerged.

Sen Acad 1: These auditors will only look at what they want to look at. What I am trying to say, it's their agenda isn't it – they decide what is important – what if that does not coincide with what we decide as being important? So at the end of the day, you are at the mercy of some externally decided standard.

5.2.6. The audit and accountability

While the external quality audit was connected with the notion of accountability, there were somewhat contradictory schools of thought on the tolerability of accountability within this context, which was aligned to Huisman and Currie's (2004:529) observations

on accountability in higher education. First, the academics felt, despite their reservations and apparent rejection of external audits, as discussed in this chapter, that the audit would and should hold people accountable for their actions within the university. This view was shared by management, who affirmed their position that quality and accountability were inextricably linked and that the external quality audit would ensure that the university was held accountable for how it spent taxpayers' money. In addition, it was felt that the external audit would assist the university in meeting its obligations to the students and hold its staff accountable by instilling a more committed work ethos, which in management's opinion appeared to be lacking.

Man 3: Can you separate quality from accountability – for me accountability is quality. We must hold people accountable for what they do.

Man 1: As a trained auditor I must say that it is a very effective way of making sure that universities are doing what they are supposed to be doing – you know we must be accountable for what we do with public funds.

Man 1: We have to make sure that people are accountable for what they do. I mean, we can't have people running around doing what they please and not be accountable to anyone. Have you tried to get people on a Friday?

The senior academics, while accepting and indeed supporting the notion of accountability, felt that it should not be disguised within the audit discourse. It was felt that, consistent with their earlier positions, some sincerity should accompany the 'real' purposes of the audit. In other words, if the intention was to hold the institution and its

staff to greater accountability to its stakeholders, then such intentions should be declared upfront and not disguised as quality. Another strand of thinking that emerged focussed on the nature of accountability. While the senior academics acknowledged and accepted accountability to the university's traditional constituencies, such as students and academic disciplines, they raised concern that the external audit introduced accountability to the agenda of the state and to the external agency. A cautionary note was raised that the university should not be emasculated by an intimate relationship with the state, however morally just such a relationship would appear to be, as it would deprive the university of its credibility to offer objective critique of national policy.

Sen Acad 4: ... but now there is a different kind of accountability, isn't there – you mentioned transformation, value for money and so on – so now the accountability is not [only] to our students and our work but to a separate agenda – the agenda of the state and the HEQC.

It would seem that the senior academics were more in favour of associating quality as accountability to their academic discipline, which is manifested as the maintenance of high standards and international comparability.

Sen Acad 3: Standards are about quality – if you don't meet the set standards, how can you talk about quality? In my view, quality is standards.

Interviewer: Is that how you see quality in higher education?

Sen Acad 3: Absolutely – when you compromise standards then you compromise quality – you cannot lower your standards and then claim quality – as most overseas countries are not giving full recognition to our qualifications – you know at one time our doctors and pharmacists were

recognised worldwide – now they must write examinations before they can practice in places like England – so yes, quality is about standards.

5.2.7. External quality assurance as a managerial tool

A theme that resonated across all occupational categories was that the current conceptualisation of external quality assurance appeared to support the introduction of a new bureaucracy and to increased managerial controls rather than improving the quality of teaching and learning. The increased managerial control underscores Land's (2004:5) observation that the shift in control over teaching and learning from disciplinary to organisational oversight diminishes the influence of the discipline experts.

It was pointed out by the academics that two of the three external definitions of quality, namely fitness of purpose and value for money, were directly connected to the managerial processes of efficiency. The academics also expressed the view that quality and so-called value for money in higher education appear to be inconsistent, especially in view of shrinking resources and having to do more with less. In addition, academic developers proclaimed that the primary beneficiaries of external quality assurance were central management, given the managerial biases in the current approach.

The senior academics expanded on this view by questioning whether external quality assurance alluded to a quality system or to a management system. While they were not against good and effective management, they were of the opinion that this should be

declared upfront, in other words by the introduction of a new and effective management system, rather than euphemising that current approaches were aimed at improving quality.

Sen Acad 1: This is another one of the new bureaucracy – well, you asked that I be honest with you. Let me ask you, how do you guys define this? Okay, another thing, is it a quality system or a management system? Quality just gives it a nice name. Now I am not against good management and keeping control of things – but then we must say that is what we are doing about improving our control and management – not put a spin on it and call it quality – quality is more than that.

In addition, it was pointed out that while no one was arguing for universities to have carte blanche and to isolate themselves into ivory towers disconnected from their historical, social, political and economic contexts, the senior academics alluded to the international trend to force universities to do more with less. It was felt that the new external quality regimes were in fact new forms of centralised control and management of the academics.

Sen Acad 1: I am not saying that universities must have carte blanche, but worldwide universities are under fire, do more with less, more research, more students, fewer academic, so what you have are new forms of control – new management over academics.

Management acknowledged that external quality assurance would indeed lead to greater managerial control, efficiencies and accountability, which in their view empowered greater achievement of their mandate.

5.3. Vision and mission

According to Keyton (2005:138), organisational members identify with and take ownership of the vision and mission of the organisation when they are closely involved in its crafting. The importance of such involvement cannot be underestimated, as the vision and mission define the direction, the overall goals and objectives as well as the values underpinning the organisation. The research findings illuminate three important subthemes, namely defining the vision and mission, the nature of the vision and mission as well as the relevance of the vision and mission as important pointers to the culture of the institution and, of course, to the institution's relationship with external quality assurance.

5.3.1. Defining the vision and mission

A central theme that emerged across the occupational categories was the acknowledgement of the need for a vision and mission to give direction to the institution. However, there was a divergence in thinking with regard to the way in which the vision and mission were defined. A view questioning the validity and authenticity of the visioning process emerged quite strongly across three of the four occupational categories. It was felt that as the vision and mission were not founded upon sufficient empirical analysis of the institution, it was consequently removed from institutional and contextual realities. In support of this assertion, the senior academics pointed to what they

perceived as the lack of empirical depth in the institutional planning documents. In addition, it was argued that the vision and mission was weakened by the institution's failure to engage in scenario planning, modelling, data verification and any form of institutional intelligence gathering.

Sen Acad 1: My view on the vision and mission is quite clear, as long they remain thumb-sucked without empirical foundations they will remain just empty words – ask around how many know what the vision and mission is.

Related to this theme was the disconnection between organisational realities and the vision and mission that were developed for the institution. It was felt that rather than developing an expansive vision and mission, it would have been prudent to adopt more modest goals such as the consolidation of the merger. In addition, the view was that more time and energy should have been spent on institutional deliberations on what is expected of a university (as opposed to a technikon), after which the information should be used to chart the way forward.

Sen Acad 4: We need to be asking questions about what makes us a university and how we can advance our academic standings. Don't borrow corporate strategies without thinking things through.

In addition to the failure to adequately consider organisational realities, it would appear that the vision and mission were also weakened by the lack of participation by key role-players such as the academics, senior academics and academic developers. The exclusion

appeared to play out on two levels. First, it was claimed that these role-players withdrew from the visioning process on their own volition owing to what they perceived as a waste of time, as little of substance was discussed. Second, it was felt that management manipulated the process by using an illusion of participation to legitimate predetermined decisions. The management view by contrast, was that the process was very inclusive and they referred to the appointment of an external consultant to provide neutral and objective guidance in the formulation of what was viewed as a 'comprehensive' vision and mission.

5.3.2. The nature of the vision and mission

The management was of the opinion that the vision and mission presented the institution for the first time with a comprehensive master plan to chart the way forward. In addition, they indicated that vision and mission would be used to align organisational priorities and activities and would consequently assist in forging commitment to the new institution. Furthermore, it was felt that the measurement of the vision and mission accomplishment would provide a reasonably objective assessment of management performance.

Man 1: The new vision and mission have just been done. This is first time that we have something comprehensive like this. We have to make sure that our activities are guided by the vision and mission. That is how the council is going to measure our performance; otherwise our contracts would not be renewed.

While management was of the opinion that the vision and mission were important to

provide organisational direction as well as a tool to measure individual and organisational performance, a contrary view emerged that pointed to the artificiality of the current institutional vision and mission. It was suggested that the vision and mission were far removed from organisational realities and was a 'paper exercise' couched in 'politically correct' statements aimed at appeasing the external quality agency and other regulatory bodies.

Sen Acad 4: Vision and mission are paper tigers – they exist on paper because that is what the department and the HEQC want to have. So the mission will have nice statements, politically correct statements so that it appears to everyone that we are doing what we are supposed to be doing.

5.3.3. Relevance of the vision and mission

While it was acknowledged that the vision and mission of an HEI should be aligned to and reflect national priorities, the question of who determined the national priorities arose. In addition, it was conceded that universities should not be ivory towers removed from their socio-economic contexts and realities. However, it was felt that universities were being pushed towards addressing the short-term political goals of the ruling party or the government of the day. The senior academics pointed out that the economic policies of the Reagan and Thatcher administrations in the United States of America and the United Kingdom respectively, demanding greater accountability from public institutions, were

still being felt and appeared to be manifested in the efficiency definitions of quality in higher education.

Sen Acad 1: How do you determine national priorities – whose priorities? I am all for universities not being ivory towers and we should not be – but these are addressing narrow political goals – and this is not something that is only happening here – internationally too, there has been shifts to the right – the politics of Reagan and Thatcher. What I am saying, sure we need to address local and international priorities, but the question still remains, whose priorities and how were they determined and do we have accept them uncritically?

Despite raising questions on the determination of national priorities, little evidence was advanced on the possible incongruity between national priorities and those of the government of the day.

5.4. Socialisation

There appears to be two somewhat polarised definitions of the socialisation of the new members into an organisation. One definition sees socialisation as a one-way process whereby a new member acquires organisational knowledge via a set of deliberate and planned induction interventions and experiences by the organisation (Tierney, 1997:5). This view is aligned with the functionalist view of organisational culture outlined in Chapter Two, which presents a rational view of the world, where reality is fixed, culture is discovered and the individual awaits being assimilated into the organisation.

The second definition, by contrast, suggests that the world is characterised by contradictions and ambiguities. The desire for power and control results in culture being contested. While powerful contextual forces may exist, possibilities exist to shape the organisational culture with multiple interpretations and possibilities. Therefore, culture is neither waiting to be discovered nor are the new members awaiting passive enculturation, as culture influences and is influenced by organisational members (Tierney, 1997:6).

The themes that emerged from a review of the data appeared to resonate with three of the five dimensions of the Cooper-Thomas and Anderson (2006:499) model of socialisation, namely internal stability (minimising disruptive influences of turnover and absenteeism), role performance (task-mastery and self-reported performance) and social cohesion (which links individuals through organisational levels through shared values, norms and behaviours). There were insufficient data coded to support the other two dimensions, namely external representation (the manner in which organisational members portray the organisation to external stakeholders) and extra role performance (helping others achieve organisational productivity).

5.4.1. Internal stability

A strong subtheme that emerged across all occupational categories related to institutional instability following the ongoing and incomplete merger process. The senior

academics pointed to the subsequent state of flux and uncertainty at the institution, as it was unclear who would constitute the new leadership of the institution. While the executive positions had been filled at the time of the external quality-assurance audit (and the research fieldwork), the next levels of management, such as the executive deans, executive directors, directors and heads of department, had yet to be appointed. Consequently, it was felt that the 'jockeying' for positions and power contributed to the instability within the institution, as the debates on the merits of an issue often degenerated into personal attacks rather than fundamental engagement in the development of the institution.

Sen Acad 3: Not really – some departments work well but with the merger everything is upside down. There are too many people trying to get the upper-hand – you can't have a rational discussion with anyone – every meeting ends in chaos.

The institution's inability to move quickly to formalise and populate the organisational structure led the senior academics to observe that political manoeuvring by certain staff members placed organisational stability at risk. Consequently, decision making was not informed by rational application of forethought and due consideration to the potential long-term impact of the choices made on behalf of the institution.

Sen Acad 4: Coming back to decision making, you know we don't use sound or even rational decision-making strategies. We decide what is politically expedient and then try to fit everything into it. Look at the scenarios we are suggesting the DoE, have we costed the exercise, and not

just in the narrow sense of cost, no projections with moving variables [laughs], that's why they should have come to the professors.

According to the senior academics, the magnitude and pace of change at the institution contributed to the internal instability. While the senior academics acknowledged that change was inevitable at the institution given its merger and transformation into a new institutional type, they felt that had there been sufficient consultation and involvement with all role-players (especially the academic staff), the change process would have been better managed and institutional instability minimised.

Sen Acad 1: I would hazard a guess and say that there is kind of uneasy truce – neither side trusts each other. Change is inevitable, but involves the people that can make that change work.

The senior academics indicated that the instability and uncertainty, alluded to earlier, impacted on organisational survival, which was taken to refer to how and whether organisational members survived the changes taking place. It was pointed out that while academics of good standing would generally survive most forms of fundamental organisational change, the magnitude of the changes and subsequent organisational instability would render even the most competent academics insecure about their continued employment by the institution. Such insecurity would inevitably impact on their academic performance and would most likely lead to highly productive academics leaving the institution, further compounding an already tenuous situation.

Sen Acad 2: ... there is no trust and there is a belief that senior management are too busy with

their own agendas and their own jobs to be worried about the rest. And to me that is worrying – soon you are going see the good people leaving.

5.4.2. Role performance

In view of the sentiments expressed earlier with regard to organisational stability, the senior academics were of the opinion that new (academic) staff members would find the institution a difficult place to work. It would appear that the state of flux contributed to role confusion, as the various levels of staff had yet to be appointed, making reporting and accountability lines somewhat blurred and unclear. In addition, the view that staff integration following the merger was not handled sensitively to allow staff to ‘find each other’ and, in so doing, identify ways of working that accommodated different philosophical positions as well as established practices. The senior academics indicated that very little was done with regard to bringing staff together to create new communities of practice.

