

**Institutional culture of a post-merger institution:  
A case study of a South African university**

**LOYISO MENNON LUVALO**

*Dissertation presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
in the Faculty of Education  
at Stellenbosch University*



**Promoter: Prof B van Wyk**

**December 2017**

## 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 sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch university will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

Date: December 2017

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation is based on a critical hermeneutic study of institutional culture of a merged institution of higher education in South Africa. Concepts, documents and interviews were analysed in order to establish how they were contributing to the articulation of institutional culture as enunciated in government policies. The University of South Africa (Unisa) is the unit of analysis and three open distance learning (ODL) institutions: Vista University Distance Education (VUDEEC) and Technikon South Africa (TSA) and the “old Unisa” merged to form what is known today as Unisa. Not many studies have been conducted on the institutional culture in an ODL context, especially through document analysis and people’s perceptions. Most studies centre on the process of the merger and its effects on the organisation generally, paying less attention to what people and documents say about the institutional culture after the merger.

Analysis of how the merger led to perceptions of institutional culture was done by construction of six meanings (shared values and beliefs, language, symbols, university leadership, staff and student development and curriculum). These meanings are recurring themes in most literature. After I examined these meanings for their congruity and rationale for undertaking the study, I responded to the question whether they could provide answers to my research questions.

My study found that most of the meanings of my theoretical framework were addressed in documents and interviews at Unisa. This somehow confirmed my theoretical framework; however, the interpretations of the policy documents and people’s perceptions on the other hand were completely different. Unisa has wonderful policies in terms of strategies for 2020, vision and mission for 2006, striving towards being “the University towards service of Humanity in Africa”. The focus was on whether institutional culture after the merger, contributes to Unisa’s vision of living up to being an African university producing knowledge that would solve African challenges. The policies are focusing on improvement of the business model, being advanced in the latest IT for ODL purposes, so that Unisa becomes a first choice for studying. There is a challenge of whether people perceive the culture of the institution, as currently paving a way towards that goal, but the vision seems to concretise the sense of creation of an institutional culture that sets Unisa as a leading open distance learning institution.

**KEYWORDS:** open distance learning, conceptual analysis, critical hermeneutics, institutional culture, mergers, higher education

## OPSOMMING

Hierdie verhandeling is op 'n kritiese hermeneutiese studie van institusionele kultuur in 'n saamgesmelte hoëronderwysinstelling in Suid-Afrika gegrond. Konsepte, dokumente en onderhoude is ontleed om te bepaal hoe dit tot die artikulasie van institusionele kultuur, soos in regeringsbeleide uiteengesit, bydra. Die Universiteit van Suid-Afrika (Unisa) is die ontledingseenheid, en drie oop afstandsonderrig (OAO)-instellings: Vista Universiteit se afdeling vir afstandsonderrig (VUDEC), die Technikon Suidelike Afrika (TSA) en die “ou Unisa” het saamgesmelt om Unisa, soos dit vandag bekend staan, te vorm. Min studies is oor die institusionele kultuur in 'n OAO-konteks uitgevoer, veral wat dokumentontledings en mense se persepsies betref. Die meeste studies fokus op die samesmeltingsproses en die uitwerking wat dit op die organisasie in die algemeen het en kyk nie soseer na wat mense en dokumente oor die institusionele kultuur ná die samesmelting te sê het nie.

'n Ontleding van hoe die samesmelting tot persepsies oor institusionele kultuur gelei het, is deur middel van die konstruksie van ses betekenis (gedeelde waardes en beskouings, taal, simbole, universiteitsleierskap, personeel- en studente-ontwikkeling, en kurrikulum) gedoen. Hierdie betekenis is herhalende temas in die meeste literatuur. Nadat ek die betekenis vir kongruensie en as rasionaal vir die uitvoer van die studie ondersoek het, het ek aandag gegee aan die vraag of dit antwoorde op my navorsingsvraag bied.

My studie het bevind dat die meeste konstitutiewe betekenis in my teoretiese raamwerk in dokumente en onderhoude by Unisa aangeroe word. Dit het my teoretiese raamwerk gedeeltelik bevestig; aan die ander kant het interpretasies van die beleidsdokumente en mense se persepsies grootliks verskil. Unisa beskik oor merkwaardige beleide sover dit strategieë vir 2020 betref, en die visie en missie vir 2006 bevestig die strewende om “dié Afrika-universiteit in diens van die mensdom te word”. Die fokus is daarop om 'n Afrika-universiteit te wees wat die kennis oplewer om Afrika se uitdagings te kan aanpak. Die beleide beklemtoon die verbetering van die sakemodel deur gevorderde IT vir die doeleindes van oop afstandsonderrig (OAO) te gebruik en Unisa bo aan die voorkeurlus as studie-instelling te plaas. Mense se persepsies van die institusionele kultuur as 'n wegwysers om die oogmerke te bereik bied 'n uitdaging in die huidige klimaat, ofskoon die

gevoel dat die institusionele kultuur wat Unisa as 'n leidende instelling voorhou, in die visie gekonkretiseer word.

**SLEUTELWOORDE:** oop afstandsonderrig, konseptuele ontleding, kritiese hermeneutiek, institusionele kultuur, samesmeltings, hoër onderwys

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Glory be to God Almighty, Creator of all things, I Thank You for granting me health and strength throughout this journey;
- To my parents Mama-Nomabali Cecilia and Tata Mdende Wellington Luvalo, thank you for the upbringing and all your support. My brothers and sisters and your families, thank you all for your encouragements; My daughter Asthandile for thanks for understanding;
- To my promoter Prof Van Wyk, thank you for the guidance and your perseverance with me. I will forever be indebted to you;
- My sincere gratitude to Unisa for giving me time and resources to attain my doctorate;
- To T. Nhlapo, thank you Sgegede for being my friend, partner, a soundboard and a confidante throughout the difficulties of this journey. We have made it! and
- To my colleagues at Unisa, thanks, especially to Dr Madikizela-Madiya (*Mkaya wam kude kwalunga, nangomso Mamsengeshe!*)

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration .....	ii
Abstract .....	iii
Opsomming .....	v
Acknowledgements .....	vii
Table of Contents .....	viii
Abbreviations/Acronyms used .....	xv

### CHAPTER 1: CONTEXTUALISATION AND ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.2 JUSTIFICATION FOR UNDERTAKING THE STUDY .....	4
1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY .....	5
1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM .....	5
1.5 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	7
1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....	8
1.6.1 Hermeneutics .....	9
1.6.2 Traditional hermeneutics .....	10
1.6.3 Classical hermeneutics .....	10
1.6.4 Twentieth-century hermeneutics .....	12
1.6.5 Contemporary hermeneutics .....	12
1.6.6 Major concepts and debates in hermeneutics .....	19
1.7 CRITICAL THEORY .....	21
1.7.1 CRITICAL HERMENEUTICS .....	23
1.7.2 The Habermas-Gadamer debates .....	23
1.7.3 Summary of critical hermeneutics .....	26
1.8 RESEARCH METHODS .....	27
1.8.1 Case study as research design .....	28
1.8.2 Design of a case study .....	30
1.8.3 Categories of a case study .....	30
1.8.4 Advantages of a case study .....	31



1.8.5	Disadvantages of a case study.....	31
1.9	CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS.....	32
1.9.1	Explaining a concept.....	32
1.9.2	Explanation of conceptual analysis.....	34
1.9.3	DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS.....	35
1.9.3.1	What is a ‘document’?.....	35
1.9.3.2	Role of documents in research.....	36
1.9.3.3	Limits of documentary sources.....	38
1.9.4	INTERVIEWS.....	39
1.9.4.1	Sampling of participants.....	40
1.10	KEY CONCEPTS OF THE STUDY.....	42
1.10.1	Policy.....	42
1.10.1.1	Policy as text.....	42
1.10.1.2	Policy as discourse.....	43
1.10.1.3	Effects of policy.....	43
1.10.2	Institutional culture.....	44
1.10.3	Higher education.....	45
1.10.4	University.....	46
1.10.5	Mergers.....	47
1.10.6	Open distance learning university (Unisa model) .....	47
1.11	CHAPTER ORGANISATION.....	48
1.12	SUMMARY.....	50

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND KEY CONCEPTS AS APPLIED IN THE STUDY**

2.1	INTRODUCTION.....	52
2.2	THE CONCEPT OF MERGER.....	52
2.2.1	Mergers in higher education.....	53
2.3	INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON MERGERS.....	55
2.3.1	Background on selected international mergers in higher education.....	56
2.3.2	Reasons for higher education mergers.....	57

2.3.3	Types of mergers.....	60
2.4	MERGER DISCOURSES IN SOUTH AFRICA.....	62
2.5	The context of higher education in South Africa during apartheid.....	62
2.5.1	Policy context for mergers in South Africa.....	66
2.5.2	The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE).....	67
2.5.3	The Report of National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) .....	68
2.5.4	Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education..	69
2.5.5	The National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE).....	71
2.5.6	Jansen’s post-apartheid merger typologies.....	73
2.5.6.1	Institutional obliteration.....	74
2.5.6.2	Protected closure.....	75
2.5.6.3	Submerged integration.....	75
2.5.6.4	Equal partnership.....	75
2.6	UNIVERSITY LANDSCAPE IN SOUTH AFRICA.....	76
2.6.1	Traditional universities.....	77
2.6.2	Universities of Technology (UoTs) .....	78
2.6.3	Comprehensive universities.....	79
2.7	KEY ATTRIBUTES OF THE MERGER PROCESS.....	81
2.7.1	Institutional backgrounds and their compatibility.....	83
2.7.1.1	Institution by race.....	83
2.7.1.2	Type of institution.....	83
2.7.1.3	Size and strength.....	84
2.4.1.4	Location.....	85
2.7.1.5	Strong and decisive leadership.....	86
2.7.1.6	Strategy.....	86
2.7.1.7	Decision-making.....	87
2.7.1.8	Stake-holder involvement.....	89
2.8	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS.....	90
2.8.1	Jansen’s Contingency Theory .....	92
2.8.1.1	Transitional context.....	94
2.8.1.2	Challenges faced by higher HEIs during the transitional period (1990-1994).....	95

2.8.1.3	Macro-political environment.....	97
2.8.1.4	Micro-political arena.....	98
2.8.1.5	Merger outcomes.....	98
2.9	SUMMARY.....	99

### **CHAPTER 3: INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE**

3.1	INTRODUCTION.....	101
3.2	WHY THE INTEREST IN INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE?.....	101
3.3	WHAT IS INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE?.....	103
3.3.1	Centrality of culture in institutions and organisations.....	103
3.3.2	United States business studies and organisational culture.....	105
3.3.3	Importation of organisational culture into higher education.....	106
3.3.4	Cultural perspectives in higher education.....	108
3.3.5	Recent cultural trends.....	109
3.3.6	Forms of Institutional Culture.....	112
3.3.6.1	Symbols.....	112
3.3.6.2	Language.....	113
3.3.6.3	Narratives.....	114
3.3.6.4	Practices.....	115
3.4	INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT.....	115
3.4.1	Diversity.....	118
3.4.2	Political activities.....	119
3.4.3	Debates.....	119
3.4.4	Cultural activities.....	120
3.4.5	Harassment and violence.....	120
3.4.6	Student development.....	120
3.4.7	Curriculum.....	121
3.5	Meanings of institutional culture.....	123
3.5.1	Detailed discussion on meanings.....	126
3.5.2	Shared values and beliefs.....	126
3.5.3	Language.....	127

3.5.4	Symbols.....	129
3.5.5	Curriculum.....	131
3.5.6	Practices.....	132
3.5.7	Staff and student development.....	133
3.5.8	University leadership.....	134
3.5.9	Knowledge production.....	135
3.6	SUMMARY .....	136

## **CHAPTER 4: A CASE STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA**

4.1	INTRODUCTION.....	138
4.2	DISCUSSION ON UNIVERSITIES.....	138
4.2.1	History of the university.....	139
4.2.2	The role of a university.....	140
4.2.3	The role of the university in a post-apartheid era.....	141
4.2.4	Themes about the South African idea of a university.....	142
4.3	A DISCUSSION ON OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL) EDUCATION .....	143
4.3.1	What is an open distance learning institution?.....	143
4.3.2	The role of open distance learning.....	144
4.4	History of University of South Africa (Unisa).....	146
4.5	Background of a technikon .....	150
4.5.1	A brief history of Technikon South Africa (TSA) .....	151
4.6	History of Vista University Distance Education Campus (VUDEC) .....	155
4.7	GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSED MERGERS OF DISTANCE LEARNING INSTITUTIONS.....	157
4.7.1	Governments' rationale for merging Unisa, Technikon SA and VUDEC.....	160
4.7.2	Guidelines for mergers.....	161
4.7.3	Framework for governance of the envisaged new institution .....	163
4.7.4	Asymmetry in mergers.....	164
4.7.5	Effect of mergers on people involved.....	166
4.7.6	Staff perceptions of the process of merger.....	168
4.7.7	Institutional culture.....	170

4.7.8	Perceptions of benefits of the merger.....	173
4.8	SUMMARY .....	175

## **CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL DOCUMENTS AND INTERVIEWS**

5.1	INTRODUCTION.....	176
5.2	INSTITUTIONAL DOCUMENTS.....	177
5.3	THE NATURE OF A STRATEGIC PLAN.....	178
5.3.1	Relationship between strategy and culture.....	179
5.4	UNISA STRATEGIC PLAN.....	180
5.4.1	Drafting of Unisa's vision and mission.....	181
5.4.2	Unisa's Vision.....	182
5.4.3	Unisa's Mission 2004.....	188
5.4.4	Unisa's Values.....	190
5.5	UNISA CHARTER ON TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY 2010.....	192
5.6	UNISA'S INSTITUTIONAL OPERATING PLAN (IOP).....	198
5.7.	UNISA'S SELF-EVALUATION PORTFOLIO FOR THE HEQC (2008) .....	204
5.8	AUDIT-REPORT.....	210
5.9	INTERVIEWS WITH UNISA STAFF MEMBERS.....	216
5.10	SUMMARY .....	228

## **CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS, CONTRIBUTIONS, AND CONCLUSION**

6.1	INTRODUCTION.....	230
6.2	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK IN ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS.....	231
6.3	FINDINGS ON PROPOSED MEANINGS OF INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE .....	236
6.3.1	Shared ideas and beliefs.....	237
6.3.2	Language.....	238
6.3.3	Symbols.....	239
6.3.4	University Leadership.....	240
6.3.5	Staff and student development.....	243
6.3.6	Practices.....	248

6.3.7	Curriculum.....	249
6.4	STATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN SA AND FUTURE RESEARCH.....	250
6.5	THESIS OF MY STUDY.....	252
6.6	CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY.....	254
6.7	LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY.....	255
6.8	CONCLUSION.....	256
	<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>257</b>
	<b>APPENDICES .....</b>	<b>279</b>

**ABBREVIATIONS / ACRONYMS**

ACACHS	Centre for Arts, Culture and Heritage Studies
AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
AP	Assistant Principal
ASHE	Association for the Study of Higher Education
BMR	Bureau of Market Research
CAE	College of Advanced Education
CATE	College for Advanced Technical Education
CCET	Centre for Continuing Education and Training
CEDU	College of Education
CEMS	College of Economic and Management Sciences
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CHS	College of Human Sciences
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
CSRC	Central Student Representative Council
CUP	Committee of the University Principals
CUT	Central University of Technology
DBE	Department of Basic Education
DDMET	Department for Diversity Management, Equity and Transformation
DET	Department of Education and Training
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DIT	Department of Trade and Industry
DoE	Department of Education
DoP	Department of Psychology
DFTL	Department of Tuition and Facilitation of Learning
DUT	Durban University of Technology
DVC	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
EEO	Employment Equity Office
FET	Further Education and Training
FOVS	Faculties of Veterinary Science