Sen Acad 2: That is one of the things that was very poorly handled during this merger. You can’t just bring people together and say now work together. We in Engineering are having endless problems – everyone wants to do their own things – I know we are supposed to be professionals and be able to overcome these things – but we needed guidance from the top and it did not come. Don’t assume that everything will fall into place and at the end of the day, the student suffers.

In addition, it was claimed that as a consequence of the merger, political expediency

demanded that new ways of doing things be established in order not to offend the sensitivities of one or other of the merging partners. Consequently, established practices were abandoned and new ways of doing things were introduced, which were not always the most effective and efficient options.

Sen Acad 2: I don't think that they will have a very good impression of the university – getting the simplest of things done is an effort – okay, I understand that the merger has brought about changes and new people and new ways of doing things – but if it was working in the first place, what was the need to change it?

It was further pointed out that key performance areas were not clearly discussed with senior academics, resulting in poor role clarification and performance management. It was indicated that in the absence of clearly defined key performance areas or indeed any negotiated work expectations, senior academics were left to their own devices to define their role, scope of work and performance standards.

Sen Acad 1: You know when I was appointed nobody discussed my key performance areas. I was told this is what you have do. And I simply got on with things. I understand that things are not yet settled, but on the ground, we have to do our job. I have interacted with the people in my department and faculty but that is as far as it goes.

The senior academics suggested that in the absence of clear direction they simply looked to their academic discipline and 'got on with their job'. They felt that as good academics they would be able to overcome the lack of direction and survive the institutional changes

by focusing on their job and that with their expertise, experience and qualifications, they would be able to move to other institutions with ease.

However, the academics felt that as things would not get better for them, they would be most at risk following any staff rationalisation processes. In addition, they expressed the view that the lack of certainty, already alluded to earlier, or indeed any attempt by the leadership to reassure role-players and provide direction, has created job security fears. The lack of reassurances by the leadership appeared to devalue the worth of the rank-and-file academics, whose labour ensured that the university delivered on its core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement.

5.4.3. Social cohesion

All occupational categories pointed to what was termed the ‘highly fractured relationships’ that existed at the institution. When pushed to explain what was meant by this, the senior academics contended that there were multiple agendas among the various institutional role-players rendering collegial relationships almost impossible. It was suggested that executive management as well as senior management (deans and directors) were more interested in the consolidation of their own power and authority than creating a new HEI that upholds the spirit of a university. The senior academics pointed to the lack of respect, suppression of dissent, absence of debate, oversensitive responses to criticism or alternative views (by management) and the ‘ramming through’

of decisions. This view was supported by the academic developers, who found that the senior leadership was somewhat alienated and remote from the rest of the staff, as evidenced in the lack of direct communication and consultation.

Sen Acad 2: Right now that relationship is highly fractured – there is no trust and there is a belief that senior management are too busy with their own agendas and their own jobs to be worried about the rest. And to me that is worrying – soon you are going see the good people leaving.

The 'highly fractured relationships' related to another subtheme, that of the trust, or rather the lack of trust, within the institution. According to the senior academics, the lack of trust emanated from, among others, the organisational restructuring that impacted on job security. In addition, there was an uneasy relationship between the new executive management and the rest of the staff, especially the senior academics and the professoriate. The senior academics pointed to their (and the professoriate's) exclusion from key decision making as evidence of the executive management's marginalisation of key role-players whose collective experience and expertise would have added considerably to decision making and strategic planning. It would appear that the lack of trust has resulted in an 'uneasy truce'.

The notions of 'uneasy truce' and 'lack of trust' were echoed by the academic and academic development occupational category as well, who indicated that the institution was not conducive to a collegial working atmosphere. They indicated that the institution was not a particularly good place to work at as there were little trust and good working

relations. The academics asserted that suspicion was rife and that heightened sensitivities (of all internal role-players) led to a tense atmosphere that exacerbated an already stressful situation. As a result, the academics claimed not to trust that the new management would act in ways to ensure job security or indeed promote closer working relationships. While management conceded that the relationships were indeed somewhat strained, they indicated that the contributing factor was the lack of certainty in the system, caused by the merger and subsequent creation of a new institution. They acknowledged that they could not provide the guarantees and security of tenure desired by the staff simply because it was not within their competence to do so, as they too were subject to the outcomes of the restructuring.

In addition to alluding to their distrustful relationship with management, the academics further pointed to their somewhat tenuous relationship with the new colleagues (referring to colleagues from the erstwhile institutions). They indicated that there had been little consolidation towards indentifying common communities of practice, as the academics held on to previous ways of doing things. It was further pointed out that the merger had occurred in name only, as divisions still ran strong. The failure to consolidate departments and the continued existence of separate departments with different heads of departments led to little academic or social cohesion. This view was echoed by the academic developers, who indicated that it was virtually impossible to facilitate workshops for staff of the same academic department as they took their non-cooperation cues from the departmental and faculty leadership.

However, the academics did point out that while relationships across the institution was characterised as 'fractured', there had been notable exceptions in some departments where the leadership and the staff made concerted efforts to accommodate each other, find common ground and deploy coherent academic practices. This view was supported by the academic developers, who indicated that although the institution had not made any overt and concerted efforts to promote closer working relations, some academic departments had attempted to work together, which boded well for the creation of post-merger collegiality.

The management category had a somewhat different view on the lack of cohesion within the institution. While they conceded that the institution was characterised by divisions, they indicated that loyalty to the erstwhile institution was not necessarily the primary cause. Management indicated that in dealing with staff they observed that

we still have cliques and groups popping up all the time – one day they are together, the next day they are against each other. I try to get them to participate – to find common ground, but now that is nearly impossible (Man 3).

It would seem that the obvious contributing factor to the lack of social cohesion, namely the merger, may have had the unintended consequence of creating conditions for staff to rally around. In other words, while staff may be divided at one level, the existence of a common opposition in the form of management may in part have contributed to some form of cohesion. Management indicated that the external audit would provide a further rallying point for academic staff, as this would be used to their advantage to score points

against management.

Management were of the opinion that despite the challenges and difficulties, the institution was an exciting place to be working at. They indicated that changes were for the better, given the need for the institution to shake off its racially based historical antecedents as well as the commitment to the democratic mores of a post-apartheid society. Management intimated that the divisions within the institution reflected those existing within the wider society, as some people refused to accept the fundamental and profound political, social and economic changes sweeping the country.

5.5. Information

The culture elements framework (Tierney, 1988) suggest that to understand information in organisations, it would be prudent to examine the nature of information (that is, what constitutes information), the sources of information and the manner in which it is disseminated. The findings of the research extends Tierney's (1988) suggestion to include the nature of engagement, and all three subsequently form the organising structure of this section.

5.5.1. Nature of information

With regard to the nature of information, a key subtheme across all occupational categories related to what constituted information. It was claimed that the institution had

neither engaged in nor provided platforms to debate the fundamental issues pertaining to its future. The institution had been reconfigured from technikon to university (albeit one of technology) and consequently had to fulfil expectations associated with the status of a university. It would appear that very little deliberations had indeed taken place on the implications for the institution in terms of its classification as a university (of technology). In addition, it would appear that the institution had not been successful in generating or disseminating information of sufficient quality to inform or guide decision making.

Acad Dev 3: Debates about what kind of university we should be – we are a university and no longer a technikon – and no one is talking about that – you know what it means to be university and no more a technikon.

Given the fundamental change being experienced by the institution it was expected that there would a flood of information. However, it was revealed that just snippets of information was disseminated and that the information was being kept under wraps and selectively released in order to manage decision making and to control reactions and possible resistance to management decisions.

Acad 3: What information? We, the lecturers are the last to know anything.

Acad Dev 1: I make sure that I use my contacts to know what is going on. There are things that are decided and then the rest of the people get told. I think that a few people are really in the know and just enough information gets shared. This way, things are controlled.

5.5.2. Sources of information

There was a degree of consensus among the occupational categories, with the exception of the management category, that there were just a few people within the institution who were the central repositories, gatekeepers and purveyors of organisational information. While there had been references to ‘the few in the know’, the researcher was unable even with the protection of anonymity to get a clear indication of who the few in the know may be. Management, by contrast, expressed the view that there was no attempt to control the flow of information, or indeed keep critical information from the institution’s community, except that of a sensitive or confidential matter. It was pointed out that the Director of Corporate Relations sits in at all Executive Management Committee meetings in order to ensure that there was direct flow of information to all constituencies.

Interviewer: Who do you think are the main sources of information?

Acad 3: I really can’t answer that question – to me it looks like that no one knows – they are groping in the dark.

Interviewer: They?

Acad 3: The management and their advisors.

Sen Acad 3: The dean discusses the main issues during the EXCOs and the faculty board. But I think they don’t know much either – so they tell us what they know. But right now – there is more speculation and gossip rather than real information.

It would appear that certain gatekeepers filtered and managed the flow of information to limit the engagement with the information in order to control the decision-making process. The failure or refusal to engage fully with all stakeholders regarding such a fundamental institutional change was interpreted as a means to manage the process from above, into a predetermined vision of what the institution should become, rather than giving those (the staff and other key stakeholders) an opportunity and platform to jointly contribute to crafting the vision, shape and form of the new institution.

Sen Acad 1: ... but I know you are talking about institutional level – there, information is filtered and very well managed – on a need-to-know basis.

Interviewer: What do you mean by need-to-know?

Sen Acad 1: How else can you ram things through – you keep people on a need-to-know basis. You wait for the meetings and spring stuff on them – that way they did not have time to really digest the information and plan their arguments.

In order to overcome the dearth and filtering of information, organisational members relied on informal channels to access information. The academic as well as academic development categories pointed to use of the 'grapevine' as a means of finding out what was going on in the institution. In addition, and related to the use of the 'grapevine', was having access to and knowing the 'right people' and 'contacts' (this was not defined) as the source of information. The use of the informal communication channel and accessing individuals 'in the know' points to the failure of the formal communication channels to

convey institutional information adequately or to a lack of trust in what was being communicated.

Acad 1: I mean there's so much going on but when we have the meetings there's nothing really being said – same usual story – you'll know when I know. We try to get information from the grapevine, if you want to know anything use the grapevine. There are messages on the intranet but that's just not the whole story.

Acad 2: ... if you don't have your contacts in the right places, you are in the dark – lucky for me – I get to hear most things from my contacts.

5.5.3. Nature of engagement

A key issue raised by all the occupational categories, except the management category, centred around the somewhat deliberate sidelining of key constituencies when it came to decision making. In addition to being denied access to information, ostensibly to be excluded from decision making, the academics questioned the need for secrecy. However, management pointed out that information flows from their level across the university via the formal communication channels.

Acad 2: ... but that is not how it should be – why is there are this secrecy – this is the time when we should be open – you know, transparent about what is going on – don't tell us after the fact.

In addition, reference to the illusion of consultation indicated that consultations occurred after the fact. In other words, consultations took place to legitimate decisions that had

already been taken. It was pointed out that while meetings had indeed taken place, the discussions lacked substance and gave the impression of 'going through the motions'.

Sen Acad 1: That is just a façade. Look, I am not naïve, I don't expect consultation and participation on every issue, but when it comes to academic matters, research, I want to be part of the strategic decision making. Why aren't the professors consulted on key issues – why aren't our views canvassed?

Acad 1: [Laughs] [silence] I'm not sure how to answer that. But now there's no trust – we just get told – no real consultation – But I don't blame the HoDs – they are just [as much] in the dark. Decisions are made on top and just passed down. Sometimes I think we just work here and go home.

Management, by contrast, pointed to broad-based participation in a number of committee structures that was set up to discuss matters critical to the forging of the new institution.

Man 1: I'm not sure about that question. But what information we have we share with the university. Information that comes from the department and the council gets filtered down to staff. That's why we have the Director of Corporate Relations sitting in our meetings.

5.6. Strategy

Pettigrew (2002:423) argues that strategy as a feature of organisational culture is contextually based. Context is taken to refer to, among other things, the historical or temporal setting, internal milieu, external environment, structure, stability, technology

and internal political situation. Given the argument that strategy formulation is context-bound, it stands to reason to consider two of the more significant influences, namely external alignment and internal conditions.

5.6.1. External alignment

According to the senior academics, the institutional strategy appeared to be driven by external policy drivers, especially those relating to the transformation of post-apartheid South African society in general and higher education specifically. They contended that the seemingly moral legitimacy of these policy statements, as they aimed to transform South Africa to reflect the democratic mores of a post-apartheid society, rendered any difference of opinion as being somewhat 'anti-transformation'. This view was underscored by management, who indicated that it was imperative that the institution is aligned with the national policy agenda. They indicated that one of the key purposes of the mergers was to move away from apartheid-based institutions to those that catered for the higher education needs of all South Africans. Management pointed to the decision to create single-site faculties, rather than replicating programmes across multiple delivery sites and perpetuating old divisions, as tangible evidence of their (management's and the institution's) commitment to the national policy.

It would appear that the institution had little choice but to align its strategy to the national policy directives. The academics pointed out that the institution had to fall in line

with the national policy directives as the state had indicated that it would 'steer' higher education using the three primary instruments at its disposal, namely funding, the programme and qualification mix and the external quality assurance of HEIs. It was clear to the academics, senior academics and academic developers that this unequal power relationship left the institution with little room to manoeuvre and that institutional strategy would have to uncritically reflect and incorporate national policy. This view was validated by management's contention that while not all role-players would buy into the proposed direction that the institution was undertaking, the institution was nevertheless obliged to align its strategy with national policy, as it was accountable to its council and the national state, which provides its funding.

5.6.2. Internal conditions

All occupational categories, except management, indicated that the internal conditions at the institution were such that strategy was largely informed by demands of the external environment, as alluded to previously. They claimed that the strategy was informed more by wider political considerations than by a thorough analysis of contextual factors that relate to higher education provisioning as well as the role and purpose of a university (of technology) in a local, regional and global context. In addition, they indicated that poor decision making, poor planning, insufficient scenario planning and a failure to cost the plan were evidence that political considerations were elevated above educational ones.

They suggested that political expediency determined strategy and that efforts were then made to find a fit between the strategy and internal conditions.

Sen Acad 1: We really have to know what we are about, what can we do to improve the lives of the people, and I mean real empirically based analysis, not thumb-sucked, if people really knew the basis of our decision making ...

Interviewer: Would you expand on that?

Sen Acad 1: You have seen our strategic documents – how much of that stuff was based on thorough empirical research, how much of the data has been verified, have we engaged in scenario planning – we got a business school, we got high-quality professors, why did we not involve them in our planning?

The academic occupational groups suggested that, as management has not done enough to analyse and indeed address internal conditions, they would use the audit to lend credibility to their strategic intent, as the strategy could not be justified on its own merits. It needed external impetus and endorsement. They were further of the opinion that management would wield the audit as an instrument to force its definition of changes as well as what the university ought to be. Consequently, in order to drive the strategy and force ownership upon all internal role-players, management would appropriate the audit resulting in a mutually beneficial relationship with the external audit agency and national state, leading to the implementation of external national policy and management forcing internal change by deflecting opposition and silencing debate and dissension.

In a related subtheme, the academic developers, while acknowledging the impact of the merger and subsequent creation of a new institution (of a new institutional type), suggested that the institution may have attempted too many structural and strategic changes simultaneously. They argued that a coherent strategy would have prioritised key activities, such as settling the institution after the merger before embarking on an ambitious restructuring and reorganisation process. In their view, the primary consideration appeared to be a need to satisfy public perception of the transformation of the institution. The academics echoed this view by indicating that there were too many things being embarked on and very few reaching finality. While they appreciated that change and strategy development and deployment were not linear processes, they felt that some of the more critical change initiatives such as the merger should have been bedded down first to give the internal role-players a clear indication of where the institution was headed.

5.7. Leadership

House, Javidan, Hanges and Dorfman (2002), in a review of literature, as well as a multinational empirical study, found that leadership has a profound impact on the culture of organisations. In addition, they argue that leader behaviour is impacted on by the situational context, such as size, technology, maturity and relationship with the environment, of the organisation. Leadership is therefore considered an important indicator of organisational culture.

Despite repeated prompting by the researcher, virtually all occupational categories demonstrated an unwillingness to comment fully on the nature of leadership at the institution. The researcher relied on comments made elsewhere and drew inferences from those to identify leadership credibility, capacity and control as important subthemes.

5.7.1. Credibility

A key theme to emerge across the occupational categories, with the exception of management, was the credibility of the organisational leadership. It was pointed out that the new leadership of the institution had little credibility capital. It was felt that the leadership consequently acted in ways to enforce their authority within the institution, were extremely sensitive to criticism and acted in ways to silence dissent. In addition, it was claimed that the lack of credibility was associated with leadership insecurity that consequently resorted to heavy-handed methods to force changes and enforce decisions.

Acad Dev 1: There is lot of insecurity at the top and the more the insecurity, the more the need to force things through. This audit will be the tool to make sure that things happen in a particular way. As it is, the level of consultation is at an all time low. This is a university, shouldn't we be debating stuff?

In addition, it was claimed that the leadership were desirous of being seen as effective leaders by the external stakeholders, especially the external quality agency, and therefore willingly and uncritically pandered to the externally imposed agendas.

Sen Acad 1: Now the university will buy into this and you know why – the guys up there are so desperate for credibility. I mean how many of them can point to being academics of standing?

The management category, while acknowledging that it was desirous of the external audit, expressed the view that the institutional intelligence that would be forthcoming from the audit would give them an objective overview of the institution, ostensibly with a view to improve managerial practices. In addition, management felt it was incumbent and indeed their responsibility to manage the new institution, and in so doing, they will have to make decisions that may not please everyone.

Man 1: Of course not everyone will be pleased, but this is a new institution. And we as management must manage, we cannot just have everything loosely organised, otherwise nothing will get done. I think that we are appointed as the leadership and we provide that leadership.

5.7.2. Manipulative control

Associated with the theme of credibility, the academics pointed to the new leadership's attempts at manipulative control. While the occupational categories conceded that it is the integral role of leadership to control activities within the institution, they were of the opinion that the control exercised was manipulative in nature to meet their own ends rather than that of the institution. It was felt that the external quality audit would provide the leadership with the tools needed to impose greater control over the academic staff.

The management view, by contrast, alluded to the necessity to manage a large and unwieldy institution that had just experienced a merger as well as being transformed into a novel institutional type (the UoT typology had been introduced to South African higher education in 2004 following the merger of technikons). They also indicated that the fragmented nature of the institution (taken to mean the geographical dispersion of learning sites across a wide area as well as the merging of three disparate institutions) required greater centralised management in order to forge a new unified institution. In addition, they were of the opinion that consultation with internal stakeholders, though critical to inform decision making, had to end at some point so that decisions can be implemented as they (management) still had to manage the institution as a going concern.

5.7.3. Leadership capacity

The commentary on capacity took its cue from the observations on leadership credibility alluded to earlier in the chapter and suggested that the leadership's lack of credibility or eminence in the academic community was evidence of poor leadership capacity to manage a large and complex organisation. The academics pointed to the inability or unwillingness of the leadership to address the state of flux and uncertainty that had characterised the institution. The academics were of the opinion that the leadership did little to improve staff morale given the fundamental changes that had been visited upon the institution.

Acad 3: There's just no trust and good working relations – and you know what's the sad part – the management is doing nothing to make the people feel safe or at least do something to boost morale – they know that morale is low, but very little is done to improve – I just get the feeling that we are worth nothing – leave and you can be replaced. But at the end of the day the student suffers.

While management acknowledged that staff morale was low, little was offered in terms of how this situation would be addressed. It was further argued that in not possessing the necessary attributes to motivate, guide and lead staff, the leadership resorted to their formal authority and power to force decision making as well as to impose their will upon the institution.

5.8. Concluding remarks

This chapter presented the findings of the interviews using the cultural elements framework as the organising framework. Within each cultural element the findings were presented in terms of how the organisational members perceived the introduction of external quality assurance. In commenting on those perceptions, the researcher established that the institution was characterised by a fragmented organisational culture, which in turn resulted in a complex and contested relationship with external quality assurance. The research findings pointed to a coexistence of amended cultures of the academy with the institution, thereby questioning the morally just and democratising discourse that permeated the introduction of external quality assurance in the South

African context. In the next chapter, the findings are synthesised and the second research sub-question is addressed by proposing a model that may be used to explain the relationship between the organisational culture and the implementation and eventual outcomes of external quality assurance in the form of the institutional audit.

Chapter Six: Synthesis, conclusions and recommendations

6.1. Introduction

The final chapter brings together the study by providing a synthesis of the literature and the research findings. The chapter addresses the research questions by using the analytical framework to demonstrate that organisational culture and external quality assurance are complex multidimensional constructs that display characteristics that go beyond their commonly presented democratising and public-good discourse. The findings are summarised to indicate that despite the existence of multiple and contrasting organisational cultures and external quality assurance's competing roles and purposes, certain cultures and agendas predominate. The chapter then presents a model to be used in suggestive manner to explore the complex relationship between the central constructs as well as a set of conclusions that explicates that relationship. The chapter thereafter suggests a set of recommendations to enable the achievement of authentic and enduring change in HEIs and ends with concluding remarks.

6.2. Synthesis

6.2.1. Synthesis of the literature

The research on the relationship between organisational culture and external quality assurance began by bringing both constructs onto the same analytical plane in order to facilitate analysis and theory building. The preferred analytical framework was adapted from Burrell and Morgan's (1979:347) typology of sociological paradigms and was used in a suggestive manner in order to examine the central constructs in a higher education setting. In using an analytical framework to review the literature on both constructs, as well as to guide the subsequent research methodology, the researcher demonstrated that researching and theorising about organisational culture and external quality assurance were dependent on the philosophical and political orientations of the researcher (Tsoukas and Knudson, 2003). In other words, the aim was to indicate that both constructs, contrary to their portrayal in popular and managerialist academic literature, were neither neutral nor free from ideological influences (Ogbor, 2001; Anderson, 2006). The analytical framework pointed to ontological, epistemological and methodological controversies that have dogged both the academic study of organisational culture and external quality assurance. This study built on the work of Parker (2000) and Trowler (1998) in conceptualising organisational culture and external quality assurance by using a multidimensional framework that underscored the importance of epistemological and ontological differentiation. The adapted four-perspective framework facilitated the broad

categorisation and analysis of the extant literature while taking cognisance of Parker's (2000:60) cautionary note of the "conceptual violence" that may be required to force literature into conceptual or theoretical boxes into which they may not sit comfortably.

The functionalist, managerialist perspective, which appears to find the most favour among scholars, points to remarkable similarities in the conceptualisation and theorising of organisational culture and external quality assurance. Organisational culture is generally viewed as a homogenous and unitary entity whereby members share a set of values or assumptions and accordingly act with organisation-wide consensus, consistency and clarity (Martin, 1992:45). So, from a functionalist perspective, there is a singular truth driving the organisational culture and it is the role of the management to find, protect, manage and bequeath that set of truths to ensure the unchanging social order. Trowler (1998:29) argues that the functionalist definition is one-dimensional in that it alludes merely to corporate culture, which is viewed as the way in which the work is organised, the hierarchy defined, formal power distributed and the espoused corporate values direct the general ethos of the institution. Ogbor (2001) takes a more critical view by alluding to the hegemonic power of corporate culture as one that legitimates, consolidates and perpetuates the power capital of the managerial elites.

This perspective of QMSs in higher education and the role played by external quality assurance in validating those systems follows a similar line of thinking. The aim of establishing QMSs in HEIs was founded upon the need to increase the effectiveness and efficiency in response to factors ranging from globalisation (Amaral, 2007) to the

widening of access, new technologies and demands for greater accountability by external stakeholders such as national states on the way taxpayers' money is being spent (Harvey and Newton, 2007). The introduction of QMSs has its champions, who point to the development of robust management information systems, improved monitoring and evaluation of their core, support and management functions, and greater transparency in decision making. The improved efficiencies punted by this approach appeared particularly attractive to stakeholders such as national states seeking greater returns on investing in higher education in an era characterised by greater financial stringency and the need for value for money.

The consequence of those demands had led to the corporatisation of the university with a corresponding shift to centralised control, as power shifts from the academics to the managers (Kogan, 2002). The increasing corporatisation of the university finds expression in what is termed new managerialism (Lomas, 2007), where the focus is on strengthening the hand of the central administrators, as the emphasis is on ensuring institutional financial success. The allure of managerialism lies in its seductive language of excellence, performance and efficiency borrowed from the business sector to underpin the introduction of quality assurance. As Lomas (2007:405) asserts, the shift in power from the academic to the central administrators transforms the priorities, cultures and practices of the university with the increasing emphasis on compliance and accountability. It would therefore appear that the primary beneficiaries are the senior managers, who would use quality assurance to measure their level of efficiency and

determine the level of goal achievement. Critically, Lomas (2007:406) argues that accountability, audit and assessment elements of quality assurance aim at controlling the behaviours of people in higher education towards the management-determined goal of accountability, effectiveness and efficiency. The functionalist appropriation of organisational culture and external quality assurance sees both functioning as control mechanisms, requiring preapproved and predetermined beliefs, assumptions and behaviours, while actively prohibiting those that are viewed as contrary and consequently considered undesirable.

The radical structuralist and political perspective, by contrast, argues that organisational culture is more than a consequence of internal organisational contexts. The view here is that organisational culture is closely connected to and reflects the prevailing socio-economic milieu. In addition, this perspective points to the desire for sudden, almost revolutionary change, to bring about a complete break from the past, hence the term 'radical' (Nurminen, 1997). It is further argued that the radical structuralist aims to transform the social impact of organisational culture and to create organisations and societies free from domination (Ogbor, 2001). However, as Wood (2004) asserts, within this perspective there is one set of truth to discover and the only way to bring about the organisation to that truth is through radical change of the prevailing socio-economic system. While change within this perspective is generally viewed as 'progressive', Nurminen (1997) argues that there is sufficient space within the perspective to locate structural change in the opposite direction, that is, change that serves not to emancipate,

but rather to introduce new forms of domination, albeit under new and progressive guises. While, according to Ogbor (2001), there has been some literature on the role of globalisation and international capital on the production and/or reproduction of certain patterns of identity, social and cultural structures within organisations, this perspective remains under-theorised and under-researched.

When it comes to higher education, Amaral (2007:4) cites Ball's (1998) profound statement that there has been "an increasing colonisation of education policy by economic policy imperatives" and that the subsequent structural changes have resulted in significant changes in ideology, values and in the relationship between higher education and the state. This altered relationship finds expression in the pressure exerted by the state on higher education to become more responsive and relevant to the national economy and meet policy imperatives, as evidenced in the United Kingdom (Harvey, 2006), Australia (Vidovich, 2001) and South Africa (CHE, 2007). Such change assumes a structural form and is imposed by states that do not have the patience for change to occur incrementally. Cooper (2003) argues that external quality assurance (as well as internal quality management) appears to be one of the key instruments available to states pursuing the new agenda, as it fits well with the ideology of the market.

The purposes of external quality assurance were to assuage fears regarding the credibility of the institutions' degrees by making explicit public statements regarding academic standards and that the public were getting value for money via effective and efficient academic provisioning. While universities themselves had to make public statements

regarding the manner in which they were meeting their vision, mission, goals and objectives, establishing policies and procedures to ensure continuous improvement and employing strategies that demonstrated fitness of purpose and fitness for purpose, the whole process would be validated by an external quality agency. Despite the exhortations of national states regarding the desirability of external quality assurance as a public good, Houston (1997) cautions that external quality assurance does not necessarily address the concerns and interests of those closest to teaching and learning, research and community engagement, as the state demands that the university does more with less, align itself with national goals and adopt a fitness of purpose approach to quality.