GCE	Giyani College of Education
GPR	Gross participation rate
HBU	Historically Black University
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institutions
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HESA	Higher Education South Africa
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HR	Human Resources
ICT	Information and communicational technology
IF	Institutional Forum
IITT	Inter-Institutional Task Team
ILCDE	Integrated Learner-Centred Distance Education
IOP	Institutional Operating Plans
IT	Information Technology
IWG	Institutional Working Group
JMTT	Joint Merger Task Team
MEDUNSA	Medical University of South Africa
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MLST	ML Sultan Technikon
MUT	Mangosuthu University of Technology
NCHE	National Commission on Higher Education
NMMU	Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
WGDE	Working Group on Distance Education
NWG	National Working Group
NWU	North West university
ODL	Open Distance Learning
PAI	Previously Advantaged Institutions
PC	Portfolio Committee



PDD	Primary Data Document
PDI	Previously Disadvantaged Institution
PENTECH	Peninsula Technikon
PG	Portfolio Committee
PQM	Program Qualification Mix
PVC	Pro Vice-Chancellor
RAU	Rand Afrikaans university
RSA	Republic of South Africa
RU	Rhodes University
SACTE	South African College of Teacher Education
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAUVCA	Southern African University Vice-Chancellors Association
SATESAR	South African Tertiary Education Sector Assessment Report
SDD	Secondary Data Documents
SDDEI	Single Dedicated Distance Education Institution
SER	Self -Evaluation Report
SES	Social Economic Status
SLP	Selected Learning Programs
SHRC	South African Human Rights Commission
SRC	Student Representative Council
SU	Stellenbosch University
TBVC	Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei
TN	Technikon Natal
TSA	Technikon South Africa
TUT	Tshwane University of Technology
UCT	University of Cape Town
UFS	University of Free State
UG	Undergraduate
UKZN	University of KwaZulu Natal
UL	University of Limpopo
UNISA	University of South Africa

UNIVEN	University of Venda
UNIZULU	University of Zululand
UNW	University of the North-West
UoT	University of Technology
UP	University of Pretoria
VC	Vice Chancellor
VP	Vice-Principal
VUDEC	Vista University Distance Education Campus
WGDE	Working Group on Distance Education
WITS	University of the Witwatersrand
WSU	Walter Sisulu University

## CHAPTER ONE

### CONTEXTUALISATION AND ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

In the study on which this dissertation is based, an inquiry was conducted on the issue of institutional culture after a merger at a university in South Africa. This section will elaborate on the background and significance of the study. Insight into the research procedures and research methodology associated with the study will be provided to the reader.

The merger of higher education institutions (HEIs) came about after the National Commission on Higher Education (NHCE) submitted its final report in 1996 to the then President Mandela, which argued for the creation of a single, coordinated system of higher education. Since then, HEIs have been confronted with unexpected and far-reaching demands and challenges. One of the challenges was and has remained the transformation of institutional culture at some universities in South Africa.

In December 2002, the Ministry of Education released proposals, which were approved by cabinet, for the transformation and restructuring of the higher education system. Phasing out the differences between the historically black and white institutions was the central motivation behind the South African government's restructuring plan for higher education. The restructuring and consolidation of the institutional landscape were key elements in the strategy for achieving the broader goals and objectives. The goals were namely to ensure an equitable, sustainable and productive higher education system of high quality that will contribute effectively to the human resources, skills, knowledge and research needs of the country and which will be consistent with the non-sexist, non-racial and democratic values enshrined in the Constitution (Department of Education, 1997).

The National Working Group (NWG) (see Baijnath, 2010) recommended that in particular circumstances and conditions, comprehensive institutions that offered a combination of technikon- and university-type programmes could be established to facilitate the effective and efficient

provision of higher education. The Working Group on Distance Education also recommended that an investigation be undertaken to plan for a single dedicated distance education institution. Outcome 11 of the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) proposed the establishment of a single dedicated distance education institution through the merging of the University of South Africa (Unisa) and Technikon South Africa (TSA) and the incorporation of Vista University Distance Education Campus (VUDEC) into one institution. The merger implementation date was scheduled for January 2004 (Fourie, 2008).

Implementing the proposed restructuring was complex and time-consuming and it placed an enormous burden of additional work on the affected institutions. A merger is always difficult and Harman (2000) concurs that, when deeply entrenched organisational and academic cultures are forced together, they can present a considerable force preventing or severely retarding change. This is also confirmed by Skodvin (1999:66) stating that, as merging denotes radical change, cultures or souls of partners are as deeply affected as the changes in systems of governance occur.

After my experience of working at two institutions that came into existence because of mergers, i.e. Walter Sisulu University (WSU) and the University of South Africa (Unisa), I could not help wondering about the post-merger institutional culture that these institutions now have. For example, at WSU employee salaries were paid on different dates, the teaching campus had its own human resource department and, during the workers-union meetings, people would still identify themselves with former institutions before the merger. It is similar at Unisa where I currently work. Some colleagues still long for work-related benefits and work conditions that were lost because of the merger. Also interesting was to establish what the institutional culture was before the mergers in all the institutions, how this had changed and what the current situation is and how it manifests itself.

With the above in mind, the title of the research was developed against the background of my experiences of working at merged universities and limited research on the post-merger institutional culture phenomenon, especially at an open distance institution” in South Africa, as this is confirmed by the (South African Council on Higher Education (CHE) Annual Report 1999). Berry and Paul (2013) allude to the importance of understanding post-merger institutional culture and

how it can be conducive to the effective functioning of universities. Thus, the title of this study is “The institutional culture of a post-merger institution: A case-study of a South Africa university”.

South African literature is surprisingly silent on the issue of post-merger institutional culture, especially in an open distant learning context. Instead, the focus is on the mergers and the challenges brought about because of the mergers. As a researcher, I found this rather strange because the merger was such a controversial restructuring process that the country embarked upon, that it would be logical to have reviews on what has become of the institutional culture of those institutions that merged. At both WSU and Unisa, I found that some of employees, for different reasons were talking fondly about their work conditions at the institutions they were before the merger. This has led me to question and wonder what might be a post-merger institutional culture and how difficult it is to define for an institution.

The University of South Africa, which was the focus of this study, came into being after different institutions merged. Technikon SA and the old Unisa were mainly for white Afrikaans-speaking students whereas Vista was mainly black. The question I had as a researcher was whether the then Minister of Education had envisaged the post-merger institutional culture that would come about because of merging culturally divergent institutions. On studying the National Plan for Higher Education (Ministry of Education, 2001), it became clear that the ultimate aim of the reconfiguration of the system was to achieve a new institutional landscape. Even so, little information is available on a cardinal issue such as the post-merger culture of these institutions of higher learning, especially in South Africa. Harman (2000) concurs by suggesting that mergers as a socio-cultural issue receives little attention, although Pritchard (1993) emphasises the importance of consolidation and community building in the post-merger phase, especially in institutions created from an amalgamation of unequal institutions. The questions that arose are that: if these post-merger institutions have a post-merger culture, what culture is it, is it a common and acceptable culture, which is in line with the ethos of the institution? How does this culture manifest itself and how does it affect the running of the institution as an organisation?

The above questions on the post-merger institutional culture were raised based on the culture theories that suggest that the human factor is important in successful mergers (Harman, 2000).

Universities are organisations where people who come from different cultures work, and a social constructive approach to culture is relevant (Schein, 1992). The importance of the human factor is in line with an anthropological tradition that seeks to understand what is characteristic in the behaviour of particular groups of people and how that might distinguish them from others. Vaara (2000) suggests that much of the cultural literature on post-merger integration is based on a realist conception of organisational culture, which requires the interpretation of the notion of the human factor in post-merger institutional culture. Kotecha and Harman (2001) support the notion that culture is of particular importance in the transformation of higher education. This is an important aspect and it applies to South Africa mergers too. These authors warn that it would be unwise to attempt to create educational communities through the merging of cultures, which are historically and symbolically non-complementary. These integrations should be attempted if the implications are understood and addressed (Kotecha & Harman, 2002).

Van Wyk (2009) poses a crucial question: are universities organisations or institutions? He then problematizes the concepts, which need to receive scholarly attention: organisational culture and institutional culture. He also claims that institutional culture is an under-researched area.

## **1.2 JUSTIFICATION FOR UNDERTAKING THE STUDY**

The justification for this study was to explore the case of a particular higher education merger and how it shaped institutional culture in the post-merger phase. The unit of analysis was the University of South Africa (Unisa), which comprises a merger of three different open distance learning (ODL) institutions that are scattered around the country, namely Technikon SA (TSA), Vista University (later called Vista University Distance Education (VUDEC) and old Unisa. This caught my attention in the sense that the institutions that merged all had divergent cultures, and Unisa and TSA merged and VUDEC was incorporated into Unisa (Jansen 2002), and not much has been written on the post-merger institutional culture. In the light of this, the present study offers the definition of an ODL institution.

### **1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The broader purpose of higher education transformation as indicated by the Department of Education's (DoE) White Paper 3 (1997:20) and the Council on Higher Education (CHE, 2004:22) is "to address past inequalities and to transform the higher education system to serve the new social order, to meet pressing national needs, and to respond to new realities and opportunities". It is therefore important to interrogate the institutional cultures that currently exist as a result of the mergers of HEIs. My understanding is that, with the various policy documents that Unisa has produced on transformation, open distance learning in the 21st century and institutions with African humanity, Unisa has an institutional culture, after the merger. Therefore, the assumption is that findings from this study will contribute to current debates on what becomes of institutional culture after merger. This study report will also reveal strategies or processes in trying to forge a single institutional culture, especially after merging divergent and unequal institutions. There are some challenges at some institutions that merge, some to an extent of contemplating de-merger (Sunday Times, 25/5/2014). The CHE (2016:152) confirms that, "in 2014, the merger between the University of Limpopo and Medunsa was reversed. The two campuses 300 kilometres apart, have had ongoing rifts that resulted on a ministerial task team being set up in 2010." Some of these challenges relate to different cultures that were brought together by the mergers. Findings from this study might be useful to policy makers at these institutions and others, and it may offer some insight through a literature review, analysis of documents and the study of narratives and strategies to manage divergent cultures in South African higher education.

### **1.4 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Identification of the research problem is the starting point of any research activity, according to Smit (1995). The research problem helps to focus the research and to provide direction, thus making it easier for the researcher to guide the process (Uys, 1996). Deallenbach, George and McNickle (1983) and (Maminza 2008) emphasise the importance of the problem statement in a research project by stating that the ultimate success or failure of a project usually has its roots in the problem identification phase. The importance of problem statement means that the conceptualisation provides a background to the research problem. Van Dalen (1979) points out

that identifying the exact nature and dimensions of a problem is of major importance in research. It is imperative, therefore, that the problem area of this research be outlined.

The merger at Unisa meant that three distance-learning institutions merged creating one institution. These were the former TSA, the old Unisa and VUDEC to form a comprehensive and dedicated distance education institution in South Africa (Baijnath, 2010). The new institution retained the name University of South Africa (Unisa) for historical reasons. Two of the merged institutions, TSA and Unisa, had predominantly white students and VUDEC had black students. Although all three institutions were offering distance higher education, they differed in some aspects including that of culture. Because of this background, it became necessary for a transformation charter (see Unisa Transformation Charter, 2007) as a way of creating Unisa's institutional culture. This and other post-merger Unisa policies will be explored at great length in Chapter 4 where the typology of Unisa will be discussed.

Vaara (2000) indicated that mergers were initially a private sector phenomenon and culture used to be ignored when they were undertaken. The same occurred when institutions of higher education were merged for instance in Australia (Harman, 2002). The possible challenge of ignoring post-merger culture during merger, is that the whole process might have unintended consequences because culture should be central to the process, because all individuals involved have a particular culture (Wright, 2003). Harman (2000) concurs that culture is powerful and must play a central role in university mergers, although sometimes little attention is paid to the role of culture, especially when two or more different institutional cultures are forced to become one. Harman (2002) says attempting to create integrated and coherent educational communities because of the merging of cultures that are historically and symbolically non-complementary, poses enormous challenges for higher education leaders. Even when institutions seem to be highly compatible and able to achieve profitable merger synergies, they often come with underlying cultural differences that can seriously impede integration (Harman, 2003). Institutional culture can be interpreted as historically transmitted patterns of meaning expressed in symbolic form through the shared commitments, values and standards of behaviour peculiar to members of the profession, as well as the traditions, myths, rituals, language and other forms of expressive symbolism that encompass life and work (Harman, 1989:36). In both organisations and academia, these institutional cultural



elements are deeply embedded and the thicker the culture, the more significant its influence will be (Buono & Bowditch, 1989:47). According to Harman (2002:37), “in South African institutions this is evident regarding their social differentiated racial history and tradition”.

The above statement is relevant to the Unisa situation; hence, divergent universities merged to form one institution. There have been changes of symbols like names of buildings at Unisa, but language of instruction and other forms of expressive symbolism that encompass academic life have not changed (Harman, 2002). I had discussions with some colleagues about how they still long for the former universities to which they belonged, especially when it comes to issues of salaries, privileges and work benefits because all these were lost after the merger. Given this background of these issues, the problem of the present study was to determine the post-merger institutional culture at Unisa and what this implies.

## 1.5 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research question is considered the specific management question, which findings of the research must answer (Mouton, 2001). The research question should be a fact-oriented, information-gathering question. Mouton (2001) emphasises that the research question should be the way by which the research is linked to the researched problem. Cooper and Schindler (2001) suggest that research can have a single research question or a number of research questions. This research focused on the main (primary) and secondary questions stated below.

The **main research** question guiding this study was:

- From a conceptual and literature perspective, how can the post-merger institutional culture of Unisa be articulated?

The **sub-questions** were:

- Which institutional culture existed at the different universities before the merger?
- How were these divergent cultures fused together in the new Unisa?
- Which processes and programmes did the university employ in forging a new institutional culture?

## 1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

After looking at the title of the study and addressing the questions that flowed from it, I had to find a suitable research methodology for my study. As I conduct a conceptual analysis in this study, let me clarify what I mean by ‘research methodology’. Research methodology is the interface between methodical practice, substantive theory and epistemological underpinnings. Methodology is thus the point at which method, theory and epistemology come together in the process of directly investigating specific instances within the social world. In the process of grounding empirical enquiry, methodology thus reveals the presuppositions that inform the knowledge that is generated by the inquiry (Harvey, 1990:1-2). Methodology then becomes a broad theoretical framework or paradigm for the study.

Having read the literature, I concluded that critical hermeneutics is the most suitable methodology on the basis of which my study could be conducted. This study then comprise a critical hermeneutic inquiry of the post-merger institutional culture, which has its bases in both hermeneutics as a means of understanding and critical theory as critical discourse. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) explain critical hermeneutics as being placed in the qualitative research field and these authors further describe critical hermeneutics as a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Critical hermeneutics has a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). It involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials – case studies, personal experiences, introspections, life stories, interviews, artefacts, cultural texts and productions, observational, historical, interactional and visual texts – that describe the routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals’ lives. Kinsella (2006), who comments as follows, acknowledges the relationship between qualitative research and hermeneutics:

I suggest that qualitative research is by its very nature informed by hermeneutic thought, although this link is not often made explicit in qualitative research writing. On a broad level, greater attention to the tradition of hermeneutic scholarship can enrich, substantiate and make explicit assumptions about interpretation and understanding that are central to qualitative research. Given that the emphasis in qualitative research is on understanding and interpretation as opposed to explanation and verification, and that, the parallel emphasis is evident in hermeneutic thought, where for instance Gadamer (1996) demonstrates that understanding (*Verstehen*) is the universal link in all interpretation of

any kind, the connection between qualitative research and hermeneutic thought becomes self-evident.