While the functionalist and the radical structuralist perspectives have largely treated organisational culture as external to the organisation, reified into a object and suggested that with the right technology, such as external quality assurance, it can be manipulated into a predetermined fit, the interpretivist and collegial perspective argues that the organisational member and how he or she understands the organisation should be the key focus. It is therefore argued that by examining how that member makes sense of what happens in the organisation would in all likelihood result in a more nuanced and sensitive view of the organisation. According the Martin (1992), the study of the often neglected organisational elements, such as architecture, furniture and language, and the nature of the members' engagement, interpretation and understanding of those elements individually and collectively provide a more acute insight into the culture of the organisation.

Culture is perceived as the common understanding that actors within an organisational context have of these elements. However, these meanings or understandings are constantly being reformulated through actions within the organisation. Therefore, culture can neither be viewed as a set of prescriptions about organisational behaviour nor can it be viewed as something that can be easily manipulated.

When external quality assurance is viewed through this perspective, which focuses on people's subjective experience of the world and the manner in which they construct and share meanings with the aim of seeking consensus, cohesion and integration at a local level, the role of the academic at the local level takes precedence over institutional level initiatives. As illustrated in Chapter Three, the interpretive sociological perspective embraces and provides an intellectual home for the collegial culture of higher education. Three important interrelated characteristics of the collegial culture underpin its localised, subjective interpretation of reality. The first posits that academics demonstrate a greater loyalty to their academic disciplines and their local colleagues than to the central administration of the university (Bergquist, 1992; Bergquist and Pawlak, 2007). The second privileges the academic's autonomy over academic matters, often in the guise of academic freedom. The final characteristic views academics as professionals that pursue their own academic interests and research and teaching agendas, who require little or no managerial oversight by central administration over their work. The implication for external quality assurance is that academics, while exercising their academic freedom, would also be the custodians of academic excellence and quality, requiring their peers'

validation and affirmation rather than oversight by an external agency with a questionable membership and agenda. Therefore, in Nurminen's (1997) view, this approach would be more likely to foster creativity and excellence (quality), as academics in control of their professional destiny would manage and improve their practices on their own terms and by themselves.

Whereas the interpretivist perspective privileges local meanings and interpretations over organisational considerations, the radical humanist conceptualisation of organisation culture posits it as the contested relations between the distinctive meanings and understandings held by various groups (Wood, 2004). Consequently, organisations are construed as having multiple cultures that may be embedded within an overall culture rather than a monolithic and homogenous one. These cultures cut across vertical and horizontal occupational functions as well as age, gender, social class, race and geographical boundaries. The key issues are that they are characterised by clusters of ideologies, cultural forms and behaviours and may at any given time be consistent, neutral or in conflict with the overall organisational culture (Ott, 1989; Martin, 2003). In other words, membership of these cultures are more fluid and less immutable as was first thought, as people can be part of different cultures at the same time, brought together more by shared interests rather than by demographic tags.

Martin (1992) points out that in coalescing around a common issue or concern, power, domination and potential for conflict are commonplace, as power is diffused across the members with some being in power and others subordinated. Therefore, as Parker (2000)

succinctly observes, organisational culture from this perspective is viewed as a struggle for supremacy as various groupings attempt to privilege their position, station and benefit. Abravanel's (1983) assertion that organisational culture is more akin to organisational ideology, which is defined as the beliefs of dominant groups that are used to control interpretations of meanings and understandings as well as actions, is particularly instructive. It should, however, also be noted that those who appear to be subordinated are not necessarily powerless, as resistance to dominant modalities may range from subtle forms such as non-compliance, deferred decision making and the withholding of information, to more overt acts of sabotage and subversion. A final point with regard to the radical humanist perspective is that it holds the most promise with its attempts to bring about genuine and fundamental change by challenging and altering patterns of domination.

Quality in higher education from this perspective resonates with Harvey and Green's (1993) definition of quality as transformation, which is inconsistent with the role and function of external quality assurance as it is currently conceptualised. Transformation is seen as more than the mere replacement of one system with another, as it requires critical thinking to focus on the act of transformation and its consequences (Boshier, 1999). It has been argued that since traditional education systems serve primarily the corporate and political elite, transformation must aim to overthrow modes of domination and empower the underclass to appropriate education as a means to emancipation. Furthermore, radical humanists caution against the adoptions of seemingly neutral

technologies, such as external quality assurance, which are punted as panaceas to the problems in higher education. Given the unequal distribution of power favouring national states, external quality agencies and institutional central management, it would be highly unlikely that power would be relinquished in the name of democratising higher education and empowering the disempowered.

In sum then, the literature on organisational culture and external quality assurance appears to be divided along epistemological and ontological lines. While the functionalist and managerialist literature (and policy) reifies organisational culture as unitary and homogenous and glibly pronounces that the 'right culture' can bring about efficiencies so desirous of the managerialists, and that external quality assurance as a 'neutral technology' can make higher education more effective, there is sufficient scholarly evidence to dispute these claims. All four perspectives that were used to analyse the extant literature of both constructs have their strengths and are not without their limitations. Suffice to say, the hegemonic position of the functionalist and managerialist views of organisational culture and external quality assurance, though challenged in scholarly literature, appears to be stronger than ever. This is evidenced in the trend of more and more national states moving towards establishing and consolidating external quality agencies and deploying fairly similar methodologies (Bradley, 2005). Despite growing evidence that the manipulation of organisational culture is less easier said than done (Trowler, 1998; Parker, 2000) and that external quality assurance may not yield the

benefits its champions unquestioningly proclaim (Anderson, 2006; Filippakou and Tapper, 2007; Harvey and Newton, 2007), they remain strongly advocated.

6.2.2. Synthesis of the findings

The four perspective elements of the data analysis model developed in Chapter Four provided the analytical framework to examine and subsequently synthesise the literature on both constructs. Similarly, the amended four cultures of the academy, namely the transformational, collegial, political and managerial cultures, which were embedded in their respective theoretical homes within the data-analysis model, were used to synthesise the research findings. In line with the pragmatic and pluralist, rather than the mutually exclusive use of perspectives, the amended cultures of the academy were similarly used in a suggestive manner to present a synthesis of the findings given the complexity of the organisational world as well as the premise that such cultures are constantly in a state of flux and renegotiation.

The managerial culture, embedded in the functionalist perspective, found expression in the desire by management for the institution to give a good account of itself. In addition, it was claimed that as the institution had nothing to hide, the external quality-assurance audit would and should be welcomed. The external quality-assurance audit would also provide the impetus for the management to 'shake things up', serve as a wake-up call for so-called lazy academics and be used as an opportunity to get rid of those staff who were

perceived as not adding value to the institution. The last assertion was a particularly insightful indicator of the managerial culture, as it suggested that there was only space for those members who subscribed to this culture, as whose behaviours fell in line with management-defined values. A further link to the managerial culture lay in the belief that external quality assurance and accountability were inextricably linked and that the institution was obligated to demonstrate that it spent taxpayers' money prudently by, among other things, instilling a more committed work ethos among the staff. While there appeared to be consensus regarding being held accountable for one's actions, the question of accountable to whom and/or to what emerged quite strongly. The external quality-assurance exercise appeared to tacitly privilege accountability towards central management and the national policy agenda rather than towards the academy, which should have been the case in any endeavour that purports to improve quality in higher education.

The most compelling indicator of the managerial culture was the belief that a key outcome of external quality assurance would be the introduction of a new bureaucracy and increased centralised managerial controls. In pointing to the efficiency and value-for-money dimensions of quality, it was suggested that the primary beneficiary of external quality assurance would be management, as the academics would have to do more with less. Furthermore, it was argued that external quality assurance alluded more to a quality 'management system' rather than one that aimed at improving teaching and learning. The managerial effective and efficiency dimensions were not rejected in their entirety; it

was rather argued that this should be declared upfront as the primary rationale of external quality assurance instead of camouflaging it within the improving the quality of teaching and learning discourse. Despite perceived threats to academic freedom and potential loss of institutional autonomy, the question as to why management would embrace the external quality-assurance audit, almost without question, arose. The reasons probably lay in the belief that the external quality-assurance exercise strengthened the hand of management to centralise control over the institution by moving the locus of influence and control over academic matters from the academics to management.

The external quality-assurance audit therefore appeared to support the centralisation of managerial control and by implication tacitly strengthened the managerial culture within the institution. The findings point to an interesting dynamic on how this manifested within the institution. First, the management of the newly created institution sought the validation of the external quality assurance of their academic offerings to uphold their standing within the higher education community and in the public eye. Second, external quality assurance could also compensate for a lack of credibility capital in the current leadership by generating findings that appeared to vindicate and validate the managerial strategy and choices. While a poor audit report was also possible and had the potential to damage the existing management, it was found that a carefully stage-managed self-assessment and subsequent theatrical performance during the audit visit would ensure that only relatively minor shortcomings are surfaced while the more fundamental

weaknesses would be kept from the review panel, which would ensure that a very critical report would be highly unlikely. The weakness of the current external quality-assurance methodology, whereby a panel conducts a visit over a week merely to validate claims made in the self-evaluation report, was advanced as a reason for ensuring that the true state of affairs would in all probability be rarely uncovered. In addition, the lack of formal sanctions following negative external quality-assurance outcomes indicates there would be little motivation to bring about fundamental change. It would therefore seem that external quality assurance, despite its supposedly noble intentions, strengthens the hand of central management by demanding accountability to the institution and ensuring alignment and loyalty to the management-determined vision, mission and goals, and provides management with a tool to ensure compliance with an unitary set of values and beliefs, in other words, the fostering of a functionalist managerial culture.

The political culture, taking its cue from developments in the wider socio-economic context, highlighted an acute awareness of the need to transform existing relations and arrangements. External quality assurance, especially in societies in transition, is often justified as an instrument to steer higher education towards fulfilling the state's social and political agenda. The political culture, located in the radical functionalist perspective, suggests that society is characterised by fundamental conflict and that radical change often follows political and economic crises, such as the one experienced in South Africa after 1994. The inference here is that the culture of the organisation would reflect the class (and other) struggles that occur within the larger socio-economic context of that

organisation. Within the organisation, the political culture recognised the need for change on a similar magnitude, and it was argued that the organisation had not sufficiently ‘transformed’, which was taken to mean that it had not adequately operationalised the national employment equity and affirmative action legislation policies.

The political culture pointed to the inevitability of the organisation’s alignment with the predetermined national policies, even if those policies may or may not be congruous with advancing the quality of their core business (see 5.6.1.). Despite acknowledging that not all role-players would buy into the singularity of the national policy agenda, the institution would nevertheless have to align its strategy to that agenda, since external quality assurance, together with state control over funding and the institution’s programme and qualification mix, would ensure institutional compliance. It was found that external quality assurance was interpreted as an instrument to force the higher education sector into a predetermined fit and that its legislated status as well as its seemingly moral authority would silence criticism, let alone any form of formal dissent. The assertion was that the unequal power relation that existed between the state, the external quality agency and the institution left little room for the institution to manoeuvre.

The findings underscore the observation that while political and the radical structuralist perspective appear to be motivated by a ‘progressive’ agenda to transform entrenched structural inequalities, the potential for replacing one form of domination with another still remains (see 5.2.1., 5.2.6. and 5.2.7.). Whereas previous oppressive systems, such as apartheid in South Africa and totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe, were overtly

suppressive, the newer forms of domination assume more sophisticated forms, by using euphemistic terms such as 'steering' and 'light touch' to disguise instruments of state control.

Despite these perceptions, there did not appear to be a sense of disempowerment within this particular institution. Indeed, the understandings of the various groupings of external quality assurance made them cognisant of the potential impact on their work and consequently raised their awareness to manage the intrusion of the external quality-assurance exercise accordingly. They internalised that open dissent and opposition to the external quality-assurance audit would be futile given its policy status and moral authority. Therefore, in protecting their traditional spheres of influence and to bring about change, they would resort to more subtle means, such as 'surface engagement', by creating the illusion of participation and acceptance, knowing full well that the complexity of the organisation would render attempts at centralised control somewhat futile and that they would therefore retain some measure of meaningful control over their activities.

In contrast to the view of the organisation as an agent of an externally defined change, the collegial culture focuses on the organisational member and how that member understands the organisation. The difference between the collegial culture and the transformative culture is that in the former the need for consensus, cohesion and solidarity at the level of the local actors would be elevated above that of the organisation. Although there was a tacit acknowledgement that HEIs should in fact reflect the

democratic mores of the post-1994 South African society, it was questioned whether external quality assurance was the appropriate means to that end. The collegial culture argues that the improvement of the academic enterprise should be the core focus of quality initiatives in higher education. It should, however, be noted that, while the collegial culture aims for consensus and solidarity, the findings at this particular institution did point to 'fractured' relationships among colleagues, as multiple agendas rendered so-called collegial relationships nearly impossible. A possible reason advanced for the lack of collegiality was the failure to manage the merger of the institution with sufficient care and sensitivity.