From the extract, it is suggested that the nature of my study was well suited for critical hermeneutics; hence, I tried to understand concepts and interpreted them according to my own understanding. In the following section, the discussion will be on the origins of hermeneutics and how it has developed from classic hermeneutic theory and twentieth-century hermeneutics. I also discuss the major concepts and debates in hermeneutics, after which I discuss critical theory. A discussion of critical hermeneutics follows, including the Habermas-Gadamer debate and its Freudian and Marxist foundations. Later, in section 1.8, the research methods adopted for this study are discussed.

### **1.6.1 Hermeneutics**

Since its emergence in the seventeenth century, ‘hermeneutics’ was referred to as the science or art of interpretation (Grondin, 1994:1). Byrne (2001:1) describes hermeneutics as having to do with textual interpretation or finding meaning in the hidden word. Berger and Luckman (1966) define the purpose of hermeneutics as being to explore the socially constructed contexts of both institutions and organisations. Hermeneutics as methodology for this research was particularly important because it is identified in literature as a recognised framework for the analysis of organisations and institutions (Bryman, 1992), and particularly when one is examining the culture of organisations or institutions (Frost, *et al.*, 1985); Harvey & Meyer, 1995:20).

Originally, hermeneutics was connected to the interpretation of the Bible (Hjørland & Nicolaisen, 2005:1). However, several approaches to hermeneutics have developed over time, and several different types of hermeneutics have seen the light. In this section, I will discuss how perspectives on hermeneutics developed. This understanding, in turn, depends upon understanding the context within which a given situation takes place. These context-specific elements suited the present research, which dealt with an analysis of institutional culture in the context of a post-merger university.

### 1.6.2 Traditional hermeneutics

Hermeneutics has a long history, dating back at least as far as ancient Greece (Cooke, 1938). The term is derived from two words, namely the Greek verb *hermeneuein*, meaning to interpret and the noun, *hermeneias*, meaning interpretation. It was introduced into philosophy mainly through the title of Aristotle's work *Per hermeneias* or in the English translation, *On interpretation*, more commonly referred to by its Latin *De interpretotione* (Cooke, 1938). Aristotle used this title to designate how the logical structure of language conveys the nature of things in the world.

It is not surprising that scholars associate hermeneutics with interpretation. Birch (1993:238) considers hermeneutics to be the science of interpretation, especially of scripture. The importance of religious text was prevalent in the era of traditional or biblical hermeneutics. Traditional hermeneutics was concerned with exegesis or an extensive and critical interpretation of biblical texts. Traditional hermeneutics sought to identify the literal or authentic meanings of religious text so that they could explain how to live a Christian life. The early monks also analysed literary works in an attempt to arrive at the original or intended meaning (Birch, 1993:238).

### 1.6.3 Classical hermeneutics

Although traditional hermeneutics emerged as ahistorical and critical methodology for analysing texts, classical hermeneutics theory represents a movement away from medieval methods of interpretation to explain the correct analysis of biblical texts (Jacobs, 2012). However, biblical hermeneutics did not die and (Dilthey, 1833-1911) there was renewed interest in the interpretation of the Bible. This was a short step from the interpretive tradition of the Middle Ages to texts themselves. Among the key figures in the area of classical hermeneutic theory is Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), who was concerned with the construction of methods to aid successful interpretation of texts, and Dilthey (1833-1911) who added a social perspective.

According to Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), hermeneutics is concerned with construction methods to aid interpretation (Rasmussen, 2002). Schleiermacher developed hermeneutics into a single discipline, embracing the interpretation of all texts, regardless of subject and genre. At each

level of interpretation, we are involved in a hermeneutic circle. Kinsella (2006:5) describes the traditional hermeneutic circle as a circle with two poles. On the hand, there is the object of comprehension to be understood as a whole, and the other hand, there are the various parts of which the object of comprehension is composed. The object of comprehension, taken as a whole, is understood in terms of its parts, and this understanding involves recognition of how these parts are integrated into the whole. The parts, once integrated, constitute the whole. Each part link to the whole by virtue of its location and function. In the process of contextualisation, each of the parts is illuminated, which clarifies the whole (Kinsella, 2006). The two poles of hermeneutics are therefore bound together in a relationship of mutual clarification. Therefore, as Hjørland and Nicolaisen (2005:1) contend, we cannot fully understand a text unless we know about the whole culture from which it emerged.

Before Schleiermacher, hermeneutics was understood as providing a set of tools and techniques for understanding those parts of a text that are difficult to understand. Schleiermacher challenged this assumption and transformed hermeneutics from a technique to a general theory of understanding and interpreting texts. For Schleiermacher, the goal of interpreting a text was to recover the author's original intended meaning (Prasad, 2002:14-25).

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) broadened hermeneutics by relating all historical interpretation to objection (Dilthey, 2010). Whereas Schleiermacher transformed hermeneutics from a technique to a general theory, Dilthey raised hermeneutics to the status of general epistemology (Prasad, 2002:15). Dilthey formulated a more general idea of hermeneutics as he wanted to use method as a means of understanding human expression. Dilthey's three levels (experience, means expression, and understanding) of understanding what is being expressed by an author in a piece of work, carry a strong methodical connotation. Dilthey (2010) was trying to defend humanities against growing competition from science. He thought that hermeneutics could be developed into a humanistic method (hermeneutics of the human sciences) that could produce knowledge (Hjørland & Nicolaisen, 2005:2).

In summary, according to Dilthey, we do not live as linguistic creatures that subsequently understand and interpret. Rather, we live as understanding, interpreting creatures in every aspect

of our lives. Dilthey (2010) placed emphasis on understanding human action in its historical context, and he extended the scope of hermeneutics to include cultural systems and organisations.

When systems and organisation are involved, hermeneutics develops a social perspective. Such perspective was useful for this study, especially when bearing in mind that an institution (such as a university) is more than just a place, but rather a system (Van Wyk, 2009:334) comprising living and changeable entities, a community which shapes its institutional character. By focusing on hermeneutics as the general theory of interpretation, as well as the epistemological foundation of the social sciences, classical hermeneutics theory contributed greatly to the development of hermeneutics.

#### **1.6.4 Twentieth-century hermeneutics**

In the twentieth century, hermeneutics was enriched by yet another development, phenomenology. This new development introduced three giants in the hermeneutic tradition, namely Martin Heidegger, Paul Ricoeur (who mostly built on Heidegger's concepts) and Hans-Georg Gadamer (1977). These three shared the fundamental view that all meaning and thought depend on language. This study concentrates on the respective contributions of Heidegger, Ricoeur and Gadamer to hermeneutics.

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) had a strong influence on the development of hermeneutics. He challenged the methodological hermeneutics of Dilthey (2010), and was instrumental in shifting the focus from interpretation to existential understanding (understanding that has to do with existence or being) (Hjørland & Nicolaisen, 2005). This was treated as a more authentic way of being in the world than simply a way of knowing the world. Heidegger's three modes of people's involvement with their surroundings comprised an everyday mode of practical activity, a reflective problem-solving mode, and a theoretical mode (Hjørland & Nicolaisen, 2005:2).

Pepa (2004), in an elaboration of these three modes, contends that, as a necessary part of human being-in-the world (*Dasein*), things are perceived according to how they are encountered and used in every routine and task. Forster (2007:42) supports this contention when he argues that the

understanding of meaning, and hence the possession of language, are fundamental modes of existence or *Dasein*. In a further explanation of Heidegger's three modes, Pepa (2004) refers to *Vorverstandnis*, implying that understanding a situation is directly mediated by a foreknowledge or pre-understanding. This fore-knowledge or pre-understanding is compromised of the life-world (*Lebenswelt*) or personal experience of trying to make sense of the situation. It follows then that the holding of the *Lebenswelt* in abeyance (suspension or temporary inaction) would make understanding impossible.

Perception and apprehension therefore move from fore-knowledge to an existential understanding, which is a largely unreflective and automatic grasp of a situation that triggers a response. Heidegger (1889-1976) thus transforms hermeneutics, and in doing so, raises understanding to a fundamental category of human existence (Prasad, 2002:16). This hermeneutics transformation is considered in the context of this dissertation in the following way: it will draw on the epistemological dimension in the sense that knowledge will be gained about the concept of institutional culture in the university setting. It will also draw on the ontological dimension in the sense that this knowledge (constitutive meaning) will be used to determine how institutional culture is organised, constructed and articulated by the universities under study.

Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) is arguably the most decisive figure in the development of twentieth-century contemporary hermeneutics. He was profoundly affected by the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (Prasad, 2002). Fundamental in Gadamer's work is the concept 'understanding'. According to Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, understanding is not a procedure or rule-governed undertaking; rather, it is a condition of being human. Understanding is interpretation. As Gadamer (1975:87) explains, understanding is not "an isolated activity of human beings, but a basic structure of our experience of life".

According to Gadamer (1977), philosophical hermeneutics can be described as a philosophical position that reflects the essence of a human being in terms of historicity. Human beings do not have a history but are historical in nature (Institut for Filosofi of Idéhistorie, 2010). Philosophical hermeneutics reflects what it means to be a person (or a group of people, an institution, a company, a political party, a nation, a social class or a generation). Philosophical hermeneutics depends on

one's understanding of being that particular person (or that group of particular persons). That is to say, understanding does not display or present one's way of being as if it were given as an independent object. Understanding does not refer to non-mediated reality, which could be taken as the object of knowledge (Waghid, 2005:87). The reality referred to by understanding is always already in itself mediated. In other words, what people are depends on how they understand themselves, rather than their understanding depicting their way of being. Put differently, understanding is not a procedure nor does it prescribe a set of rules that govern understanding, but rather it is a condition of being human (Waghid, 2005).

Given that, most societies today are characterised by the global distribution of knowledge and information; philosophical hermeneutics delivers a pivotal contribution to our understanding of modern society. It provides insight into the cultural and historical mechanisms, which constitute our modern self-understanding and thus our reality, and as such, it had an important role to play in this study. Philosophical hermeneutics has the potential to illuminate the mechanism, which underlines the post-merger institutional culture in the university setting, as well as to explain cultural reality of the university.

In his philosophical hermeneutics, Gadamer (1977) contests Schleiermacher's conception of the hermeneutic circle (see Schleiermacher, 1768-1834). Instead, Gadamer advocates a process whereby the interpreter shifts between his or her own horizon of understanding and the meaning of the text, as well as between the interpreter questioning the text and the answers to which this gives rise. Gadamer (1977) posits that the interpreter's horizon and the horizon of the text can converge when the interpreter tests his or her prejudices or pre-conceptions in encounters with the text, and continues to adjust these until they yield a reliable reading of the text. The interpreter questions the text from his or her own horizon of understanding. This horizon is limited by an interpretative bias, that is, interpretation can never be undertaken from a neutral position because interpretation is always determined by tradition and history. The interpreter's horizon is thus conceived as related to tradition (Gadamer, 1977). This means that the interpreter's horizon is collective and transcends the individual; its force requires no justification. The interpreter is therefore able to confront his or her own horizon with that of the author in different ways.



Firstly, this may uncover bias on both sides. Secondly, this may enable one to distinguish productive (legitimate) prejudices that are conducive to understanding from inhibiting (illegitimate) prejudices that lead to misunderstanding (Rasmussen, 2003:3). Gadamer (1977) therefore regards the understanding of a text as the result of a fusion between the horizon of understanding of the interpreter and that of the author.

To summarise, Gadamer (1975) rejects the traditional assumption that texts have an original meaning. Instead, Gadamer conceives meaning to be something that only arises in the interaction between texts and in an indefinitely expanding and changing interpretive tradition. Consequently, he denies that interpretation should seek to recapture a supposed original meaning, and instead holds that it must and should take into account distinctive features of the interpreter's own outlook and the distinctive application which he envisages as making of the text in question (Forster, 2007:45-46). Gadamer (1975) therefore developed a distinctive and thoroughly dialogical approach. This approach grounds understanding in tradition (Malpas, 2009). Gadamer therefore points out that we can never step outside of our tradition; all we can do is try to understand it. This is possible through understanding or mastering our experience. This approach relates to the second important aspects of Gadamer's (1975) work, namely historical interpretation. Gadamer (1977) develops a conceptualisation of understanding that considers the interpreter's history. Historical interpretation can, by implication, serve as a means to understand the context of the text (Gadamer, 1975:174). Foster (2007:47) joins scholars like Hirsh (1978) in claiming that Gadamer's arguments are not very convincing. The debates, which followed, gave rise to two irreconcilable theories of understanding and interpretation, namely positivistic hermeneutics and phenomenological hermeneutics (Madison, 1990:26).

Positivist hermeneutics stems from those philosophers such as Thompson (1990) and Kuhn (1996) who regard positivism as a philosophy of natural sciences, and hermeneutics as a philosophy of human sciences. Although there may be some truth in this standpoint, (Hjørland & Nicolaisen, 2005:2) state that this understanding is too simplistic. For these two authors, Kuhn (1996) can be seen as a hermeneutic interpreter of sciences. Phenomenological hermeneutics, on the other hand, stems from the close links between phenomenology and hermeneutics, which has related the

interchangeable use of the two terms. However, phenomenological and hermeneutical philosophers differ in their philosophical beliefs (Byrne, 2001).

Phenomenological hermeneutics assumes that, in order for a complete interpretation of the object or text, a proper context or mental frame is needed (Byrne, 2001). This context cannot be found in the extraneous historical and cultural context; rather, the text affects its own mental frame. Therefore, according to phenomenological hermeneutics, to interpret a text means excluding all extraneous variables and allowing the text to communicate its meaning. The aim of phenomenological hermeneutics is to articulate the truth as it is presented in the text. The underlying assumption of phenomenological hermeneutics is that the reader does not interpret the text; rather, the interpretation is revealed by the text (Beukes, 2010:22).

A comparison of positivist and phenomenological hermeneutics reveals that the latter hermeneutic system lacks rigorous textual, historical and cultural methodology (Harvey, 2001). Positivist hermeneutics, on the other hand, assumes that we only know about something if we can apprehend it through our senses and explain what causes it (Harvey, 2001:13). This approach appears to operate at a more scientific level and focuses mainly on explaining how the world operates. In the 1960s, Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005) further developed hermeneutics through incorporation of structuralist ideas. He asserts a complementary relationship between structural analysis and hermeneutics (Ricoeur, 1918:160). Ricoeur defines text as any type of discourse fixed by writing, and distinguishes between two distinct ways of reading a text (Rasmussen, 2004:4):

- The reader can treat the text as a text in its own right, meaning, without taking author and reference into account.
- Alternatively, a reader can fulfil the text by restoring it to living communication by (re)telling it.

The first approach to the text would be an explanation of the text while the second constitutes interpretation (Rasmussen, 2004).

Ricoeur (1981) links explanatory reading with structuralism, which provides an explanation of the text based on its inherent structure. Structuralism seeks to uncover universal structural regularities (Van Wyk, 2007). However, Ricoeur (1981) does not consider this kind of structural description

to be adequate, precisely because it only offers the possibility of explanation, not interpretation. He suggests that a comprehensive reading of hermeneutics should complement structural description. Ricoeur (1981) argues that reading a text involves a dialectic engagement between the structuralist and the hermeneutical approaches. He asserts that this gives rise to a close mutual relationship between explanation and interpretation of texts (Van Wyk, 2004:27).

In summary of the above, the aim of hermeneutics is to explore the socially construed contents of cultures in institutions, bearing in mind that we cannot fully understand a text unless we know about the whole culture from which it has emerged. Hermeneutics has developed from a technique to a general theory of understanding, emphasising the importance of interpretation as determined by tradition and history (Van Wyk, 2004). The implication for this research was that hermeneutics could facilitate deeper understanding of the concept of post-merger institutional culture through applying the methods of textual interpretation, taking into account historical developments. The research took into account the historical development of Unisa in order to understand the texts (that is, the institutional documents) related to their institutional culture.

### **1.6.5 Contemporary hermeneutics**

Contemporary hermeneutics is primarily described as a theory of radical interpretation of, known as radical hermeneutics (Gallagher, 1992), and was inspired by the two German philosophers, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976). In contrast to classical hermeneutics theory, the school of radical hermeneutics claims that reading is more a case of playing or dancing than puritanical application of method (Gallagher, 1992:100). Interpretation requires playing with the words of the text rather than using them to find meaning in or beyond the text. The text is played off against itself using deconstructionist techniques. For radical hermeneutics, original meaning is unattainable and the best that can be done is to stretch the limits of language to reveal fresh insights (Gallagher, 1992).

The philosopher Caputo (1987) wrote extensively on the topic of radical hermeneutics. By radical hermeneutics, Caputo means a theory of radical interpretation. By radical interpretation, he means interpretation that “goes all the way down, and that there are no interpreted facts of the matter that

settle silently at the bottom that can be unearthed by patiently peeling away the layers of interpretation” (Caputo, 1987:1).

Applying this to education, Gallagher (1992:289-290) identifies four principles of radical hermeneutics. Together these form a radical theory of education.

- First is the principle of play: all interpretation is caught up within a play of signifiers.
- Second is the principle of limited productivity: all interpretation limits the heterogeneous textually of the object of interpretation.
- Third is the principle of power: all interpretation is an exercise of power.
- Fourth is the principle of unjustifiability: all interpretations are ultimately unjustifiable in the sense that all strategies of justification depend on one or more categories that are themselves products of another interpretation.

I found Caputo’s (1987:230-231) use of this radical theory of education, particularly the principle of power, particularly useful for this research project as it helped me to develop a general criticism of the university. Caputo (1987) notes that within the university, power relations gather around the concept of reason to defend traditional positions and exclude new ones. The result is that the university is put to work more and more by the society to which it belongs, with less and less time for the free play of ideas whose ground, reason and practical purpose cannot easily or directly be shown. Certainly, this can be linked to the point made in the Ministry of Education’s National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) (2001), that institutions have largely ignored the need to change their institutional cultures. The radical theory of education implies that this could be the case because of the influence of power relations – the authorities at the university tend to protect the status quo. Analysing policy documents related to institutional culture, from the perspective of radical hermeneutics, therefore implies laying bare the knowledge that is required to achieve understanding. This would mean going beyond the surface or obvious meaning of the text, digging beneath the surface language of the text, in order to uncover and retrieve those meanings that could lie buried beneath the surface.

The above presents a brief summary of my study of hermeneutics thus far. Hermeneutics clearly is a progressive discipline. Through its conceptual work and the ensuing debates, it has developed

into a collection of methodologies of interpretation suitable for not only religion and humanities, but for the social sciences. As such, I used this approach as a research methodology to create awareness of the nature of institutional culture in the context of the university. The next section addresses the major concepts and debates in hermeneutics.

### **1.6.6 Major concepts and debates in hermeneutics**

In this section, the study draws on Prasad (2002:17-23), who discusses the major concepts and debates that inform contemporary hermeneutics. He expands on the following focus areas:

- the idea of the hermeneutic circle;
- the historicity of understanding and the hermeneutic horizon;
- the dialogical nature of understanding and the attendant concept of a ‘fusion of horizons’; and
- the role of authorial intention in interpretation.

*The idea of the hermeneutic circle*, applied to the textual productions of society, means that the meaning of individual texts of a given culture can be fully understood only by understanding the meaning of the overall spirit of that culture (Prasad, 2002). In turn, the overall spirit of that culture can be understood only by understanding the meaning of the individual texts produced by that culture. However, Prasad (2002:17-18) contends that the notion of the hermeneutic circle suffers from a logical contradiction. Prasad notes that if the whole is to be grasped before the parts can be understood, then “we shall never understand anything”. From a hermeneutic perspective, therefore, understanding cannot be seen merely as a logical and analytical process. Rather, the process of understanding goes beyond logic and analysis, and is, in some respect, “intuitive and divinatory”. According to Prasad (2002:18), the idea of the hermeneutic circle remains an important element in the conceptual architecture of hermeneutics.

*The historicity of understanding and the hermeneutic horizon* – the notion of the hermeneutic circle does not seem to consider the interpreter’s own historical context. This issue is addressed by Gadamer (1975), who notes that any act of interpretation must take place within a circular movement between, on the one hand, the interpreter’s prior understanding of the whole, and on

the other hand, an examination of the parts. This implies that the interpreter approaches the text with certain expectations and a pre-understanding of the historical and cultural tradition to which the text belongs. Gadamer (1975:263) calls such pre-understanding “prejudice”, and distinguishes between prejudices that make understanding possible and prejudices that lead to misunderstanding. Gadamer (1975) suggests that we can become conscious of our own prejudices only when we encounter a text of which the meaning challenges the truth of our own prejudices.

*The dialogical nature of understanding and the attendant concept of ‘fusion of horizons’* – for Gadamer (1975), one of the major limitations of early hermeneutics is its reliance on the subject–object dichotomy, with the subject being the interpreter, and the object being the text. He rejects this dichotomy and conceptualises interpretation as participation in the tradition to which the text belongs. Such participation implies that understanding and interpretation have the nature of a dialogue, in which the meaning of a text emerges through a conversation between the interpreter and the text. In this dialogue, the interpreter puts questions to the text and the text, in turn, puts questions to the interpreter. The goal of this dialogue is to find those questions to which the text constitutes the answers. It is only by answering such questions that we can genuinely understand a text. According to Gadamer (1975:273), a hermeneutic dialogue in which the interpreter suspends unproductive prejudices to arrive at an authentic understanding of the text constitutes a “fusion of horizons”. In this ‘fusion’, the interpreter expands his or her own horizon of prejudices to integrate the horizon of the text. Such a fusion of horizons requires that the interpreter be aware of his or her own historical consciousness. Such consciousness requires an awareness of the interpreter’s own hermeneutic horizon, recognition of interpretation as dialogue and openness to tradition.

*The role of authorial intention in interpretation* – for both Schleiermacher (1985) and Dilthey (1976), the purpose of textual interpretation is to understand the intended meaning of texts. This view is radically disturbed in Gadamer’s (1975) hermeneutic philosophy. According to Gadamer, (1975:264) the meaning of a text always goes beyond its author, and the text at all times represents more than the author intended. This rejection of authorial intention is found troubling by objectivist theorists (Hirsch, 1965), who conceptualise the text as possessing a fixed meaning, and who explain the task of understanding as seeking to decipher meaning objectively by relying on

method-governed analysis. Methods themselves are, however, historically produced, and no method can ever be successful in removing all traces of history, culture and context from the interpreter. There is therefore merit in Gadamer's (1975) conclusion that meaning of a text always emerges through a conversation or dialogue between text and interpreter, and such meaning is not delimited by authorial intentions. Gadamer's (1975) view is widely accepted among contemporary hermeneutic scholars (Prasad, 2002:21).

Against the backdrop of the major concepts and debates outlined above, I have identified the following methodological consideration as relevant for the research project. Following the principle of the hermeneutics circle, a significant notion is the importance of contextual interpretation. Institutional texts or documents can only be fully understood taking into account the cultural context as it had developed historically. In turn, the history of the culture can only be understood by understanding the texts or institutional documents produced because of the cultural context. This means being mindful of the fact that the context of university (Unisa) is not given, but because of a particular cultural history, and this would need to be carefully analysed.

For hermeneutics research, history serves as an important part of context. The present research therefore had to acquire a thorough familiarity with the historical development of Unisa, in order to understand texts related to its institutional culture adequately. As an institutional researcher employing critical hermeneutics as a research methodology, I needed to question and test my own prejudices continually. This implied being continually self-reflective and self-critical as I searched for authentic consensus and meaning. The task of critical hermeneutics in searching for authentic consensus and meaning could be facilitated through engagement in critical theory. The next section therefore reports on a discussion of how critical theory has evolved along three central phases.

## **1.7 CRITICAL THEORY**

Waghid (2004:54) explains critical theory as being geared toward evaluating and changing established ways of thinking and established forms of life. Calhoun (1995:11) refers to critical theory as a special term for theory that is self-conscious about its historicity, its place in dialogue and among culture, its irreducibility to facts, and its engagement in the practical world.

Max Horkheimer (Calhoun, 1995) of the Frankfurt School of Social Science posits that critical theory, as social theory, is oriented toward assessing and changing society as a whole, in contrast to traditional theory, which is oriented only to understanding or explaining it. Horkheimer (1972) points out that critical social theory should be directed at the totality of society in its historical specificity (i.e. how it came to be configured at a specific point in time). This point was instructive for the study, as this approach enabled me to seek to understand the merged institution, taking into account the unique histories of the disparate institutions that merged and how dealing with those histories has led to a reshaping of a new institutional culture. Calhoun (1995) also points out that critical theory should improve the understanding of society by integrating all the major social sciences, including economics, sociology, history, political science, anthropology and psychology. This point was instructive in terms of how to approach the present study.

Jürgen Habermas (1968) is widely recognised for his work on critical theory and features prominently in this present study as he made the case for critical theory in his critique of Gadamer's work on hermeneutics. In the next section, I shall spend more time exposing his views on the use of critical theory. Habermas (1968) distinguishes between critical theory in literary studies and critical social theory. In literary studies, critical theory is a form of hermeneutics, i.e. knowledge via interpretation to understand the meaning of human texts and symbolic expressions. While in social theory, in contrast, critical theory is a form of self-reflective knowledge involving both understanding and theoretical explanation to reduce entrapment in systems of domination or dependence, obeying the emancipatory interest in expanding the scope of autonomy and reducing the scope of domination (Calhoun, 1995). From this perspective, much literary critical theory, since it is focused on interpretation and explanation rather than on social transformation, would be regarded as positivistic or traditional, rather than as critical theory in the Kantian or Marxian (Calhoun, 1995) sense. Critical theory in literature and the humanities in general does not necessarily involve a normative dimension, whereas critical social theory does, either through criticising society from some general theory of values, norms or thoughts, or through criticising it in terms of its own espoused values (Horkheimer, 1972).

Thus, the use of critical theory and hermeneutics as a methodological tool not only enhances our understanding and gives us an emancipatory view of the merger model, but also provides a



framework for understanding the relevance of this model in contributing to the formation of institutional culture (Calhoun, 1995). The rationale behind the decision to ground the present study in critical theory is that there was a need to reshape the past conditions and culture of the newly merged university of technology. For historical reasons, even though the merged institutions were both technikons, they nevertheless were different on many fronts. In the chapters that follow, the study will report in detail on these differences.

### **1.7.1 CRITICAL HERMENEUTICS**

When German critical scholars, like Jürgen Habermas (1968), joined the discourse on hermeneutics, seeking to extend boundaries of hermeneutics, critical hermeneutics became important. Previously discussed theorisation of hermeneutics focused on the problem of dealing with or not dealing with the historical and cultural distances that separate the interpreter and the text. According to Demeterio (2001:1), such limited focus would lead to an overabundance of hermeneutics once the two distances are taken out of the picture. Habermas (1968) gave new direction to hermeneutics when he insisted on the necessity of hermeneutics even without these two epistemological precipices. This cleared the way for critical hermeneutics, especially when he identified the three generic domains of human interest, namely the technical, the practical and the emancipatory (Demeterio, 2001).

In this section, I outline the cornerstone events in the development of critical hermeneutics, starting with Habermas's constructive debate with Gadamer. This is followed by a brief description of how Habermas ventured into Freudianism and Marxism in an effort to qualify his criticism of Gadamer. Critical hermeneutics is then summarised, reaffirming its importance as a research methodology in the context of this research. This section is concluded by a discussion of critical theory, which, after hermeneutics, is the second leg of critical hermeneutics.

### **1.7.2 The Habermas-Gadamer debates**

Gadamer's (1975) primary argument is that tradition is central to understanding. Gadamer (1975) believed it not possible for anyone who seeks to understand, to step outside his or her tradition, to

free him- or herself from effective historical consciousness. For Gadamer, the task of understanding cannot be performed by stepping out of the tradition but must be performed by remaining within it. To him, it is the tradition that shapes our 'prejudices', our expectations, with which we approach a particular experience (Nuyen, 1995:420). Jürgen Habermas (1968) has problems with Gadamer's reliance on "historical consciousness" or the notion of tradition as a basis for understanding (Nuyen, 1995:420). For Gadamer, without being able to stand outside and look back at tradition, hermeneutics will fail to reveal what may be wrong with tradition itself. Gadamer asks, "what if the tradition one appeals to is systematically distorted? What if one's tradition is the accumulation of perspectives based on force and coercion?" (Gadamer, 1968:376).

For Habermas (1980), if hermeneutics is the placing of oneself in tradition, then hermeneutical understanding will fail to detect any pathology that besets the tradition, and hence it will fail to grasp the truth. Hermeneutics will fail because tradition is that with which we understand, or interpret, anything, including tradition itself, and a defective tradition will not see itself as defective. Habermas (1980) discusses psychopathology as an analogy to the problem faced by Gadamer. A person with a psychological distortion cannot detect, let alone deal with, the pathology simply by reflecting on his or her own experiences. Any such reflection is conditioned by the very experiences that give rise to the distortion in the first place. Psychopathology can be detected only by a reflection based on an *external* reference point, usually with the help of a psychotherapist. It is only with reference to undistorted behaviour that the distortion can be revealed (Nuyen, 1995:420). For Habermas, what Gadamer's hermeneutics needs, but does not have, is an external 'reference system', or a theory that explains how things work independently of traditional prejudices.

Nuyen (1995) raised similar objections to those of Habermas. However, while Habermas is concerned about the application of a distorted tradition to the particular case, Apel is concerned about the particular case distorting tradition (Apel, 1980). In Apel's case, the root of the pathology is not in the tradition, as in the case of (Habermas, 1980) but in the "existential demand" (Nuyen, 1995:420) for the application of tradition which could result in an opportunistic interpretation of history. Thus, Gadamer's hermeneutical movement from tradition to the particular case is problematic in both directions: the pathology of tradition will infect our understanding of the

particular case, and conversely, the pathology of the demand in the particular case will infect our understanding of tradition (Nuyen, 1995:421).

With regard to Habermas's views on the application of distorted tradition to a particular case (see Habermas, 1980), a reflection is made on graduation ceremonies at some merged institutions by way of an example. I use this example, as graduation ceremonies can loosely be regarded as 'tradition' within the higher education context section 1.6.5. Given that Habermas agrees with Gadamer on the game of language (see Apel, 1980), and given the fact that South Africa recognises 11 official languages, how did the merged institutions agree on the language of this tradition in this particular case of graduation? Apel (1980) was especially concerned about a particular case distorting tradition. Staying with the same example, how acceptable or 'tolerable' would 'ululating' or 'ancestral praise' or singing be in the middle of a graduation tradition, as these are expressions of some cultural groups whenever they are happy. Would it be that those particular cases of expression are distorting the tradition of 'soft applause' during graduation, as expressed by other cultural groups?