The findings indicated that there was a disconnection between the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning and the external quality assurance definitions of quality (see 5.2.2). In addition, the notion of 'audit' was considered problematic because the focus was not on improving quality, but rather on complying with predetermined standards, which, given the complexity of the disciplines within the academy, may render the outcomes of the external quality-assurance exercise, as currently conceptualised, somewhat unconvincing and hollow (see 5.2.3. and 5.2.6.). Furthermore, reservations with the prevailing view that benefits from the external quality-assurance audit would automatically and by default accrue to the academy were also expressed, as there was little empirical evidence that supported the rationale and methodology of current external quality-assurance practices. It was pointed that the methodology of external quality assurance was resource-intensive, especially with regard to the time and

intellectual energy that had to be dedicated to the internal quality-assurance processes (see 5.2.3). The inference here is that external quality assurance appears to have a large opportunity cost to organisational members, as they would have to redirect their attention and intellectual resources from their disciplines and core functions to another set of activities that they had neither initiated nor necessarily believed in. While the efficiency aspects of external quality assurance were somewhat maligned, the 'return on investment' and 'cost-benefit' arguments were advanced to question whether external quality assurance would meaningfully improve the quality of interactions in the classroom. Consequently, it was claimed that an illusion of participation would be created without any deep engagement and that, once the audit event had passed, attention would simply be focussed on the core business and life would go on as normal. Furthermore, the collegial culture interpreted accountability primarily in terms of their academic discipline or core function, rather than to the institution and/or any other external stakeholders.

The transformative culture resonated to some degree with Harvey and Green's (1993) notion of quality as transformation. In this definition, higher education develops students to be "adaptive, adaptable and transformative" (Warn and Tranter, 2001:191). The argument of the transformative culture is that for traditional modes of domination to be broken, higher education should develop students' higher-order knowledge, skills and abilities to foster critical thinking and action. Tam (2001) extends this argument by calling for a fundamental change in form, cognitive transcendence and transformed self-image.

In order to bring about such change in students, external quality assurance should be seen as empowering the academy rather than strengthening centralised control and perpetuating modes of managerial domination. Given these noble and honourable goals with regard to the transformative culture, the findings were somewhat surprising. First, the findings indicated that conditions within the institution were not conducive to a transformative culture at the time the study was undertaken. It would appear that the internal organisational context prioritised and privileged the other cultures over the transformative culture. Second, external quality assurance, despite its democratising rhetoric and transformative discourse, seemed to favour and strengthen managerial and political cultures. The findings appear to support the assertion that the highest-order purpose of higher education, namely the transformation of student experience, was undermined by managerial and political imperatives.

6.3. Conclusions

The first and most obvious conclusion of the study is that the view of organisational culture as monolithic, homogeneous and unitary is a somewhat impoverished one, as the synthesis of the literature as well as the findings revealed. Rather, it should be considered as being more ephemeral than concrete, multidimensional than singular, characterised simultaneously by conflict, consensus and indifference and in a constant state of flux. The point is that an organisation, especially one that has undergone fundamental change, cannot be said to have a so-called organisational culture that is easily amenable to

manipulation, as several cultures may be said to be in existence at any given time. Furthermore, attempting to use demographic tags, such as race, gender, social class or occupational category, to categorise membership of such cultures, is somewhat limited, as members coalesce around common issues or concerns and consequently cannot be categorised into fixed, immutable classificatory schemas. The implication is that organisational culture may not, contrary to the popularly held view, be easily manipulated by managers in order to entrench or even direct actions and values towards a predetermined end. Therefore, the assertion that the creation of the right organisational culture by management is, often glibly, advanced as a precondition to advancing the organisation is somewhat spurious, as various groupings either endorse, reject or remain indifferent, depending on whether such efforts advance their cause or interests or not.

The second major conclusion is that external quality assurance is not necessarily a value-free and neutral exercise aimed at improving the quality of teaching and learning, as promised in its early conceptualisation and implementation phases. Even when its political agenda is explicitly articulated, especially in societies in transition, where the stated goal is linked to democratisation and advancement of communities neglected by previous regimes, the implementation and outcomes (intended and unintended) may not necessarily result in those seemingly noble and morally justifiable intents. External quality assurance's often rationalised and championed position that it is aimed at the public good by ensuring that higher education fulfils its social and economic obligations in a manner that is effective and efficient appears to have universal resonance. The caveat, however,

is that the transformation of student experiences appears to be relegated to a secondary goal to allow external quality assurance to facilitate the political goals of national states. The use of a sophisticated and seemingly morally justifiable and democratising discourse disguises external quality assurance's more insidious intents.

The third major conclusion relates to organisational culture and external quality assurance and proposes a model that could be used to understand their complex relationship, as depicted in Figure 6.1.

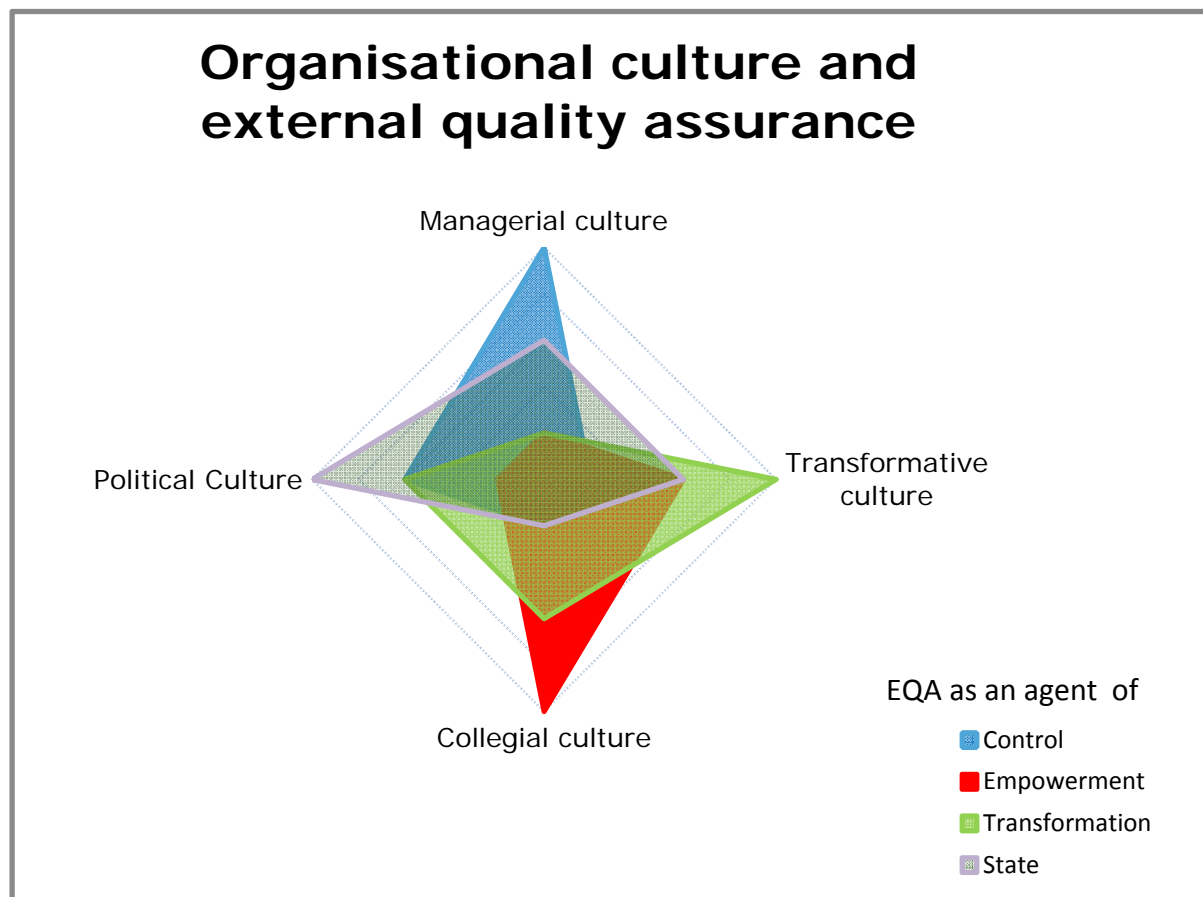


Figure 6.1: The relationship between organisational culture and external quality assurance

Figure 6.1 illustrates that while organisational culture is not necessarily unitary, it may be viewed as demonstrating characteristics that may be defined as managerial, political, collegial and transformative. These are neither ideal-type cultures nor do they necessarily depict incommensurable polarities or fixed and immutable membership. They are to be used in a suggestive manner to indicate that these cultures may exist simultaneously, interact and influence each other constantly and of course determine interactions within the organisation and the nature of engagement with externally originated initiatives. The second feature depicted by Figure 6.1 explicates the different purposes of external quality assurance. This study has demonstrated that external quality assurance has purposes that go beyond its often morally just and public-good motives, as external quality assurance acts as an agent of control, empowerment, transformation and of the state. As with the organisational cultures, external quality assurance plays these different roles simultaneously, though not necessarily to the same extent, tacitly and overtly. Finally, Figure 6.1 aimed to demonstrate that there is a connection between the different roles played by the different organisational cultures and external quality assurance. The figure does not indicate a correlational relationship; rather the qualitative findings demonstrate that the different purposes of external quality assurance resonates with each of the organisational cultures and strengthens the one to which it is most closely connected. The figure depicts that external quality assurance's control agenda strengthens the managerial culture, the transformative agenda strengthens the transformative culture,

the empowerment agenda strengthens the collegial culture, and the state agenda strengthens the political culture.

6.4. Recommendations

Given that external quality assurance, at least in the South African context, would be an inevitable feature of the higher education landscape for the foreseeable future, the following recommendations may assist with its relationship with the organisational cultures of tertiary institutions.

The first relates to the conceptualisation of organisational culture. The study's use of the four-perspective theoretical framework demonstrated that organisational culture is a multidimensional and complex construct. Therefore, glib statements that the right organisational culture is one that is amenable to shaping and directing towards management-determined goals is an impoverished assumption that in all probability would lead to any genuine and authentic quality (or change) initiative not achieving its stated goals and objectives. While the research has demonstrated that the managerial, collegial, political and transformative cultures may coexist simultaneously within an organisation, the first three cultures predominated in the literature and in the research findings. Ironically, the transformative culture that should characterise knowledge organisations such as HEIs appeared to be lacking, which may undermine any fundamental change initiative. It is therefore recommended that due consideration be

given to the development and nourishment of a transformative culture to underpin any quality initiative by fostering critical thinking and action in organisational members to break traditional modes of domination to realise fundamental change in form, cognitive transcendence and transformed self-image in a creative academic enterprise.

The second recommendation relates to the discourse underpinning external quality assurance. As had been demonstrated with organisational culture, external quality assurance too, appears to appeal to multiple and sometimes competing agendas. Like organisational culture, it has been shown that external quality assurance acts as agent of the state, seeks to consolidate managerial control, sometimes empowers academics and rarely brings about transformation, especially in the lives of students. The key concern is that while the rhetoric of external quality assurance appeals to the latter two purposes, in practice, it appears to strengthen and consolidate the former two. The first part of this recommendation therefore suggests that the rationale of external quality assurance be openly declared and that the higher education community be informed accordingly without any punitive measures or consequences following non-compliance. The second part of the recommendation suggests that as long as external quality assurance, overtly or tacitly, drives the agenda of the state and of the management of HEIs, it would in all probability not achieve the higher-order goal of transformed student experiences and would remain a compliance exercise that would be subtly and subversively undermined. It is therefore recommended that external quality assurance is reconceptualised to

empower the academy to once again assume responsibility for the quality of its teaching and learning and furthermore that it aims at transformative student experiences.

The third recommendation is aligned to the recommendations mentioned above and concerns the relationship between external quality assurance and organisational culture. External quality assurance is often offered as a means to develop the 'right' organisational culture to the management of universities, the so-called neutral technology to drive change and ensure that all organisational members share the same values and beliefs. This study has demonstrated that both sets of assumptions are fallacious and point to the reason why fundamental change do not always happen at institutions post external quality initiatives. In drawing attention to the relationship between the agent of state and the control agenda of external quality assurance to the political and managerial cultures, the study has demonstrated that the external quality-assurance practice and the institution derive mutually beneficial outcomes that appear to relegate the concerns of the academy and students to a secondary status. It is therefore recommended that the external quality-assurance practice elevates its empowerment and transformation agendas to strengthen the collegial and transformative cultures of the organisation in order to foster authentic and enduring quality.

The fourth recommendation relates to items for future research. First, as Harvey and Newton (2004) observed, the conceptualisation of external quality assurance as well as its approach and methodology needs to be informed by research and derived from evidence-based policy. This study argues that, equally importantly, newer definitions of quality

derived from longitudinal studies and based on graduate attributes may be more helpful in improving the academic enterprise. Second, while this study has favoured the interpretive over the functionalist perspective, it nevertheless asserts that an empirical cost-benefit analysis of external quality assurance is necessary to advance the understanding of the impact of external audits on HEIs. Third, further research in multiple sites to track the impact of external quality assurance in catalysing fundamental change is necessary, as is an investigation into surface versus deep engagement by organisational members regarding external quality assurance. Fourth, the nature of accountability in terms of its levels, to whom and/or what, and the management of multiple accountabilities require further investigation in order to determine levels of organisational commitment. Finally, institutional intelligence is often offered as a benefit or motivation for embracing external quality assurance. However, this taken-for-granted assumption requires clear elucidation as little has been offered in terms of what is institutional intelligence, valid and reliable means for its gathering and analysis and crucially, how it is to be used and by whom.

6.5. Concluding remarks

This study had sought to explore the relationship between organisational culture and external quality assurance in a newly merged South African UoT. The specific research question that guided the study, namely “What is the nature of the organisational culture of an HEI and how does it determine the relationship with external quality assurance in the form of an institutional audit?”, was supported by two sub-questions, namely “How do the assumptions and values of organisational members define the organisational culture of an HEI?” and “What model or framework could explain the relationship between the organisational culture and implementation and eventual outcomes of external quality assurance in the form of the institutional audit?” The researcher was drawn to the topic by the seemingly taken-for-granted assumptions that benefits would accrue to the university following the external quality assurance audit, and that one of those benefits would be creation of the ‘right’ organisational culture, assist in leveraging change and bring about greater efficiencies and effectiveness. It was found that these assumptions were not sufficiently tested and that there were philosophical, conceptual and methodological controversies and contestations surrounding both constructs.