Apel (1980) concurs with Habermas (1980) and further argues that an objective *scientific* viewpoint has to be developed for there to be any chance of genuine understanding (Nuyen, 1995:420). Analogously, what Gadamer's hermeneutics needs, but does not have, is an external 'reference system', or a theory, which explains how things work, independent of traditional prejudices. According to both Habermas and Apel, there are no resources within Gadamer's hermeneutics to break out of the hermeneutic cycle (Beukes, 2010). Gadamer, on the other hand, contends that putting the emphasis on method presupposes that knowledge already exists about the subject which is supposed to be interpreted and understood (Beukes, 2010:24).

Another of Habermas's ideological clash with Gadamerian hermeneutics was that the latter assumes that every dialogue between a subject and an object, or between two subjects, is a genuine and authentic dialogue (Demeterio, 2001:2). Gadamer (1975) advocates dialogue or conversation as a way of uncovering knowledge and reducing the embedded political power in people's discourse. According to him, conversation assumes mutuality of question and answer. Gadamer proposed that, through conversation with the text or with another, an event of understanding would

occur that cannot be predicted nor controlled (Byrne, 1998:6). Gadamer is said (see Byrne, 1998) to have believed that true conversation occurs when people are open and equally participative and interested in achieving common understanding. In the case of the present study, the point about genuine and authentic dialogue must be borne in mind, especially since the mergers were coerced and therefore political (see Habermas, 1980). Habermas contends that Gadamer (1975) failed to anticipate the possibility of pseudo-dialogue and pseudo-consensus. According to Apel (1980), Gadamer was unaware that the free-flowing game of understanding and interpretation can easily be warped by the dominating, violent and distorting forces of ideology that can be reified and too subtle to be seen and felt by the players themselves. Habermas (1980) does, however, agree with Gadamer (1977) that a dialogue has to be a free interaction between two agents. Habermas (1980) contends that, once dialogue is infected by ideology, its foundational freedom is destroyed and any resultant consensus would, by logical implication, be a pseudo-consensus. According to him, ideology can permeate the totality of a life-world, or the horizon, but it can also weave itself into the very fabric of language (Gadamer, 1977). Thus, language, which is the indispensable tool of the Gadamerian dialogue, becomes the carrier of ideological infection. Gadamer, in effect, emerges as a caricature of a dreaded surgeon with a chest of infected medical instruments (Demeterio, 2001:2).

Habermas (1980), however, does agree with Gadamer that playing the game of interpretation means playing the game of language. However, Demeterio (2001:3) says that for Habermas, playing the game of language meant playing the game of domination, violence and distortion. Habermas views language as the bearer of cultural tradition; it is the medium of inter-subjective communication, a tool of domination and power among people and a means with which to enforce inequality (Beukes, 2010:23). If hermeneutics is geared towards truth, Habermas (1980) insists that it has to stand outside the play of the game as an objective spectator. The interpreter has to take the non-participative stand of an external observer to be able to diagnose accurately the sinister process of ideology and language.

### **1.7.3 Summary of critical hermeneutics**

Critical hermeneutics strongly links with universal pragmatics (the philosophical study of the necessary conditions for reaching an understanding through communication) (Demeterio, 2001). In the following way, universal pragmatics presents itself as a standard or a norm against which all strategic actions have to be appraised in order to unveil their conscious or unconscious agenda and will to power. By subjecting every strategic action to a triple analysis, for (1) truth, (2) sincerity and (3) appropriateness, the critical interpreter can easily reveal the action as strategic, and can pinpoint in which way the action systematically distorts the communication process. Any illocutionary speech act (Demeterio, 2001), that fails just one of these triple tests is immediately suspected of being a conduit (or ‘carrier’) of strategic elements and ideological distortions. Universal pragmatics, as envisioned by Habermas (1977), is supposedly capable of tracing even the deep-seated ideological elements that are already woven into the fabric of language. This is the critical hermeneutics of Habermas in its strictest sense of the word (Demeterio, 2001:8).

Against this background, I concur with Mayers and Field (2004:236) that, for critical hermeneutics, an essential part of understanding is self-understanding; and understanding is related to creating meaning in the world and is already a form of application. Critical hermeneutics is invested in a kind of attentiveness to things as they are in our experience – not as givens, but as possibilities, provoking us to ask certain kinds of questions that require us to examine how things are, as well as where we are in relation to how things are. It is the attentive, active participation in this kind of continual enquiry that propels enquirers into an ever-widening and deepening quest for meaning. Critical hermeneutics orients us towards making meaning in the world as a connected, lived and practical exercise.

## **1.8 RESEARCH METHODS**

Research methods are referred to as the way empirical data are generated. Participator/action research, case study, historical, survey and experimental are the basic ones. These methods range from observation of controlled and uncontrolled situations to asking questions through reading documents (Harvey, 1991). While some methods lend themselves more readily to particular epistemological perspectives, no method of data generation is inherently positivist, phenomenological or critical. For Harvey method refers to the procedure or technique used to

generate empirical data. Frey, Botan, Friedman and Kreps (1991) refer to research methods as particular strategies researchers use to generate the evidence necessary for building and testing theories. In the case of this inquiry, I used interviews and documentary analysis as methods of generating and analysing data.

I draw a distinction between method and methodology. Method is defined as a way of doing things, whereas methodology is a set or system of methods. From this, it can be deduced that method refers to a technique, while methodology on the other hand can be seen as an approach. Taking into account the difference between the two, they can however be used together, as I did in this inquiry in order to obtain a clearer understanding of what the post-merger institutional culture of Unisa is. In the next section, case study, interviews and documentary analysis as methods for this inquiry are discussed.

### **1.8.1 Case study as research design**

Discussion of the research methods starts with a discussion on what can be understood by a case study. My research comprised a case study of a South African merged HEI.

Yin (1984) describes the case study research method as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident, and in which multiple sources of evidence are used. For Zainal (2007), the case study method enables the researcher to examine the data within a specific context closely.

Case studies, in their true essence, explore and investigate contemporary real-life phenomena through detailed contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions, and their relationships. Zainal, (2007:2) says a case study is a unique way of observing any natural phenomenon that exists in a set of data. Yin (1984) compares this to quantitative analysis, which observes patterns in data at macro level based on the frequency of occurrence of the phenomena being observed. Case studies observe the data at micro level.

In describing case studies, Stake (1995) distinguishes three types: the intrinsic, the instrumental and the collective. In an intrinsic case study, the researcher examines the case for its own sake. For instance, why does student A, aged eight, fail to read when most children at that age can already read? In an instrumental case study, the researcher selects a small group of subjects in order to examine a particular pattern of behaviour, for instance, to see how tertiary-level students study for examinations. In a collective case study, the researcher coordinates data from several different sources, such as schools or individuals. Unlike intrinsic case studies, which set out to solve the specific problems of an individual case, instrumental and collective case studies may allow for the generalisation of findings to a bigger population.

The literature (see Yin, 1984; Stake, 1995; and Zainal, 2007) reveals that the case study method can be applied in many areas and disciplines. These may include natural examples in the fields of sociology, law and medicine. In addition, also other areas have used case study methods extensively, particularly in government, management and education. In the case of government, for example, studies might be conducted to ascertain whether particular government programmes are efficient or whether the goals of a particular programme were achieved.

In other examples, such as in education, evaluative applications could be conducted (see Yin, 1984), to assess the effectiveness of educational programmes and initiatives. Limiting these types of studies to only the quantitative method might obscure some of the important data that could have been uncovered using a case study method. I found comfort in this assertion, as the present study was after all about ascertaining whether government's programme, the mergers in this case, fitted the case study research method given by Zainal (2007) provided a lens through which this study could look at the research problem. Firstly, I asked myself if I was investigating a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context. The conclusion I arrived at was that investigating the institutional culture resulting from a merger of culturally diverse institutions, implied investigating a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context. The merger was not a conceptual construct; it happened in real life and within a confined geographic area. An attempt was made to examine the details of the merger in detail by analysing and interpreting documents that would enable me, firstly, to understand how the process of the merger unfolded and secondly,

how such a process contributed to the reshaping of the institutional culture at the merged institution.

### **1.8.2 Design of a case study**

Case study, as a research method, has received some criticism with regard to its lack of robustness as a research tool, a factor that led to the subsequent careful crafting of its design (Zainal, 2007:2). The intention here is not to take an in-depth look into the design, but rather to highlight some aspects of it that merit attention. There are various forms of case studies, like the single or multi-case, which makes it possible for the researcher to adopt either of these cases, depending on the issue that is investigated. In cases where there are no other cases available for replication, the researcher can adopt the single-case design. Yin (1994) confirms this by pointing out that single-case design can be conducted where events are limited to a single occurrence. The multiple-case design, on the other hand, can be adopted with real-life events that show numerous sources of evidence through replication rather than sampling logic. According to Yin (1994), generalisation of results from case studies, from either single or multiple designs, stems from theory rather than populations. It appears from the literature that the case study method is not only designed for multiple uses, but can also be grouped into different categories.

### **1.8.3 Categories of a case study**

Yin (1984) notes three categories of case study methods, namely exploratory, descriptive and explanatory case studies. Each of these categories carries within itself volumes of what can be said about it. I will, however, not discuss but give an elementary explanation of what each category stands for. Exploratory case studies, according to Zainal, are set to explore any phenomenon in the data that serves as a point of interest to the researcher. For instance, a researcher may conduct an exploratory case study on an individual's reading processes, which is meant to open the door for further examination of the phenomenon observed (Zainal, 2007:3).

Descriptive case studies, on the other hand, set out to describe the natural phenomena that occur within the data in question. Zainal (2007) suggests that descriptive case studies may be carried out



in a narrative form. The challenge, however, as Zainal points out, is that the researcher must begin with a descriptive theory to support the description of the phenomenon or story. If this fails, there is the possibility that the description lacks rigour and that problems may occur during the project (Zainal, 2007:3).

The third of Zainal's categories is explanatory case studies. These are studies that examine the data closely, both at the surface and at a deep level, in order to explain the phenomena in the data. Explanatory cases are also deployed for causal studies, where pattern- matching can be used to investigate certain phenomena in very complex and multivariate cases.

#### **1.8.4 Advantages of a case study**

There are a couple of advantages of using case studies. First, the examination of the data is most often conducted within the context of its use, that is, within the situation in which the activity takes place (Yin, 1984). Zainal contrasts this with an experiment, for instance, which deliberately isolates a phenomenon from its context, focusing on a limited number of variables (Zainal, 2007). The second advantage is that case study methods allow for both quantitative and qualitative analyses of data. In respect of the qualitative methods, Zainal (2007) sees their often-produced detailed accounts not only in helping to explore or describe data in a real-life environment, but also in helping to explain the complexities of real-life situations that may not be captured through experimental or survey research. For Zainal (2007), a case study of reading strategies used by an individual subject, for instance, can provide access not only to the numerical information concerning the strategies used, but also to the reasons for strategy use and the way such strategies are used in relation to other strategies. As reading behaviours involve complex cognitive processes, reading strategies cannot be examined in isolation, but rather in relation to other strategies (Zainal, 2007). Despite these advantages, case studies have received criticism for what is perceived to be their disadvantages. The following section looks at these disadvantages to find out what they could possibly be.

#### **1.8.5 Disadvantages of a case study**

Yin (1984:21) discusses three types of arguments against case study research. For him, case studies simply lack rigour. He notes, “too many times, the case study investigator has been sloppy, and has allowed equivocal evidence or biased views to influence the direction of the findings and conclusions”. Second, case studies provide very little basis for scientific generalisation, since they use a small number of subjects, and some are conducted with only one subject. Zainal (2007) criticises the single-design case study method for its dependency on a single-case exploration and says this makes it difficult to reach a generalising conclusion. The question commonly raised is, “How can you generalize from a single case?” (Yin, 1984:21). Yin (Zainal, 2007) considers case methodology ‘microscopic’ because of the limited sampling cases. Parameter establishment and objective setting of the research are far more important in the case study method than a big sample size (Zainal, 2007:5). The third criticism of case studies is that they are often labelled as being too long, difficult to conduct and producing a massive amount of documentation (Yin, 1984).

What were the implications of having familiarised myself with the nature, meaning and uses of case study methods? The implications were that I have come to understand that case studies are empirical, in-depth investigations that occur in real-life situations (Jacobs, 2012). Case studies allow one to examine data where the activity takes place. As explained earlier, I am convinced that case study is a most suitable research method for my study. The post-merger institutional culture under investigation is a real-life merger, making the study a real-life situation investigation. Therefore, this study can be classified as a case study interpreting a real-life phenomenon, as also suggested by McDonough and McDonough’s (1997).

## **1.9 CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS**

Conceptual analysis has appealed to me due to the philosophical nature of my investigation. It is therefore important to try to understand the nature of this appeal. In this section, an attempt is made to give a more detailed understanding of the concept ‘conceptual analyses’. Firstly, the meanings of ‘concept’ and ‘analysis’ are explored after which the relevance of conceptual analysis to this investigation is explained.

### **1.9.1 Explaining a concept**

Birch (1993:1) draws on the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which describes a concept as “an idea of a class of objects, a general notion or idea”. It can also be explained as “an abstract or generic idea generalised from particular instances” (Beukes, 2010:37). A concept exists when one has the ability to use words appropriately and when one examines the use of words in order to see which principle governs their use. If these uses can be made explicit, the concept would be uncovered (Van Wyk, 2004:5).

In seeking to understand more about concepts, the researcher asks the question: what is it that we can conclude by reasoning from evidence from concepts or how much do we know about them? Klimke and Putman (1972) point out the dangers of possessing concepts without knowing what they mean. The authors say we can possess concepts in spite of being massively ignorant of, or mistaken about, the kinds of meanings our concepts pick out. For example, people may possess a concept like ‘bubonic plague’ without knowing that the plague was spread by the transmission and proliferation of tiny micro-organisms, and that the symptoms of the plague were causal effects of the activity of these micro-organisms in a host body. Laurence and Margolis (2003:254) extend this challenge of concepts by pointing out that one can even possess the concept in spite of wrongly taking the symptoms to be an infallible indicator of the presence of the disease, or while believing that the affliction is the result of some sort of supernatural causes.

Within a similar context, Hirst and Peters (1998) argue that a concept is not the same as an image. According to them, one can have a concept of ‘punishment’ without necessarily having a picture in mind of a criminal being hanged or a boy being beaten. Is to have a concept necessary to be able to use the word ‘punishment’ correctly? If we have the concept, we can relate ‘punishment’ to other words like ‘guilt’, and say things like ‘only the guilty can be punished’. Hirst and Peters (1998) argue that this ability to relate words to each other would go along with the ability to recognise cases to which the word is applied.

Van Wyk (2004:4) objects to this approach to explaining a concept. He says we often distinguish between things or groups but do not have a word for marking the difference or similarity. Are we then to infer that in such cases we have no concept? This would mean denying that animals, which

make quite complicated discriminations, have concepts. On the other hand, we would be prepared to say that a person has a concept of ‘punishment’ if he (she) could relate the word ‘punishment’ correctly to other words, such as ‘pain’ and ‘guilt’, and apply it correctly to cases of punishment. In the case of this explanation, which concept of ‘merger’ and of ‘institutional culture’ did the policy makers have and with what did they associate these? One could ask the same of institutions. This is why it becomes important to ask the question: how does the institution interpret the post-merger institutional cultures as outlined by policies? The questions provide credence to Parekh’s argument that, having done the mergers, there is now not a very clear idea of what the institutions are and how they should deliver on their mandate. In other words, one can understand Parekh (2008) to be saying there was no clarification of these concepts (merger and institutional culture) to the extent that it became not clear how to address the two issues.