In order to systematically explore the literature on organisational culture and external quality assurance, collect and analyse data and present the findings of the study, the researcher constructed a multidimensional theoretical framework. This framework provided a structured tool with which to demonstrate that both constructs may be

viewed via multiple lenses or perspectives in order to test commonly held and articulated notions. The framework enabled the researcher to examine epistemological and ontological differences in the conceptualisation of both constructs and in so doing attempted a more holistic and comprehensive overview.

The research findings from the case study demonstrated that the popularly held notion of organisational culture as homogenous, unitary and amenable to manipulation from above in the creation of a set of shared values is somewhat spurious. The findings indicate that multiple cultures coexist simultaneously and share a relationship that at times is consensual, conflicted or indifferent. While there are cultures that enjoy dominance, the others are not entirely disempowered, as they have the potential to exercise their resistance in subtle and covert ways. The key point here is that organisational culture is not a fixed and immutable phenomenon, as it is constantly in a state of flux as the organisational members engage with internally and externally derived quality initiatives in ways that either confirm their dominant position or resist it in ways that minimise the impact of those initiatives on their preferred way of doing things. The second construct of the study, namely external quality assurance, was also found to be multidimensional with several layers of stated and unstated intents despite being championed by a democratising and public-good rhetoric. The findings indicate that the primary beneficiaries are the state and university management, as external quality assurance appears to drive an accountability agenda to national policy and central management.

This research attempted to address the gap in current thinking on the relationship between organisational culture and external quality assurance by demonstrating that neither, in themselves or jointly, may achieve their lofty promise as potential panaceas to higher education's challenges. Their limitations were found to reside in impoverished theorising and the lack of systematic research prior to making glib pronouncements on their potential benefits. The research has shown that fundamental and enduring change in higher education is largely contingent on the elevation of a transformative organisational culture and the transformation agenda of external quality assurance.

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Appendix 1: Interview guide

Interview guide and field notes

Date: _____

Venue:

Time started: _____

Time ended:

Interviewee category: _____

Interviewee:

Introductory comments

Good afternoon (Prof, Dr, Mr, Ms)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my study. As you are aware, I am researching the relationship between organisational culture and the introduction of external quality assurance. This study is very important, as it would enable us (you and I) to understand the institution we work in as well how the new external quality audit may impact on us.

I would like to reassure you that our conversation will be treated in the strictest confidence and no one besides me, the data-capturer and my supervisor will have access to it. If you do not mind, I would like to record our conversation to assist me to recall the details as well as in my data analysis. You will be given an opportunity to listen to the interview recording and view the transcript to verify its accuracy. If you are not satisfied in any way, I will destroy them both.

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I have prepared an informed consent form that outlines the details of confidentiality and I would like you to sign it before we could commence [hand out form].

If you do you have any questions we can proceed.

Themes	Question	Observation and Notes
Environment	<p>As you know the HEQC will be conducting institutional audits at all universities:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The HEQC defines quality as fitness for purpose, value for money, transformation. What do you understand by that definition? 2. What are your views on external quality audits? 3. What effect would such audits have on the institution? <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. How do you think the institution would respond to the audit? b. Why would you say that? c. How should it respond? d. What impact do you think the audit will have on your work? 	
Mission	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What role did you play in defining the vision and mission of the new university? 2. Would you say that there was sufficient 	

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	<p>participation by all institutional role players in the defining the mission (If no – why)</p> <p>3. Do you think that the mission addresses local and national priorities?</p> <p>4. If the institution wanted to redefine its mission, how would you advise that it should go about it?</p>	
Socialisation	<p>5. What would be a new staff member’s first impressions of the university?</p> <p>6. Why would you say that?</p> <p>7. Does the university promote closer working relationship among its staff?</p> <p>8. How would you describe the relationship between staff on different levels (for example, between management and the academic staff)?</p>	
Information	<p>9. How is important information communicated across the institution</p> <p>10. Who do you think are main sources of information?</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">a. Why would you say that”</p> <p>11. What information do you consider to be important to do your work and to be part of the university?</p> <p>12. What about the HEQC’s quality audit has been</p>	

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	shared with you?	
Strategy	<p>13. We spoke a little earlier about mission. Do you believe that the activities within the institution are guided by its mission?</p> <p>14. The HEQC wants the institution set up quality management systems</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What do you understand by a quality systems? b. Do you think they will bring about improved quality in our teaching learning c. Do think it would lead to greater accountability to our students? d. How you think staff are going to respond the QMS demands? 	
Leadership	<p>15. Does the university promote participatory decision making?</p> <p>16. How would you describe the relationship between the leadership and the academics?</p> <p>17. How do you think the leadership (senior management) will respond to the HEQC audit (what would they with it)?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Why would you say that? 	
Closing	<p>Thank you for your participation. Do you have any questions for me? Remember, I will send you the transcript for verification and you can also request the tape recording.</p>	

Appendix 2: Interview Schedule

Interviewee Category	Interviewee	Date	Time	Venue
Academic	Acad 1	02/08/05	15:30	Office
	Acad 2	16/08/05	15:00	Office
	Acad 3	30/08/05	15:30	Office
	Acad 4	13/09/05	12:00	Office
	Acad 5	27/09/05	15:00	Office
Academic Development	Acad Dev 1	03/08/05	15:00	Office
	Acad Dev 2	17/08/05	15:30	Office
	Acad Dev 3	31/08/05	15:30	Office
	Acad Dev 4	14/09/05	16:00	Office
	Acad Dev 5	28/09/05	15:00	Office
Management	Man 1	05/08/05	16:30	Office
	Man 2	18/08/05	16:00	Office
	Man 3	1/09/05	16:00	Office
	Man 4	15/09/05	16:30	Office
	Man 5	29/09/05	16:30	Office
Senior Academic	Sen Acad 1	04/08/05	13:00	Office
	Sen Acad 2	19/08/05	15:30	Office
	Sen Acad 3	02/08/05	15:00	Office
	Sen Acad 4	16/08/05	15:00	Office
	Sen Acad 5	30/09/05	15:00	Office

Appendix 3: Informed consent form

I, the undersigned, agree to participate in a research project titled "organisational culture and external quality assurance" which is being conducted by Mr D Naidoo, a PhD student registered at Stellenbosch University.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary; I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty and have the results of my participation, to the extent that it can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The following points have been explained to me:

1. The purposes of the research are to:
 - (a) Examine the relationship between organisational culture(s) and external quality assurance.
 - (b) Develop a model that has the potential to explain this relationship.
2. The main data gathering instrument is a semi-structured interview.
3. Interviews may be audio taped and once transcribed will be destroyed.
4. Participants may choose not to respond to any question(s).
5. No risks, discomforts or stresses are foreseen.
6. The results of my participation will be confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my prior consent.
7. The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the research.

I have read and understand the Informed Consent and conditions of this research. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent for participation in this research project. I agree to abide by the rules of this research.

Signature of Participant

Date

Appendix 4: Sample Interviews

Interview with Academic Staff Member

Interview Transcript

Date: 02/08/06

Venue: Office

Time Started: 15:40

Time Ended: 16:35

Interviewee Category: Academic

Interviewee: (A1: Code Sam)

DN: Hi Sam – thanks for participating in the study – this is for my PhD – at Stellenbosch with Chris Kapp.

Acad 1: No problem – anything to improve things around here

DN: Before, we start – a couple of things – I just want you to know that everything you say is treated as confidential – we can stop at any time and if you want me to give you the tape – it's no problem. After I transcribe the tape – I'll send you a copy to check it through.

Acad 1: Should I be worried

DN: No – it's the formal procedure – and I'll be taping our interview – [pause] any problems there

Acad 1: No

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DN: I also have the informed consent – I would like to go through it with you

Acad 1: No that's okay.

DN: Okay – let's get started – You know I am looking at the relationship between organizational culture and quality assurance – especially focusing on the HEQC audit

Acad 1: Ja – with all the things still hanging in the air here – that too. When is our turn?

DN: I think sometime after 2007 – that's when they going to look at merging institution?

DN: Talking about the HEQC – what is your view on their definition of quality – you know fitness for purpose, value for money and transformation

Acad 1: I am not sure what is fitness for purpose?

DN: It means are we doing the things right – if look at our mission are we doing the things to achieve our mission

Acad 1: really – I'm not even sure what the mission is

DN: The HEQC's definition of quality

Acad 1: Ja – well I suppose it's okay – but I'm not sure about it here – you know transformation very hard to know

DN: Let's talk a little about the audit – what do think about these audits?

Acad 1: Will it be like SERTEC?

DN: Not exactly – but somewhat similar- we must write a report – the HEQC will appoint a panel – they will come and visit us – then a report.

Acad 1: but you know the mergers are not yet completed – no finality on anything – then this on top – you know what are we are busy doing – just trying to make sure that

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everyone on the campuses are doing the same thing- meeting after meeting – no shows – I’m not even sure about my job

DN: You think the audit will help make things better?

Acad 1: From what little I know – I think it’ll just make things worse – management will use it to fire people –

DN: why would you say that?

Acad 1:

DN: Let’s talk a little about that – how do you think the institution will respond to the audit?

Acad 1: Isn’t that your job [laughter] No seriously – if it’s like SERTEC we’ll go through the motions – prepare a fancy report – you know management will like a good report – they too sensitive. I think that it’ll be a whitewash – you know everyone wants to look good -

DN: You think the audit might be good for the institution

Acad 1: Maybe - I’m not sure – you know so much is changing here – that just another thing – it might be – it depends on the HEQC – from what I know it looks like they want us to conform to their thinking – you know quality is one thing – doing all this other stuff is another. They and the department – it’s one thing after another – now we must all look alike – with the merger – we were forced together – now we must look like what they want us to look like. Coming back to the audit – and if like SERTEC, nothing with change – we’ll go back to doing things they way

DN: What impact do you think that the audit will have on your work?

Acad 1: [Laughing] who do think is going to do the work – teaching – you know what my load is – now we have to upgrade qualifications and they talking about research – this is

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going to be one thing on top another – where is the time to teach – and don't talk about the students – everything you say... we will have to do all the work – write up the stories [laughter] make it up – but one thing for sure there's going to be lot more work –

DN: Do you think it'll change the way you doing things

Acad 1: Not really – I'm more interested in just surviving here – when all is said and done we will just have see who comes up on top after the musical chairs up there.

DN: I would like to raise the issue of the mission of the institution – how did you see the development of the mission?

Acad 1: Mission – oh the strategic planning – I was not involved – I think there was some workshops at Kiviets Kroon for selected people – this was presented to everyone – next thing we had a new mission vision and all that – You know – we never had a chance to influence those things – the deans here are just interested in retaining their jobs – They should consult the academic staff – you know we do the key work here – without us they are nothing yet we are just excluded.

DN: So you would say there was limited participation in defining the mission

Acad 1: Oh for sure – we are just told this is what the mission – you know there's consultation – and there's consultation – they consult and then don't change anything.

DN: How would you advise the university go about changing its mission?

Acad 1: For one, things involve all the academic staff – but there are so many things that's not yet sorted out – give us the information we need and we can help make better decisions – you know we are academics [laughs]. Seriously, we need to really talk about what's important – not just told – if this place is for all us – then all of us must be part of it. We need to be working together – not just be dumped on.

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DN: On that issue, what would a new staff member's first impression of the university be?

Acad 1: Why would anyone come here – no seriously, they would just be lost – running around from campus to the next – no clear directions – things changing all the time. We had a new staff member – temporary because they don't want to appoint permanent staff – you the merger – this lady did not know whether she was coming or going – this is not a good place to be working right now – and you know what – I don't think it's going to get better

DN: Why you would say that?

Acad 1: Can you see things improving – once this merger nonsense is settled then we going into that audit story –

DN: Would say that the university promotes closer working relations among its staff – a sense of collegiality.

Acad 1: No, we have good working relationships in this department because we get on – sometimes, I think the management just wants to destroy everything we worked for all these years – anything we do is not good enough – with three heads of department – how do you think things will improve. We get with the guys from the other campuses – but I'm not sure how long that is going to last – when the competition for post – HOD – who knows. But you know, we try to work – oh we have our difficulties but it's about the students.

DN: How would you describe the relationship between staff on different levels – between management and academics for example?

Acad 1: [Laughs] [silence] I'm not sure how to answer that. But now there's no trust – we just get told – no real consultation – But I don't blame the HoDs – they are just in the

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dark. Decisions are made on top and just passed down. Sometimes I think we just work here and go home

DN: How is information shared in the institution – I am not talking just about communication

Acad 1: You are the last to know anything – things get decided then we get told – I mean there's so much going on but when we have the meetings there's nothing really being said – same usual story – you'll know when I know. We try to get information from the grapevine, if you want to know anything use the grapevine. There are messages on the intranet but that's just not the whole story.

DN: Who do you think are the main sources of information?

Acad 1: I'm not mentioning names but you know up there – there are few in the know – you know we are like mushrooms, kept in the dark and fed you know what. But things are kept under wraps and at the last moment we get told. I suppose in response to your question, a few up there are in the know and the rest of us work on a need to know basis.

DN: How much of the audit has been share with you?

Acad 1: Not much really – I suppose we'll get told what to do as usual – and you know what's the sad part, we won't be able resist anything – if you object of have a different then you are a trouble maker- now they say our jobs are safe, who knows what's going to happen in the future.

DN: Talking about the future, do you think that our activities are guided by our mission?

Acad 1: The new vision and mission have just been done. But you know I am not sure – how can we have all these fancy goals and objectives and yet we not doing things right on the ground. Just getting students and lecturers to class.

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DN: The HEQC is looking at our quality management system. What do you understand by *quality management system*?