### **1.9.2 Explanation of conceptual analysis**

Concepts do not exist in isolation from other concepts. They can only be understood in relation to other concepts. In realising this fact, I also analysed the connectedness of concepts in order to develop a better understanding of HEIs and institutional culture. Yehezkel (2005:669) explains this connection by using the concept “conceptual ties”. According to Yehezkel (2005:669), a conceptual tie is a connection of dependence between meaningful components of a language. He illustrates his point by saying that, if the meaning of the word x (that is, the concept x) depends upon the meaning of the word y (that is the concept y), then a conceptual scheme that does not include y cannot include concept x.

Conceptual ties are therefore connections of meaning (Beukes, 2010). In considering this viewpoint, I used mergers within the context of higher education in South Africa, which is different from other mergers in other sectors elsewhere in the world. Mergers were adopted in South Africa as a way of addressing inequities created by the apartheid system, whereas in other countries like Australia, US, Canada and New Zealand, were for financial and fiscal policies. To understand these mergers therefore means to understand different reasons for mergers in South Africa. Equally, to appreciate the post-merger institutional culture one needs to understand what it is, what it means, and how it relates to the mergers.

Analysing concepts will help in interpreting and understanding how the merger process unfolded. To understand this, we need to be sensitive to the realities of this merger – how the merger affected people, policies and practices. As Burbules and Warnick (2003) observe, “An unexamined concept may help in masking an underlying confusion.”

### **1.9.3 DOCUMENTARY ANALYSIS**

It may be simplistic to assume that conceptual analysis alone is an authentic source of understanding mergers, and that on its own it could lead to realising the objective of this study, which was to explore how the merger of an HEI contributed to a reshaped institutional culture. In order to limit this risk, I also analysed documents. Documentary analysis falls within qualitative methods of research (Bowen, 2009).

As the present study is of a conceptual nature, it becomes necessary to explain what is meant by ‘documentary analyses. In the preceding section, sometime was already spent in explaining what analysis is. In this section, the meaning of ‘document’ will be explored briefly while retaining the same meaning for ‘analysis’ as is applicable under ‘conceptual analysis’.

#### **1.9.3.1 What is a ‘document’?**

Given (2008) offers a simple explanation of a document as a text-based file that may include primary data or secondary data as well as photographs, charts and other visual materials. Burnham *et al.* (2008) explain it by making a distinction between ‘document’ and ‘literature’. For them, a ‘document’ is an instrument in language, which has as its origin a deliberate expressed purpose to become the basis of, or to assist, the activities of an individual, an organisation or a community.

There are differentiations between primary data documents (PDDs) and secondary data documents (SDDs). For her, PDDs include transcriptions of interviews, participant observation field notes, rituals, maps and diagrams. These documents are filed systematically so that they can be readily recovered for classification, coding and analysis. SDDs, on the other hand, are materials that are important in describing the historical background and current situation in the community or

country where the research is being conducted (Webb & Webb, 1932). They include maps, demographics, and disease distribution and graduation rates. These are useful for forms of research such as spatial data or historical research.

For Webb and Webb (1932), the essence of a primary document is not intended to inform historians or political events; instead, primary documents are exclusively for the purpose of action. These authors regard primary documents as facts in themselves not merely the representation of facts, and in this sense, they are to be distinguished from literature, which constitutes all other writings yielding information as to what purport to be facts. In their view, there can be no substitute for actually handling the primary documents themselves and, as such, no summary or abstract of a document is of any use. If primary documents are inaccessible Burnham *et al.*, (2008:176) conclude that the subject (and any research of it) is impracticable.

This ‘purist’ view has been met with resistance, as Scott (1990) and Burnham *et al.*, (2008) indicates; there are a number of problematic features in the purist argument. For Scott (1990), whilst Webb and Webb (1932) identify possible sources of inaccuracy and bias in the literature they fail to see that similar problems may beset the analysis of primary documents. For Scott (1990), a more adequate approach to documentary sources must therefore adopt a more flexible view of the value and use of documents than that used by Webb and Webb (1932).

The views expressed above expose us to the nature and meaning of what, in the eyes of many scholars, may constitute a document. Implicit in their arguments are behaviours that should guide those who are interested in document analysis. While there may be merit in Webb and Webb’s (1932) approach to primary documents, the researcher likes Burnham’s (2008) flexible approach to the value and use of documents. One cannot discard a document based on it being a summary or abstract; rather, if its status is cleared and it speaks to the issues at hand, every bit of information is useful to a researcher. In section 1.9.3.2, the role of documents in research is considered. In many ways, this continues the debate by Burnham *et al.* (2008) on the nature of a document.

### **1.9.3.2 Role of documents in research**

Although documents often serve as key sources of social-scientific data, their role in research is said to be rarely highlighted. Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss (2009) and Given (2009) consider documents as on a par with an anthropologist's informant or a sociologist's interviewee. To them, the standard approach to the analysis of documents focuses primarily on what is contained within such documents. In this frame, Glaser and Anselm (2009) say, documents are viewed as conduits of communication between a writer and a reader – conduits that contain meaningful messages. Such messages are usually in the form of writing, but can engage other formats such as maps, architectural plans, films and photographs. Glaser and Anselm (2009) warn, however, that, although documents invariably contain information, each document enters into human activity in a dual relationship. First, documents enter the social field as receptacles of instructions, obligations, contracts, wishes, reports. Second, they enter the field as agents in their own right, and as agents, documents have effects long after their human creators are dead and buried. In addition, documents as agents are always open to manipulation by other – as allies, as resources for further action, as opponents to be destroyed and suppressed.

Glaser and Strauss (2009) recommend what they call a straightforward approach to documents. This involves the adoption of some form of content analysis that concentrates on what can be suggested based on the discussion that documentary analysis may benefit from a critical hermeneutic approach. I invoke the words of Gadamer (1975), when he asserts that understanding was always a historical, dialectic and linguistic event. Gadamer (1975:8) says we can only understand a text when we actually make ourselves part of the common aim from which the text emerged historically. If one takes into cognisance the 'historical consciousness' of the texts, what it seeks to understand the conditions under which they were written, and evaluates and assesses them. One may be better able to do an interpretive analysis of what is written in documents. This method might provide emancipatory outcomes with respect to understanding that each merger has a life of its own, different from the others. From this point, we might get to understand how institutional culture is reshaped under particular conditions, and this may lead to developing the necessary insights about institutional cultures within merged institutions of higher learning (Given, 2008).

Based on the above discussion, it is suggested a documentary analysis might benefit from a critical hermeneutic approach. Documentary analysis might provide emancipatory outcomes with respect to understanding that each merger has a life of its own, different from the others.

### 1.9.3.3 Limits of documentary sources

Documentary sources offer great opportunities to develop novel accounts and interpretations of significant events (Burnham *et al.*, 2008). However, as with all sources and methods, it is prudent to ask which other types of information may usefully complement this approach, and what are the limitations of documentary sources. I discuss conceptual analysis as a complementary method to documentary analysis in this section. In this section, the limitations to documentary analysis are discussed. Burnham *et al.* (2008) highlight such limitations as authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning.

Burnham *et al.* (2008) identify *authenticity* as a major limitation to documentary analysis. For him, the authenticity of a document concerns its genuineness: whether it is actually, what it purports to be. This question goes beyond the purpose to involve the notion of soundness. Scott (1990) raises several questions with regard to this, such as whether the document is an original or a copy and whether it has been corrupted in any way. About authorship, one may ask whether it is possible to authenticate the identity of those responsible for producing the document.

Scott (1990) links the question of authenticity to that of *credibility*. He suggests that, once a document has been authenticated, it is necessary to ask how distorted its contents are likely to be, in other words how sincere and accurate the author of the document was? Scott urges the researcher to pay particular attention to the conditions under which the document was produced and the material interests that may have driven the author to write the document.

For Scott (1990), the most serious challenge facing users of documentary sources concerns the *representivity* and meaning of the documents. He implores the researcher to make sure that the documents consulted are representative of the totality of relevant documents. This requires that consideration be given to the survival and availability of relevant documents. With regard to



meaning, there might be difficulty in establishing the literal *meaning* of documents; however, all users of documents face problems of interpretive understanding of individual concepts, appreciation of the social and cultural context through which the various concepts are related in a particular discourse, and a judgment of the meaning and significance of the text as a whole. Scott (1990) recommends that the researcher discover as much as possible about the conditions under which the text was produced and, on that basis, make sense of the author's situation and intentions (Burnham, 2008).

#### 1.9.4 INTERVIEWS

Another significant and relevant data collection tool in this project is semi-structured interviews. Interviews are a qualitative way of allowing a researcher to enter into understanding the world of the person who is interviewed. Although Patton (1990) states that there is no recipe for effective interviewing, he further mentions that, in the end, the interview must offer the researcher a human aspect of the interviewee. This happens due to the interaction that takes place during the process of interviewing. According to Ellen (1986), the researcher must always bear in mind that the interview is a social process, and that a conversation is governed by a variety of cultural conventions and expectations, which need to be learned. This becomes very important in ethnographic research (Ellen, 1986) because sometimes researchers can be insensitive to the cultural conventions that they are researching.

Ellen (1986) states that there are various types of interviews, and criteria which researchers apply, vary:

- The first criterion of an interview is the degree of pre-determination in the question that is asked. For example, we move from formal questions through standardised agendas and checklists to questions arising spontaneously.
- A second criterion is the degree of directiveness: questions may vary from neutral, vaguely encouraging prompts to the most specific of questions on particular subjects.
- Thirdly, there is the degree of how open or closed the manner of the question asked is. Ellen (1986:321) gives an example of “how are you?” versus “are you suffering from

malaria? “The point here is that in an interview questioning is cardinal in obtaining the required information.

- A fourth criterion is the length of the interview (brief encounters versus in-depth probes).
- The fifth criterion is the degree of arrangement (from a pre-set appointment to discuss a special topic to a totally unexpected meeting and subject of conversation).
- The sixth criterion is the interview setting (in a group versus at the subject’s house or the ethnographer’s house, neutral territory and so on).

The implications of this range of interview types are that the researcher must be careful when applying these because of the challenges that they might pose. It was important for me as a researcher to remember that just as claims for the objectivity of formally structured interviews can be false, in that this kind of discussion is alien to all (see Ellen, 1989), so too can less-structured approaches themselves be unfamiliar to informants and subject to repudiation and subtler forms of non-response and distortion. These forms of interviews were used according to the question and the respondents’ reactions to a particular question.

Further, according to Seidman (2013), interviews are conducted because researchers are interested in people’s stories. Telling a story is a necessary process that one embarks on, “when people tell stories, they select details of their experience from their streams of consciousness” (Seidman, 2013:7). The argument here is that experiences of the people enable researchers to make meaning of the stories that are told. Patton (1990) asserts that at the root of the in-depth interview is an interest in understanding the lived experiences of other people and the meaning they make of those experiences. This was very relevant to the present study as interviews enabled me to understand the meaning making of the culture that was experienced at Unisa at the time of the research.

#### **1.9.4.1 Sampling of participants**

According to Mouton (2002), a researcher is always interested in a particular population that is homogenous. The population sample of this study consisted of Unisa staff members from different departments, centres and bureaus. Participants were selected according to their number of years at Unisa, e.g. during and after the merger, as Streubert and Carpenter (1999) suggests that

respondents are usually selected because of their relevance with the phenomenon that is investigated. Purposive sampling was deemed suitable form of a qualitative approach. Here Patton's, (1990) argument on suitability of purposeful sampling especially when the research is likely to benefit participants, influences me. The argument Patton, (1990:169) makes is that the power and logic of purposive sampling is in selecting cases that are rich in information for in-depth of the study.

There was one group of participants in this study and interviews were conducted between June and November 2015. The participants were all Unisa employees that were at three institutions that merged to form Unisa. In order to get various and relevant views for my study I selected participants from: African Centre for Arts, Culture and Heritage Studies (ACACHS), Bureau of Market Research (BMR), Centre for Continuing Education, College of Education (CEDU), College of Economic and Management Sciences (EMS), Department of Psychology, Diversity Management, Equity and Transformation Department, Strategic and Planning Department, and Unisa Executive Management Department. Below is a table indicating gender and race of the participants in order to indicate fairness in terms of the views obtained on the research question.

**Table 1.9.4 Race and gender of participants**

<b>Race</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
Black	5	4
Coloured	1	2
White	2	4
Asian	0	1

Samples from these centres, colleges and departments were inclusive in terms of gender and race and expected information that they could provide concerning institutional culture after the merger at Unisa. The participants varied from head of centre and departments to administrators and I felt that the sample would be large enough to obtain rich and relevant information. Section 1.10 addresses the key concepts in this research. All ethics from both universities involved in this study were followed (see attached ethical clearance certificates).

## **1.10 KEY CONCEPTS OF THE STUDY**

In this section, I refer to some meanings of concepts, such as institutional culture, policy, higher education, university, mergers and open distance learning. I provide a substantive discussion of institutional culture in Chapter 3.

### **1.10.1 Policy**

The concept ‘policy’ was fundamental to this study because in the context of South African higher education, it is the very policy that brought changes that led to mergers of most institution, some with different cultures. It was therefore imperative that this concept be explored in order to understand how it operates, how different role players interpret it, as it played a critical role when reporting on the analyses of the documents and interviews in Chapter 6 of the study. Ball (2006:44-53) discusses policy according to three viewpoints: policy as a text, policy as a discourse and effects of policy.

#### **1.10.1.1 Policy as text**

In the complexities of viewing policy as a text, Ball (2006:44) says that policy is not clear, closed or incomplete and is a result of deliberations, compromises that leads to micro-politics and interest groups. For him, policy is contested, is fluid, in a state of becoming “or never was and for any text a plurality of readers must produce a plurality of readings”. He contends that policy texts are not immune to misunderstandings of how they should be practised and contextualised and they are subject to be undermined (Ball, 2006).

The text and its readers and the context of response all have histories. Policy is not exterior to inequalities. Although it may change them, it is also affected, inflected and deflected by them. This exposition set the scene for this study, as it provided a structure by which to understand and analyse higher education mergers and institutional cultures. It allowed for interpretations of the struggles, compromises and interpretations of the merger as contained in the texts I analysed. Secondly, this description of policy was congruent with the methodology for the study (critical hermeneutics), as

it recognises history and context as framework for a critical understanding of the actor's interpretations and meaning. Thirdly, Ball, (2006) points out that policy is bound to enter existing patterns of inequality. This was the case with the South African higher education mergers, as they were created through policy to address the imbalances created by the apartheid policy (Jansen, 2003). It remains to be seen how the policy itself is affected, inflected or deflected by the mergers.

### **1.10.1.2 Policy as discourse**

As a discourse, Ball (2006:48) says that policy “ensembles, collections of related policies, exercise power through a production of ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’, as discourses”. He further describes policy (2006:49) as “practices that systematically form the object of which they speak ... Discourses are not about objects; they do not identify objects, they constitute them.” Ball (2006) says discourses are about what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where and with what authority. Discourses embody the meaning and use of propositions and words. Ball (2006) cautions that discourse cannot be reduced to language and to speech. According to him, we do not speak discourse; it speaks us. We do not ‘know’ what we say, we ‘are’ what we say and do. In these terms, we are guided by policies; we take up the positions constructed for us within policies.