Acad 1: You know I'm not really sure – I think it refers to our activities and making sure that we have the policies and procedures in place, Oh and records, like SERTEC. I think we are going to have record everything

DN: Do you think they would improve quality or bring about greater accountability

Acad 1: Accountability for sure, we are going to be under scrutiny – quality I don't think, you know once this visit is finished who do think is going to follow up – but one thing I know, we are going to be under scrutiny and you know it's not just for the quality - it's to check up and spy on us. What has happened to academic freedom and autonomy – now it's going to be like a school inspector – no, not even schools got that. I don't think this is going to lead to any improvement – it's just going to make people cover up and put on a show.

DN: How do you think academics are going to respond to the audit demands?

Acad 1: Honestly – it's just more work – we should be spending time on research and trying to get advice and support not be constantly checked up on – You know who will be laughing – the management – now they will just impose on us and say it is the HEQC. Things are not going to get better for the rank and file lecturer – it's going to get worse.

DN: You raise the management issue – would you say that the decision-making is participatory

Acad 1: No – things get decided then we get told – Oh there is the show of consultation with all those committees and so on but really have you heard anyone opposing anything – everyone is just too afraid – I think people just want to keep under the radar – do their work – go home

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DN: How then would you describe the relationship between the leadership and academics?

Acad 1: I wouldn't say leadership – more like management who want to keep everything under control. Look I understand that we are managing this merger and trying to get the three technikons working and everyone's got their own agenda, but if you want to make things work, you have to involve the people that have to make it work – don't think you know what's best – we are academics after all.

DN: How do you think the leadership or senior management will response to the audit?

Acad 1: You know they will buy into it – we have not engaged with national policy at all – we get told by state what to do and we do. Anyone who disagrees is anti transformation. But for management, this be an opportunity to get control over everything and they will get to write the report – another cover up just like SERTEC.

DN: How should they respond the audit?

Acad 1: Okay, the audit is here – I think we should be getting into improving what we are doing here in the classroom – you know we should be part of this – not just a few like everything else.

DN: Thanks for your honest responses – Do you have any questions for me – then I must thank you once again.

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Interview with Academic Developer

Date: 03/08/05

Venue: Office

Time Started: 15:00

Time Ended: 15:45

Interviewee Category: Academic Development

Interviewee: (Acad Dev 1)

DN: Hello Mat – thanks for agreeing to the interview as I told you is for my PhD with Chris Kapp at Stellenbosch.

Acad Dev 1: Sure.

DN: Before we start, I just want you to know that everything you say is treated as confidential – we can stop at any time and if you want me to give you back the tape, I will do so. After I transcribe the tape, I will send you a copy to check through and you can have it withdrawn.

Acad Dev 1: That is fine

DN: I have the informed consent form and I would like to go through it with you

Acad Dev 1: Okay, I know these things.

DN: I am looking at the relationship between organisational culture and quality assurance – especially the HEQC audit. Let's start with your view on the HEQC's definition of quality – you know fitness for purpose, value for money and transformation

Acad Dev 1: I have no problems with those definitions. But, the question I would to ask whether those definitions would actually bring about an improvement in the way we do things around. In AD we have been trying to get the academics to change their practice in the classroom. They just want short cuts. I would be very surprised if any change at all comes about with these definitions – they are good definitions at the macro-level but

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bring to about quality changes I don't think so. In any case it seems that with the quality definitions we are all going the same route. I mean there is one definition for us, for Tukkies, for Wits.

DN: On that note what are your views on the HEQC audits?

Acad Dev 1: Again, I don't see any fundamental change. I read through the audit framework and the criteria, I just can't see how we can bring about improvement in the teaching and learning. Maybe it might make our work easier to get the academics to get involved in our workshops. But really, the audits for me is going to be one big show, like a performance. Maybe you don't want to hear this as quality is your portfolio. But, in my experience, the audits aren't going to shift much. I think the academics will resist in the way they normally do – they see the audit as coming from outside and for management. We had the same issues when we had to restructure and introduce OBE. The audits might have some success because it is compelled. There are two critical issues with these audits. One the audits expect of us to be the same, the HEQC can argue about fitness of purpose and make judgments against mission but at the end of the day, they will still make judgments using the same criteria for all institutions, so in way they are making normative judgments. Second, at the institution there will be a performance like they always did – you watch, come the audit everyone will pull out all the stops and put a performance.

DN: Is that how you think the institution will respond to the audit?

Acad Dev 1: Absolutely, and no offence to your work, I just like to give you a friendly warning. The management will make sure the self-assessment report contains no controversies, the academics will polish up their stuff and files and then when all is said and done, life will go back to normal. So, the university will make sure that the outsiders and the HEQC has a good picture of us. We are very compliant to the department and the HEQC – have you noticed we don't really debate academic stuff. I know that everyone is

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concerned with the merger, but we are still lecturing to students, they are still writing examinations. We should not forget that we are a university, alright a university of technology.

DN: What impact do you think that the audit will have on your work?

Acad Dev 1: I can see my work going up exponentially – as usual when something like this comes up, they run to us in academic development – so much of the work will have be done by us and the academics- anyway, you will have to guide us with the audits.

DN: Moving away from the audit for a moment, I would like to raise the issue of the mission of the institution. Please describe how the university went about defining its mission?

Acad Dev 1: There was a couple of workshops that the deans and directors attended and a few selected people. Once the documents were prepared they were supposed to be shared with everyone for comment and their inputs. Most of us here felt that we were left out. These things are discussed and then decided. I mentioned that we don't have a culture of engagement here. If you have a different or worse a dissenting view, then you get tagged as a trouble maker. You have seen how some people got shifted sideways. People are careful what they say and to who they say it. So the management might think there was participation in determining the vision and mission, but in view that participation was only with the upper echelons – not with us worker bees.

DN: Do you think the mission addresses local and national priorities?

Acad Dev 1: Of course they do but they are just words, we still pretty much do our own thing. What we have is nice document for the department and for the HEQC, I know that the lecturers couldn't care a fig about vision and mission and all that. At the end of the day, they just want to their thing, to lecture and get on with their business. Do you know how far the management is from the lecturers?

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DN: You actually raised a question that I wanted to ask later. Nevertheless, if the university were going to change its mission, how would you recommend it be done?

Acad Dev 1: We should start at the bottom and make sure that we involve all the staff. There are consultations and there are consultations. Don't just circulate stuff and ask for comments – you have to have real engagement. Once this merger thing ends then we can start with our business of being a university. How many people do you reckon know what it means to be university? This is more than a name change from technikon to university. So we have to involve the staff and students, ensure that we have workshops, talk openly about our new vision. This vision can only happen if all the people buy into it.

DN: Talking about staff, what would a new staff member's first impression of the university be?

Acad Dev 1: Depends where they are going to be working?

DN: I am talking about the university as a whole rather than just a geographical location

Acad Dev 1: You know we have the orientation for new staff. I think that new staff are going to find it very hard to work here – well there is a moratorium on new staff so that question is ...

DN: Hypothetically speaking

Acad Dev 1: Oh – they will find this place very confusing. With all the changes that are going on, new staff members will find it very hard to connect with the university – Also I suppose it depends in which department they are going to be working in. Some departments are very good, I know, having worked with them – others not so good. So new staff might fit right into a department. You know some departments work with attitude of just getting on with things and they don't bother with what is happening with the management.

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DN: Would say that the university promotes closer working relations among its staff – a sense of collegiality.

Acad Dev 1: That is the issue isn't it? Some departments work well, others just do their own things. If you want to promote good working relationships it must come from the top. If voices are silenced and dissent is frowned upon, how can we build the culture of a university. Our senate is nothing like that of Wits where those people really engage with each other and then they can still be friends. Here, if you say something then it gets personal and you can expect to get ambushed at some stage.

DN: How is information shared in the institution – I am not talking just about communication through the intranet.

Acad Dev 1: If you don't read things for yourself and try to find out what's going on, you will be in the dark. I make sure that I use my contacts to know what is going on. There are things that are decided and then the rest of the people get told. I think that a few people are really in the know and just enough information gets shared. This way, things are controlled.

DN: What do you mean by controlled?

Acad Dev 1: Well, the new management will make sure that they have a handle on what goes on in the university, otherwise they won't be able to impose their ideas. It's about who is the know and who controls what gets shared. We get the policies and documents and you can comment for sure but what happens with the comments.

DN: What about the audit has been shared with you.

Acad Dev 1: Basically what I read on the intranet and on your guys website. I also know from my contacts at UCT and CUT that it is quite intense. But you know, from what I gathered, they don't look like they are getting at the teaching and learning issues – there's quite about interviewing people about what is in their self-assessment report, but

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how those reports get written is another story. We will have to wait and see how the management and you guys manage the audit when it is our turn.

DN: Talking about the future, do you think that our activities are guided by our mission?

Acad Dev 1: I am all for working with to a vision and mission. But I can't see how that new mission is going to focus people on what they should be doing. When I speak to the lecturers, they want to get on with their job, but with all the uncertainty how can they focus on the future when they don't know whether they have a future.

DN: The HEQC is going to look at our quality management system. What do understand by quality management system?

Acad Dev 1: This is not something that has been pinned down clearly. I attended the workshop that you guys conducted and say that it is about our policies, procedures and systems. I suppose it's a framework where we put all our quality issues together. Even though I am AD I am a bit fuzzy on this issue. But, I take it to be all the things we do with quality. I suppose it includes our work and your work.

DN: Do you think that audit is about quality or accountability

Acad Dev 1: Quality I am not sure about. But I do think that accountability is going be very high on the agenda. There is move here to make sure that everyone doing things the way that management wants to them to be done. But coming back to HEQC, I think they are very accountability driven – if you look at the criteria and the supporting question – they are very clever here, they don't talk about minimum standards, but that's what they are they are, so at the end of the day we have minimum standards and with minimum standards you get accountability, you don't necessarily get quality. From the HEQC, it's about accountability not quality. This is just perfect for the management – they will get the lecturers to do what they want them to do and the lecturers cannot complain.

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DN: How do you think lecturers will respond?

Acad Dev 1: They lecturers know that that is coming from outside – so they won't complain openly. Sure there are those who don't buy into this whole quality issue and the HEQC, but they know that complaining and objecting is not going to get them anywhere. But I think they will resist in their own way – do they minimum, give what is needed, polish up things and then slip into their own way of doing things. Lecturers are wise, they know that the situation here is not going to tolerate resistance and opposition and they will play the game.

DN: I like to turn the decision-making at the university. Would you say it is participatory?

Acad Dev 1: We have these committees that are supposed to discuss and really thrash issues out. But look who sits there – how many of those people are really going to engage with the management and the decisions. We had this one faculty per site issue – everyone moans outside the meeting, but the decision has been made – so where is the consultation. People will accept things at face value, but when it comes to what matters, they will go back to doing their own things.

DN: How then would you describe the relationship between the leadership and academics?

Acad Dev 1: I don't think the leadership is in touch with the academics – they don't really know what is happening at the coal face. We know when we run our workshops the frustrations of the lecturers and I see this gap getting wider and wider. Not all the lecturers are against the leadership, but if you ask them to be honest, there is not much faith there.

DN: How do you think the leadership or senior management will response to the audit

Acad Dev 1: The management will want the audit – only if serves their purpose the leadership will want the audit to make them look good and validate their decision making.

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I think that the audit will be used to make sure that people do what is the management wants them to do.

DN: Why would you say that?

Acad Dev 1: There is lot of insecurity at the top and the more the insecurity the more the need to force things through. This audit will be the tool the make sure that things happen in a particular way. As it is, the level of consultation is at an all time low. This is a university, shouldn't we debating stuff.

DN: How should the respond

Acad Dev 1: If the audit is achieve its main quality objectives, which I am not convinced about, then there must be real engagement at all levels especially with those of us that the coal face. Just coming in and then moving on is not going to change anything.

DN: Thanks for your honest responses – Do you have any questions for me – then I must thank you once again.

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Interview with Senior Academic

Interview Transcript

Date: 04/08/05

Venue: Office

Time Started: 13:00

Time Ended: 13:50

Interviewee Category: Senior Academic

Interviewee: (Sen Acad 1)

DN: Afternoon Prof, thanks for agreeing to the interview. As you know, I am busy with my PhD with Chris Kapp at Stellenbosch.

Sen Acad 1: Sure, you should be studying here with us, but let continue

DN: Before we start, I just want you to know that everything you say is treated as confidential – we can stop at any time and if you want me to give you back the tape, I will do so. After I transcribe the tape, I will send you a copy to check through and you can have it withdrawn at this stage also. I have the informed consent form and I would like to go through it with you

Sen Acad 1: That's fine with me.

DN: Thanks. My research topic looks at relationship between organizational culture and quality assurance especially the HEQC audit. Let's start with your view on the HEQC's definition of quality – you know, fitness for purpose, value for money and transformation

Sen Acad 1: Those are interesting definitions, but do they speak to quality in teaching and research? I am not convinced. When I submit my research and articles for publication there are a different set of quality standards. So, in way they may be more resonant with a national transformation agenda than with quality in the university. Any way what does fitness for purpose mean – it just mean that we are efficient in what we do, and of course how does efficiency fit into an educational discourse. The bean counters can point to

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value for money, how do you measure value money, and is it a measure of quality, no I don't subscribe to that view.

DN: Would you expand on your view of the HEQC audits?

Sen Acad 1: Look, how can someone who has read through whatever nonsense we publish, interview a few people and arrive at judgments about quality in teaching and research. These guys think that an "audit" is an appropriate term. Do they know where "audit" comes from – it's an accounting term verifying practice against a predetermined standard. Can you see how many of those issues are just contradict good educational practice. You can see that I just don't buy into this audit thing – if we want to understand quality then we need to look at our classroom interactions and quality of our research. I mentioned this already, but this is just about the national policy agenda rather than really improving quality.

DN: How you think the institution will respond to the audit?