The actions of the state, according to Ball (2006), are the product of discourse, which points in the direction of power, although discourses are typically formed and legitimated in particular institutional sites like the state. Ball (2006) does not offer us a concrete theory with which to appreciate policy as discourse. By his own admission, he says, “at present I can offer no satisfactory closure on the issue of policy as discourse except, weakly perhaps, to reiterate my earlier point about needing more than one good theory to construct one half-decent explanation or account” (Ball, 2006:48).

### **1.10.1.3 Effects of policy**

Certainly, policies have effects, and according to Ball (2006:50), the challenge in discussing their effects is that the specific and the general are related. Nevertheless, a distinction is made in terms of first-order and second-order effects. First-order effects are changes in practice or structure

(which are evident in particular sites and across the whole system). The merging of two universities and a technikon with different ways of operation fits the criteria of first-order effects.

Ball's (2006) second-order effects are the effect of these changes on patterns of social access and opportunity and social justice. The changes that were brought by the merging of these three institutions and how this contributed to the reshaping of institutional cultures can be seen against Ball's second-order effects. Using Ball's classification of the effects of policy (Ball, 2006), it can be said that the present inquiry looked at how the first-order effects of the merger – the practices and structures – contributed to the second-order effects – the reshaping of institutional cultures.

### **1.10.2 Institutional culture**

Kuhn and Whitt (1998, in Association for the Study of Higher Education [ASHE], 2005:39) describe institutional culture in higher education as:

“the collective, mutually supporting patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behaviour of individuals and groups in an institution of higher learning and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus.”

Exploring institutional culture not only involves questions of whom to study but also of what to study (Toma, Dubrow & Hartley, 2005). Furthermore, the mission of the institution, as defined, articulated and used on campus, and its history are central in understanding institutional culture (Toma *et al.*, 2005:46). The convictions and influence of founders or influential leaders may be central to the ways in which members of an institution continue to view the fundamental purpose of the institution (Toma *et al.*, 2005). It is also deemed central in the understanding of institutional culture to look at how people interact with the various environments at HEIs, and how these interactions are influenced by factors such as location, physical setting and psychological properties.

Alvesson (2012) emphasises the importance of culture and understanding of how people and organisations function in terms of culture. What he refers to as organisational culture is responsible for development knowledge, which is crucial to the sustainability of an institution. Alvesson

however admits that culture is not easy to define calling it a “tricky concept as it is easily used to cover everything and consequently nothing” (Alvesson, 2012:3). There are diverse ways in which culture in organisation is defined and used, but most of these ways share the following common assumptions about cultural phenomena:

- They are related to history and tradition;
- They have same depth, are difficult to grasp and account for, and must be interpreted;
- They are collective and shared by members of groups;
- They are primarily ideational in character, having to do with meanings, understandings, beliefs, knowledge and other intangibles;
- They are holistic, intersubjective and emotional rather than strictly rational and analytical (Alvesson, 2012:3).

Institutional culture is explored further in Chapter 3 of this study.

### **1.10.3 Higher education**

In a philosophical study of this nature, it is expected of a philosophy student to ask what the meaning of higher education is. The New Encyclopaedia Britannica (2007:918) defines higher education as “any of various types of education given in post-secondary institutions of learning and usually affording, at the end of a course of study, a named degree, diploma, or certificate of higher studies”. HEIs include not only universities and colleges but also various professional schools that provide preparation in fields such as law, theology, medicine, business, music and arts. Higher education also includes teacher training colleges, junior colleges, and institutes of technology (Higher Education Act No.101 of 1997) of South Africa.

In this study, I focused on an ODL university that falls under the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997) of South Africa. Under this Act, a higher education institution is any institution that provides higher education on a full-time or part-time or distance basis and which is:

- merged, established or deemed to be established as a public higher education institution under this Act;
- declared as a public higher education institution under this Act; or

- registered or provisionally registered as a private higher education institution under this Act.

Following is an explanation of what a university is, since university is one of the key concepts in the study. Allen (1988) observes that most philosophical analyses still focus not on the concept ‘higher education’, but upon the idea of the university. He also points out that philosophy of higher education is chiefly concerned with universities, and as such, most important works on the subject include the concept ‘university’ in their title. Against this background, I wish to point to a tendency where, even in South Africa, the concept ‘university’ is used interchangeably with ‘higher education’. The truth is that, while by ‘university’ is meant higher education, the reverse is not the case, as ‘higher education’ does not necessarily mean ‘university’. What is acceptable, especially against the Higher Education Act of 1997, is that universities are part of the higher education sector, while the latter goes further to include colleges and other public institutions falling under the act.

#### **1.10.4 University**

The concept ‘university’ finds its origin in both legal Latin *universitas*, meaning ‘community’, and in classical Latin *universus*, meaning ‘totality’ (Van Wyk & Higgs, 2004:197). A university can be explained as an institution of higher learning, providing facilities for teaching and research, and authorised to grant academic degrees (Van Wyk & Higgs, 2004). A university is comprised of an undergraduate division, which confers bachelor’s degrees, and a graduate division, which comprises a graduate school and professional schools, each of which may confer master’s degrees and doctorates. Du Pré (2009) offers a similar explanation, but goes a little further by explaining its processes. To him –

the university is an academic institution at which research is conducted and teaching and learning are offered within the organised cadre of the contact between lecturer and student, and supported by networking, cooperation and collaboration with external academic partners to create, develop and transmit knowledge” (Du Pré, 2009:14).



Given these explanations and many others, and having explained it himself, Du Pré still worries about what he calls “the true nature of a university”. He finds that the policy documents, such as the Van Wyk de Vries Commission (1974), the Committee of University Principals (CUP) investigation into universities (1987), the NPHE (2001), the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) (1996) and many others, including their amended forms, are not helpful in giving direction on the true nature of a university. In the face of this dilemma, the present study resorted to using the concept of universities as explained above.

### **1.10.5 Mergers**

Moeng (2009:29) and Vaara (2000:82) argue that the term ‘merger’ has two meanings in the context of combining organisations. Firstly, it can refer to any form of combination of organisations that are initiated by different types of contracts. Secondly, a merger is a combination of organisations that are rather similar in size and that create an organisation where neither party can be perceived as an acquirer. Goedegebuure (1992:16) defines a merger as:

“An amalgamation of two or more separate institutions that surrender their legal and culturally independent identities in favour of a new joint identity under the control of a single governing body. During this process by and large all assets liabilities and responsibilities of the former institutions are transferred to either a continuing or to a new institution.”

In this study, the term ‘merger’ is used with the focus on how the merging of three separate institutions, two universities and a technikon, separate histories, policies, programmes, locations and cultures contributes to a reshaping of post-merger institutional culture. In 1.10.6, a short background of a distance education model is presented. This will be extensively discussed more in Chapter 4 that focuses solely on the typology of Unisa.

### **1.10.6 Open distance-learning university (UNISA model)**

A very basic definition of distance education is that it is learning at a distance. Siaciwena (2000) describes distance education as a system of instructional methods in which teaching is performed without the teacher’s presence, where communication between the teacher and the learner is then

facilitated by print, electronic, mechanical and other devices. Tahir's (2001) definition adds that distance education is a mode of teaching that includes the use of newspapers, pamphlets, magazines, books, radio, television, film and the postal services as sources of teaching. According to Intelecon Research (2000), distance education is commonly applied to both formal and non-formal learning. Buitendacht (1995) and Maminza, (2009) refers to distance education as a vehicle for open learning because it features the elements of student support, recognition of prior learning open access, freedom of pace, and freedom of space. The other terms that are used interchangeably with 'distance education' are 'lifelong learning' and 'open learning'.

The Open University of the Netherlands describes open learning in terms of four kinds of freedom, namely free and open access, freedom of place and time, freedom of pacing, and freedom to combine modules from different programmes (Intelecon Research, 2000). The common thread in the definitions is that open distance learning is characterised by among other features, students' independence in their studies and reliance on technology as a form of communication between the institution and the student.

## 1.11 CHAPTER ORGANISATION

The study is organised as follows:

In **Chapter 2**, there is a literature review on mergers. This is accomplished by providing detailed analysis of the concept of 'the merger' and how it came about in the case of Unisa. Literature on typologies of mergers is reviewed, specifically mergers in higher education. International and South African discourses are explored extensively. This being a hermeneutic study in nature, it was cardinal to understand the historical and specific conditions under which mergers take place. This was done by reviewing the historical and policy context of higher education (HE) mergers in South Africa. Most merger scenarios reveal a commonality of processes without which it would be difficult for any merger to succeed. This has resulted into me proposing what I considered key attributes of a merger process. Post-merger processes and experiences internationally were also reviewed, and the results are reported in Chapter 6. This section is concluded by a report on a body

of theoretical frameworks, out of which I propose Jansen's (2003) contingency theory, which I believe captures the conditions of the particular post-merger culture under study.

**Chapter 3** begins by explaining institutional culture in an attempt to explore in detail the notion of institutional culture, focusing on international and local discourses. As this was a conceptual study, it was appropriate to start by analysing the meaning of concepts as a way of arriving at how best use them. In this case, I started this chapter by exploring in detail the disciplinary foundations and nature of institutional culture. It is not common that culture is associated with universities (Tierney, 1995). In this chapter, the conceptual link between universities and culture is discussed. Through the literature review, I discovered that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' culture. This realisation has led to a presentation of typologies of institutional culture internationally and in South Africa. Cultural factors dominate the HE environment abroad and here at home. I explored typologies of institutional culture in order to ascertain how these institutions have dealt with cultural dynamics. Conceptual frameworks that I considered relevant in analysing institutional culture in higher education are also presented. The chapter concludes by proposing specific meanings of institutional culture that I used as tools for analysing institutional culture in merged HEIs.

The case study for this inquiry was an ODL South African university.

In **Chapter 4**, through a literature review, I discuss the nature of distance learning universities. While the idea of an ODL university is a worldwide phenomenon, it is, however, not a first choice for many South Africans. Against this background, I examined the nature of ODL University closely. A study of a critical hermeneutic nature, such as this one, preoccupies itself with exploring historical contexts as a basis for understanding. In doing this, the respective histories of the three institutions that merged – the Technikon SA, Vista University (later known as VUDEC Campus) and the Unisa – are discussed. The story of their merger is narrated from the time government announced its intention to merge them. I recount their respective reactions to the merger up to their last day of separateness and to the current institutional culture.

**Chapter 5** focuses on the analysis of data. The data consisted of documents (Unisa policies) and interviews conducted with staff members at selected departments and centres of Unisa. From the interviews, the analysis proceeds along establishing patterns and themes that arise in terms of conceptualising institutional culture in Unisa's post-merger era. The documents to be analysed are the transformation strategy, audit report, institutional operating plan, strategic plan and the university's self-evaluation report. The documents were analysed against the main question of the study, which was from a conceptual and literature perspective on how the post-merger institutional culture of Unisa can be articulated.

In **Chapter 6**, the findings of the research on post-merger institutional culture are discussed. Concluding remarks and reflections on the challenges of the study, the contribution to the body of knowledge to the field and possible future research on the topic are presented.

## **1.12 SUMMARY**

This chapter introduced how I came to decide on the research topic and its relevance. However, these reflections alone would not have been helpful if there were no tools for navigation. In recognising this fact, motivation for undertaking the study was provided through a preliminary reading of the literature. In this section, I followed developments in the relevant field of study, an exercise that helped in shaping and focusing initial ideas. It is not possible to undertake a journey such as this without knowing why one takes it and how one will get where you want to go. I therefore stated the overall aims of the study, while at the same time articulating what the problem that the study sought to investigate was. This led to a formulation of specific research questions as a way of focusing the research problem.

Having clarified the research question, I provided what was considered an appropriate methodology for this study: critical hermeneutics. Thus, this study comprised a critical hermeneutic inquiry of a merged HEI and its post-merger institutional culture. The study therefore drew on features of both hermeneutics, as a means of understanding, and critical theory, which introduced us to critical engagement. In this chapter, I spent a considerable amount of time on reviewing concepts and the literature as they related to critical hermeneutics. I related these back

to the study to show how they would help in achieving the research aims. Methodology is not the same as method. While methodology helps in investigating specific instances, method, on the other hand, is a procedure or technique used to generate empirical data (Harvey, 1990). I presented and discussed the case study, interviews, conceptual analysis and documentary analysis, as methods that were used to generate, analyse and interpret data for the inquiry. This helped me to construct relevant meanings and interpretations for post-merger institutional culture in a merged institution.

Even though these approaches were tested assumptions, when one applies them to particular conditions, such as the ones prevailing at university, they make for new perspectives, which sought to discover through this research. Therefore, no one method or methodology can claim to satisfy all requirements for a critical understanding of a particular phenomenon. The chapter ended by introducing key concepts that were major themes throughout the study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND CONCEPTS AS APPLIED IN THE STUDY

#### 2.1 INTRODUCTION

This section of the study provides a conceptual framework on mergers giving a detailed explanation of the nature, meaning and process of mergers. Conceptual analysis is employed for a better understanding of mergers. The objective of the present study is mainly to create a better understanding of mergers, which is done through conceptual analysis. In Chapter 1 a detailed explanation of what is meant by ‘conceptual analysis’ is given (see 1.9.3.2). In analysing mergers, I considered Beukes’ (2010:37) warning that conceptual analysis does not only involve breaking down or analysing a concept in parts in order to gain knowledge, but such analysis also requires interpretation. This means that, even before dissecting a concept, it has to be interpreted, slowly showing its multiple uses, its meaning and context in order to clarify it (Beukes, 2010).

A conceptual framework on mergers is provided by explaining the meaning, nature and process of mergers. An exploration of a particular case of the post-merger institutional culture of the institution under study was a primary aim of the study. This institution is referred to through the study as a ‘unit of analysis’, which Mouton (2001:51) explains simply as the “what” of the study.

#### 2.2 THE CONCEPT OF MERGER

A merger can be described as the act of merging, especially the combination of two or more companies. Pritchard and Williamson (2008:49) also describe the meaning of merger in two ways: as a noun and as a verb. In the case of a noun, “merger” means “the extinguishment of an estate ... by absorption into another”. When used as a verb, “to merge” means “to sink a lesser estate into a greater one” (Shorter Oxford Dictionary, 2008). The literature clarifies the concept ‘merger’ in varied ways, but my attention was captured by a crisp explication: a merger happens when two companies become one (Vaara, 2002). This decision is usually mutual between both firms (while the explication might not reveal much, it succeeds in securing a general perspective in one’s mind

of what a merger could be). It also forces one to ask, “Are there mergers whose decisions are not mutual?” This question is adequately addressed later in the chapter (see Chapter 3), when we explore different merger typologies. For now, it might suffice to point out that the decision to merge might not necessarily be mutual to all those that merge (Vaara, 2002). There are, however, mergers that can happen through mutual negotiation. Vaara (2000:82) argues that the term ‘merge’ has two meanings in the context of combining organisations. ‘Merger’ can refer to any form of combination of organisations, initiated by different types of contacts. The more specific meaning that separates mergers from acquisitions is that a merger is a combination of organisations which are rather similar in size and which create an organisation where neither party can clearly be seen as the acquirer (Bajjnath, 2010). In this research report, mergers and acquisitions are both referred to as ‘mergers’ if there is no particular need to distinguish different types. From these definitions, it can therefore be suggested that different processes sometimes drive the merging of two organisations and it is not always based on mutual negotiation.