Sen Acad 1: Look I have been in this business a long time – I have seen quite a few of this type of assessment, SERTEC and so on. Now the university will buy into this and you know why – the guys up there are so desperate for credibility. I mean how many of them can point to be being academics of standing. What will happen is that we produce a glowing report, hide the bad stuff and put out best foot forward. It's all about putting on show.

DN: What impact do you think that the audit will have on your work?

Sen Acad 1: If I understand this thing we will have produce reports on everything. My colleagues at UCT mentioned huge volumes of paper – another forest cut down. The work will be about how much paper we can push. So, there will be a lot more work, and a lot of it will be manufactured.

DN: Would you like to elaborate on that?

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Sen Acad 1: Do you know what “wet paint” is. I saw the same thing during the SERTEC days and no matter how good an auditor is, he is not going to pick up everything. This brings me to another thing, these auditors will only look at what they want to look at. What I am trying to say, it’s their agenda isn’t – they decide what is important – what if that does not coincide with what we decide as being important. So at the end of the day, you are at the mercy of some externally decided standard.

DN: On a slightly different note, I would like to raise the issue of the mission of the institution, which is central to the audit. Please describe how the university went about defining its mission?

Sen Acad 1: I was switched of that activity. There is too much time being wasted on some these things. Workshop after workshop. Yet we are expected to produce papers, supervise students and teach. But, very little of the key issues ever filter down to the academics. It’s the same thing at Senate – complete absence of academic debate. In any case, we talk about vision and mission – again something borrowed unashamedly from the corporate world, and uncritically. We need to be asking questions about what makes us a university and how we can advance our academic standings. Don’t borrow corporate strategies without thinking things through.

DN: Do you think the mission addresses local and national priorities?

Sen Acad 1: How you determine national priorities – whose priorities. I am all for universities not being ivory towers and we should not be – but these are addressing narrow political goals – and this is not something that is only happening here – internationally too, there has been shifts to right – the politics of Reagan and Thatcher. What I am saying, sure we need to address local and international priorities, but the question still remains, whose priorities and how were they determined and do we have accept them uncritically.

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DN: If the university were going to change its mission, how would you recommend it be done?

Sen Acad 1: We really have to know what we are about, what can we do to improve the lives of the people, and I mean real empirically based analysis, not thumb sucked, if people really knew the basis of our decision making.

DN: Would you expand on that?

Sen Acad 1: You have seen our strategic documents – how much of that stuff was based on thorough empirical research, how much of the data has been verified, have we engaged in scenario planning – we got a business school, we got high quality professors, why did we not involve them in our planning?

DN: Talking about staff, what would a new staff member's first impression of the university be?

Sen Acad 1: You know when I was appointed, nobody discussed my key performance areas. I was told this is what you have do. And I simply got on with things. I understand that things are not yet settled, but on the ground, we have to do our job. I have interacted with the people in my department and faculty but that is far as it got.

DN: Would say that the university promotes closer working relations among its staff – a sense of collegiality.

Sen Acad 1: I think the university is still finding its feet and there is a lot of uncertainty about positions and who is going to be boss and so on. I can't accurately or honestly say that the university does or doesn't. But what I can say is that we tolerate opposing viewpoints. Decisions get made, there is canvassing before hand – here at faculty level too. There are a few people close to the Dean, so when it comes to the faculty board, the exco has already made the decisions.

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DN: How is information shared in the institution – I am not talking just about communication through the intranet.

Sen Acad 1: That's what I have been talking about. Look, my job is to do research and manage my post-grad students. In that sense and in my discipline, I keep up to date – the library is okay and if you want stuff – you get it. But I know you are talking about institutional level – there, information is filtered and very well managed – on a need to know basis.

DN: What do you mean by need to know?

Sen Acad 1: How else can you ram things through – you keep people on a need to know basis. You wait for the meetings and spring stuff on them – that way they did not have time to really digest the information and plan their arguments

DN: What about the audit has been shared with you.

Sen Acad 1: I know about the audit from my colleagues at UCT. I know that we will have our turn in 2007 or 2008.

DN: Talking about the future, do you think that our activities are guided by our mission?

Sen Acad 1: My view on the vision and mission is quite clear, as long they remain thumb-sucked without empirical foundations they will remain just empty words – ask around how many know what the vision and mission.

DN: Without putting you on the spot, do you?

Sen Acad 1: [laughing] do you?

DN: Let's move off that for now. The HEQC is going to look at our quality management system. What do understand by quality management system?

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Sen Acad 1: This is another one of the new bureaucracy – well you asked that I be honest with you. Let me ask you, how do you guys define this? Okay, another thing, is it a quality system or a management system. Quality just gives it nice name. Now I am not against good management and keeping control of things – but then we must say that is what we doing about improving our control and management – not put a spin on it and call it quality – quality more than that.

DN: So you would say the audit is more about accountability rather than quality

Sen Acad 1: Absolutely, and again, I am not against accountability, we must be accountable but don't disguise it as something else. A lot of people are going to see this performance evaluation on a personal level – no matter, what you say, people are going to placed under the microscope and they are going to be asked to account for stuff that they had no control over.

DN: Would you expand on that

Sen Acad 1: I mean, I am supposed to be in charge of things, but things were left in a mess – how can account for someone else's action or lack action

DN: How do you think academics will respond to the audit?

Sen Acad 1: We academics are sharp. This audit is driven from outside and the management will buy into it, but I think our guys will stick together. If this audit is not something genuine and the academic will play the game. You know the question that the average academic is going to ask – is this going to make me a better academic, will this improve me in the classroom. Have you noticed another interesting issue with these audits – where is the additional resources – there's no more money or new staff – that means we have to do more with less and still be accountable for that.

DN: I like to turn the decision-making at the university. Would you say it is participatory?

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Sen Acad 1: That is just a façade. Look, I am not naïve, I don't expect consultation and participation on every issue, but when it comes to academic matters, research I want to be part of the strategic decision making. Why aren't the professors consulted on key issues – why aren't our view canvassed?

DN: Would care to speculate why that is not the case?

Sen Acad 1: I may be on thin ice here, but I think some of management might just be intimidated by the professors. I am not being egotistical, but some of us have extensive experience, some are rate scientists –that must count for something.

DN: How then would you describe the relationship between the leadership and academics?

Sen Acad 1: I would hazard a guess and say that there is kind of uneasy truce – neither side trusts each other. Change is inevitable, but involve the people that can make that change work. Coming back to decision making, you know we don't use sound or even rational decision making strategies. We decide what is politically expedient and then try to fit everything into it. Look at the scenarios we are suggesting the DOE, have we costed the exercise – and not just in the narrow sense of cost – no projections with moving variable [laughs] that's why they should have come to the professors.

DN: How do you think the leadership or the senior management will response to the audit?

Sen Acad 1: This is something forced on us, like the mergers by the state thinking that it knows what is best for the university sector. The politicians will make all the noises, and people here will jump because we don't have a culture of engagement – and if you hold a dissenting view heaven help you. I'm not far from retirement. To the question, the management will want to shine wouldn't they – it's all about the image – making sure that everything looks fine and I think that this audit will used by the management to ship

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out people that make them uncomfortable – a sophisticated exit strategy for people like me. This is fantastic tool to make sure that everyone sings from the hymn sheet.

DN: How should the university respond?

Sen Acad 1: Look, I have strong views about this audits. To me it's just another way to get control over things – we have come out one repressive system that got us in the mess we are in – why are we not learning from these mistakes. I am not saying that universities must have carte blanche – but worldwide universities are under fire, do more with less, more research, more students, fewer academic, so what you have are new forms of control – new management over academics. Okay, we should do this thing, but we should focus on our way of doing things – even then, the audits will get what the audits want.

DN: Thanks for your honest responses – Do you have any questions for me – then I must thank you once again.

Interview with Management

Interview Transcript

Date: 18/08/05

Venue: Office

Time Started: 16:00

Time Ended: 16:45

Interviewee Category: Academic Management

Interviewee: (Man 1)

DN: Hello Lavs – thanks for agreeing to the interview. As I explained this interview is part of my data gathering for my doctorate. Before we start, I just want to remind you about the confidentiality of our interview and that it will be tape-recorded. We can stop at any time and if you can request the tape if you feel uncomfortable. After I transcribe the tape, I'll send you a copy to check it through and even then you can have it withdrawn. I have the informed consent form and I would like to go through it with you

Man 1: That is okay.

DN: Let's get started – am looking at the relationship between organizational culture and quality assurance – especially the HEQC audit. What is your view on their definition of quality – you know fitness for purpose, value for money and transformation

Man 1: Those are excellent definitions – we must bring about transformation, and do it effectively and efficiently.

DN: Would you like to expand on your views of the HEQC audits?

Man 1: As a trained auditor I must say that it is a very effective way of making sure that universities are doing what they are supposed to be doing – you know we must be accountable for what we do with public funds.

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DN: How do you think the institution will respond to the audit?

Man 1: We will go into it with full cooperation – I mean it is for our benefit after all – and we should make sure that we give a good account of ourselves. Any institution and its management would welcome the audit – for us it means that we can have our peers giving us their views on how we are running the university – there’s nothing to hide.

DN: What impact do you think that the audit will have on your work?

Man 1: It might mean a little more work – you know just to make sure that everything is place – but it should not be much more work – these are things that we should have in place and if we don’t then it will be a wake-up call for the managers and academics.

DN: I would like to raise the issue of the mission of the institution. Please describe how the university went about defining its mission?

Man 1: We had a very inclusive approach and we had a consultant to assist with the process. We had to make sure that everyone was involved. We had two big workshops where we presented the vision, mission and strategic goal so everyone had an opportunity to comment and add their views. Sometimes you have to get something down on paper and then work from there. Of course not everyone will be pleased, but this is new institution. And we as management must manage, we cannot just have everything loosely organized, otherwise nothing will get done. I think that we are appointed as the leadership and we provide that leadership

DN: Do you think the mission addresses local and national priorities?

Man 1: Very early on we had to make sure that we do aligned with what is expected of us – so yes, our vision and mission is in line with national priorities.

DN: If the university were going to change its mission, would you change anything in the way it is done?

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Man 1: Of course we can only improve in the way we do things. But I think we went about things the right way this time. We tried to include as many as possible. So we had a transparent way and staff had an opportunity to comment and add their voice.

DN: Talking about staff, what would a new staff member's first impression of the university be?

Man 1: Look we are an exciting place to be working right now. There are many changes for the better. Some people cannot accept the change and still living in the old South Africa. But if you are willing to accept the way we are doing things and want to do things then this is the place to be.

DN: Would say that the university promotes closer working relations among its staff – a sense of collegiality.

Man 1: We have just merged so things are not all okay across the university. But we are working on that and sometimes people don't want to work together. But our position as management is that everything and that includes staff and students must be integrated. That's we are now working towards the single campus faculty model – that's not yet approved but we are make sure that people get to work in the townships too.

DN: How would you describe the relationship between staff on different levels – between management and academics?

Man 1: Well you know that as management we cannot please everyone all the time. So some people are not satisfied or happy with what we want to do. But we have to account to council and also the minister. We try to make sure that we have a closer working relationship, that's why we have the two committees that meet every month and a huge Senate. Sometimes those committees are just not workable, but we have to make sure that everyone can speak their mind. It takes longer to get things done. I keep telling

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members of those committee to get the message to their people make sure that they understand what we are doing.

DN: How is information shared in the institution – I am not talking just about communication through the intranet.

Man 1: We use those committees I just spoke about. Those members must take messages back to their staff. Anything we do we share with the staff. Of course there are some sensitive and confidential matters that must be dealt with by the management. But we make sure that relevant information gets down to the people. You have seen our long agendas where we try to put all that is important on paper for everyone to see.

DN: Who are the main sources of information?

Man 1: I'm not sure about that question. But what information we have we share with the university. Information that comes from the department and the council gets filtered down to staff. That's why we have the director of corporate relations sitting in our meetings.

DN: What about the audit has been shared with you.

Man 1: I know that we are going to one the first merged universities to be audited. When I am not sure, but we will be prepared when it happens, that why we have you in the job.

DN: Talking about the future, do you think that our activities are guided by our mission?

Man 1: The new vision and mission have just been done. This is first time that we have something comprehensive like this. We have to make sure that our activities are guided by the vision and mission. That is how the council is going to measure our performance, otherwise our contracts would not be renewed.

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DN: The HEQC is looking at our quality management system. What do understand by quality management system

Man 1: My understanding of the quality system is that it is all that we do improve our quality. It is all the activities and policies and procedures and so on that we can show that quality is not compromised.

DN: Do you think the audit is about quality or accountability

Man 1: We have make sure that people are accountable for what they do. I mean, we can't have people running around doing what they please and not accountable to anyone. Have you tried to get people on a Friday- we are having a huge battle with the unions who don't want staff to be on campus for longer. They say academics can work from home but how can the students consult them. Quality is about accountability.

DN: How do you think academics are going to respond to the QMS demands?

Man 1: You know academics, they will complain but this is not negotiable. This is what the HEQC wants, the department wants and what we want. Quality is what it all about. We have show the people that this university is about quality. They might complain, but they must get used it. There are new ways of doing things now. You can't hold onto the past.

DN: Would you say that the decision-making at the university is participatory?

Man 1: Look at all the committees we have. The management makes sure that staff are involved. We had many workshops so yes we do have a participatory system. Of course there are some decisions that we as management have to take, but try to involve the staff as far as possible.

DN: How then would you describe the relationship between the leadership and academics?

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Man 1: We make sure that the Deans are involved in what we do – the Deans must make sure that there academics in the faculties are involved in what they do.

DN: How do you think the leadership or senior management will response to the audit

Man 1: The leadership will want the audit. For us, this a good thing because now we will get an objective view of the university and this is good thing.

DN: Thanks for your honest responses – Do you have any questions for me – then I must thank you once again.