The literature suggests varying reasons for mergers in companies. These include political factors, enhancement of company production and expenditure decrease to increase monies form taxes, (Harman, 2002). The success or failure of the reasons for mergers may be questioned at times. Sirower (2003) and Naidoo (2006:3) posit that although some mergers have succeeded, a high failure rate of mergers has been noted in business sectors. Mark Sirower (Naidoo, 2006:3) concluded in two thirds of the 168 mergers, he analysed, between 1979 and 1990, that mergers destroyed shareholder value. Another study conducted in 1992 showed that 44% of all companies acquired were later sold, often at a loss (Tanenbaum, 1999; Naidoo, 2006:3). Having secured an idea of what might be meant by mergers in general, the next discussion reports on what this might mean in higher education.

### **2.2.1 Mergers in higher education**

Harman (2000:345) prefers to call mergers in higher education “institutional mergers”. He describes these as a combination of two or more separate organisations into a single entity, with overall management control being under a single governing body and a single chief executive officer. During this process, all assets, liabilities and responsibilities of the former institutions are

transferred to either a continuing or a new institution. Institutional mergers often result in subsequent mergers of academic and administrative organisational units (Goedegebuure 1992; Harman & Meek, 1992). Goedegebuure (1992) describes a merger in higher education as an amalgamation of two or more separate institutions that surrender their legal and culturally independent identities in favour of a new, joint identity under the control of a single governing body. Mergers are also classified in terms of the academic focus and activities that the merging institutions bring together. This classification was introduced to the literature by Goedegebuure (1992), drawing on private sector merger typologies that use ‘line of business’ and ‘type of product’ as structuring dimensions.

The Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997) refers to a merger as the process ... of which two or more HEIs that are public lose their status as juristic persons on the date that they are merged into a new juristic person. Harman and Meek (2002:1) caution that, whatever we choose to call a merger, it is the most significant event in which an institution might be engaged. In both the educational and commercial worlds, Harman and Meek (2002) say there are few ‘true’ mergers and even fewer are painless. Whatever the ultimate view might be on mergers, Harman and Meek warn that it can take up to ten years for the wounds to heal and for the new institution to operate as a cohesive and well-integrated whole. Goedegebuure (1992) observes in terms of the literature limitations is that:

It is a remarkable feature of the higher education literature that, although merger is a long-standing fact of institutional life, little attention in terms of research effort has been paid to this phenomenon. Admittedly, there is substantial documentation available from administrators and scholars directly involved in higher education mergers. However, in general, these articles and conference papers are not based on specified research designs derived from something like a theoretical framework. They are accounts of events and recollections from informed insiders. Valuable in their own right as illustrations of the problems, pitfalls and intricacies associated with merger, they unfortunately provide little knowledge in the strict sense of the word on the motivations, dynamics and results of these processes. In short, from a theoretical point of view the study of merger is almost barren field.

The above observation is true, especially when it comes to literature related to the post-merger institutional culture on which this study focused. In fact, there are few theories that touch on the



area; even those that attempt to, the approach is not relevant to higher education, but to business mergers.

As this study encompasses definition of concepts, I always look out for concepts and what they might mean. From the explications above, there appears to be connected or related concepts that describe mergers both in business and in higher education. Yehezkel (2005:669) explains this connection by using the concept of “conceptual ties”. To invoke his explanation, which was presented in section 1.9.1 of this dissertation, a conceptual tie is a connection of dependence between meaningful components of a language. From the discussions on the nature of mergers in higher education, the researcher identified the following conceptual ties: amalgamation, combination, absorption, surrender, lost status, new juristic person and new joint identity. These concepts can be viewed to mean change that is brought about by an act of joining two or more institutions into a new institution.

Coming closer to my inquiry, the Higher Education Act (No 101 of 1997) strikes a particular chord in me when it explains a merger in terms of what it does and not what it is, in other words as a verb and not as a noun. To recapture, the Higher Education Act (No 101 of 1997) describes a merger in higher education as a process where two or more HEIs that are public lose their status as juristic persons on the date that they are merged into a new juristic person (Jansen, 2003). This study was about understanding the processes of a merger of an HEI to the extent that such processes may have contributed to a reshaped institutional culture. I therefore use the concept ‘merger’ to mean a process of amalgamating two disparate HEIs into a multi-campus institution under a single governing body with a single vice-chancellor. Having clarified the meaning and nature of mergers, the next section will report on an exploration of discourses on mergers, starting with international examples.

### **2.3 INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON MERGERS**

This section of the dissertation refers to discourses on mergers by some selected countries that started the process of merging HEIs. As mentioned earlier in the literature review in the discussion on inclusion and exclusion (see 2.1.2.), the selected countries are some of the oldest and most

representative examples of mergers in higher education, and South Africa copied some of these country's models. South African discourses on mergers will be discussed towards the end of the chapter.

### **2.3.1 Background on selected international mergers in higher education**

Mergers have been a common phenomenon in a small number of countries for well over three decades (Cloete, 2004). According to Hall *et al.* (2004), the international literature is largely devoted to the experience of mergers in developed countries such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Norway and Australia.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, political authorities in the United Kingdom and Australia initiated mergers to create a two-fold HE system with the establishment of colleges of advanced education and polytechnics as alternatives to universities (Jansen, 2002). According to Fourie (2008:126), mergers were also important in the 1970s in the German experiment with the *Gesamthochschulen* as well as in the Swedish reform in higher education (Skodvin, 1999). The mid 1980s until the 1990s saw the most extensive use of mergers in order to create changes in higher education internationally. Australian businesses followed in 1987, while Harman (2000:343) traces institutional mergers in Australian higher education from 1960. Mergers in higher education have been the subject of a number of recent studies as discussed by Pritchard and Williamson (2008:48). In Australia, mergers took the form characterised by multi-institutional mergers involving cultural challenges to integrate communities from the emerging campuses that were historically and symbolically diverse (Fourie, 2008).

The Chinese HEIs started to merge in 1992, reaching a peak in 2000, when 174 universities and colleges were incorporated into 73. Up to 2003, nearly 60 institutions were involved in mergers (Yongmei & Wenyan, 2008). As a result, a number of large comprehensive universities were set up with a full range of disciplines, including liberal arts, science, engineering, agriculture and medical science (Yongmei & Wenyan, 2008).

In the United States, mergers were used as elements of restructuring efforts but more commonly as devices to build stronger and more viable institutions and to avoid closure of financially weak institutions (Harman & Harman, 2003:35). It is further stated (MacBain, 2009) that in the public sector, mergers have occurred mainly amongst colleges in order to build stronger units, with frequently independent community colleges being combined to form multi-site colleges. For example, in 1995, 21 Minnesota community colleges, 34 technical colleges and seven state universities were consolidated to create a new Minnesota state colleges and universities system, consisting of five community colleges, 12 merged community and technical colleges, and seven state universities. In 2006, the Medical University of Ohio and the University of Toledo merged, thus becoming the third largest public HEI in Ohio (MacBain, 2009:1).

In the private sector, numerous mergers have taken place between small private liberal arts colleges. The major driving force here has been the need to achieve financial viability and/or to avoid rendering them useless. The emerging arguments from literature on international mergers are that somehow the reasons for mergers are not that different from those of business mergers (Jansen, 2002). Now that the international merger examples from which South Africa “borrowed”, have been discussed, it remains to be seen if the challenges these countries experienced like merging cultural diverse institutions, were experienced in South Africa. The Unisa merger comes to mind, especially when Fourie (2008) provides an example of Australian mergers of institutions that were historically and symbolically diverse. This will be further explored in the chapter focusing on the merger at Unisa. I will now discuss the reasons usually provided for mergers in higher education.

### **2.3.2 Reasons for higher education mergers**

There are various reasons why institutions merge and mergers can take place between two or more institutions. Although a much broader perspective on international mergers exists, two examples were selected for illustrating the rationale for mergers, i.e. Australia and United Kingdom. The reason for this selection is that these countries have been involved in mergers for a much longer time than other countries. A snapshot of Harman’s (2003) drivers of mergers will be given as indicators of what leads to mergers in higher education. In Australia, mergers were adopted for

solving the problem of duplication and as part of restructuring efforts to address problems of fragmentation and non-viable institutions. Harman and Harman (2003:35) state that mergers and restructuring of higher education in Australia took place in “waves”.

The first wave took place between 1960 and 1981, when there was a consolidation of the fragmented non-university sector. This resulted in small specialist institutions like that of agriculture, paramedical studies and teacher education combining to form larger institutions that could be easily absorbed into universities. Cases like these were the Victorian cities of Ballarat, Bendigo and Geelong, Comprehensive Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs) were combined with small specialist colleges (Harman & Harman, 2003).

The second wave of mergers between 1981 and 1987 was initiated by the Commonwealth government, which had taken over full responsibility for the funding of all public higher education in 1974 (Harman & Harman, 2003). The Commonwealth decided that 30 CAEs involved in teacher training had to combine with other in order to avoid losing funding. These mergers were contested but eventually they were combined into larger CAEs or absorbed into universities (Harman & Harman, 2003).

The third wave of restructuring, taking place between 1987 and 1991 was the most challenging. The Commonwealth announced major reforms that included the abolition of the binary system and extensive institutional mergers. Instead of determining which particular mergers had to take place, size criteria were used to define eligibility for future Commonwealth government funding (Harman & Harman, 2003).

As indicated earlier in section 2.3.1, Harman and Harman (2003:31) argue that although rationales for mergers vary from country to country, there are drivers within the national system in most countries that pressure governments to achieve:

- increased efficiency and effectiveness, especially to cope with rapid and substantial increases in enrolments and additional responsibilities for higher education;
- action to deal with problems of institutional fragmentation and non-viable institutions;

- improved student access to and greater differentiation in course offerings to cater for more diverse student populations; and
- Increased levels of government control in the overall direction of HE systems, especially to ensure that institutions serve national and regional economic and social objectives more directly.

Academics and professionals sometimes drive these forms of collaborations and mergers, but other pressures come from external groups like government, funders and donor organisations (Harman, 1991).

The interesting question to ask would be how the reasons for mergers in higher education differ from those in the private sector. Harman and Harman (2003) suggest that there are common elements between mergers in private companies and mergers in higher education like increased productivity, efficiency and politics.

In the recent evaluation of mergers that took place in Europe between 2000 and 2015, Esterman and Pruvot (2015:12), have tried to establish the rationale behind these mergers. In Denmark, Belgium and France, the view of the mergers has been that “by gaining mass, universities can generate economies of scale and rationalise the use of resources and has been an important driver for merger and concentration process”. The other drivers include mergers considered as means of overcoming fragmentation, achieving critical mass, avoiding duplication of programs, creating synergies and adapting to changing demographics (Esterman & Pruvot, 2015). A fundamental warning the two are offering is that economic gain should never be considered as a main driver of mergers, which happens to be the case in many countries in Europe. They argue that it takes a while for a merger to bear the intended outcomes because of the short duration of the transition period. The short period leads to little time and resources to complete all the work as envisaged in the plan, which also has a knock-on effect on the delivery of efficiencies and the overall success of the merger (Esterman & Pruvot, 2015:13).

For the purpose of this dissertation and its limited scope, I do not dwell much on a discussion of these. In the next, section the discussion moves to the different types of mergers, demonstrating

how the mergers were the product of a complex interplay between governmental macro-politics and institutional micro-politics in a context of political transition.

### 2.3.3 Types of mergers

Mergers can take a variety of forms and in turn, particular forms of mergers are likely to have a major influence on the particulars of the merger process. The kinds of difficulties likely to be experienced are the pattern of structures likely to emerge, and the likelihood of success (Jansen, 2003). In the South African Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997), the definition of a merger is close to that of Harman (2000:345) (as indicated previously in 2.3.2), as a combination of two or more separate organisations into a single entity, with overall management control being under a single governing body and a single chief executive officer. During this process, all assets, liabilities and responsibilities of the former institutions are transferred to either a continuing or a new institution. However, terminology used in international literature in terms of mergers is far from clear and consistent. According to Hall *et al.* (2004), the word ‘merger’ is used in a number of instances to refer to what, in South African terms, would be considered ‘incorporation’. Particular terms have a greater currency in some contexts than in others – for example, the Australian literature tends to use ‘amalgamation’ most frequently (Harman & Harman, 2003); other countries, such as Canada and the United States, use ‘consolidation’ (Harman, 2002). Below are useful ways of classifying and conceptualising different merger forms.

Mergers themselves have been classified in three principal ways (Harman & Harman, 2003). One of these is the classification of mergers in terms of organisational outcome, such as unitary merger, federal merger, incorporation, and so on. The second type of classification is in terms of impetus with a common distinction in the literature made between ‘voluntary’ and ‘involuntary’ mergers (2003). Taking issue with this classification as used by Harman (2002), Goedegebuure (1992:1) states, “No merger is voluntary as such ... Merger is always an offensive or defensive action in response to certain environmental developments, ranging from specific government initiatives to weavings of the ‘invisible hand’ of the market.”

This implies that the underlying causes of mergers are actually a function of the dynamics between the HE system as defined by national policy goals, and the institutions within those systems who respond to the environment so conditioned. Even if all mergers are to some extent ‘involuntary’, the scope from which institutions have to choose their partners varies. Thus, the designation of polytechnics in the United Kingdom in the late 1960s implied mergers between specified institutions, while institutions in Australia, the Netherlands and elsewhere were free to choose their partners. Institutions might perhaps be described as most at liberty to choose their partners in the instance of ‘mergers for mutual growth’ explored by Martin and Samuels (1994:47). Institutions least at liberty where specific mergers are laid down or forced by the state, and in this case, the critical issue becomes how the institutions respond to imposed combinations.

The third classification type groups the mergers in terms of the academic focus and activities that the merging institutions bring closer. This classification was introduced to the literature by Goedegebuure (1992), drawing on private sector merger typologies that use ‘line of business’ and ‘type of product’ as structuring dimensions. Substituting ‘field of academic activity’ and ‘type of academic product’ (teaching and research), Goedegebuure (1992:76) describes four types:

- a *horizontal* merger – between institutions which operate in similar academic fields and are oriented towards a similar type of product;
- a *vertical* merger – between institutions which operate in similar academic fields and are oriented towards a different type of product;
- *diversification* merger – between institutions which operate in different academic fields and are oriented towards a similar type of product; and
- A *conglomerate* merger – between institutions, which operate in different academic fields and are oriented towards a different kind of product.

One might predict that these types would influence the governance structure directly in systems where institutions are free to choose from their merger. However, in any instance, including unitary merger, one can equally predict that these types would influence quite strongly the process and timing leading to the merger and the complexity of implementation.

Where institutions are oriented towards different academic fields and products, differences in institutional style and culture would be wholly unsurprising, and could affect the merger process and outcomes quite strongly. This was particularly relevant in the case of South Africa and my study in particular as the issues of culture became paramount and have a bearing in the end on the merged institution. The following section discusses merger discourses and leads to a later discussion on South African HE merger typologies.

## **2.4 MERGER DISCOURSES IN SOUTH AFRICA**

As this is a hermeneutic study, contextual history that led to merging of institutions is important. History, according to Gadamer (1975), becomes a starting point in understanding conditions under which a certain phenomenon takes place. For Gadamer, understanding a phenomenon is a means to a historical and linguistic event (Gadamer 1975). He further argues that understanding of a text can only be achieved when we actually make ourselves part of the common aim from which the text emerged. Among the recommendations, regarding restructuring of higher education of the Ministry of Education (2001:4) was that the focus of South African higher education should be “[to] redress past inequalities and to transform the higher education system to serve a new social order, to meet pressing needs, and to respond to new realities and opportunities”. I now proceed to the history of higher education under the apartheid government in South Africa.

## **2.5 The context of higher education in South Africa during apartheid**

When the National Party came to power in the Republic of South Africa in 1948, it brought a system of governance that racialized every aspect of society (Bunting, 2006). People were identified and registered from birth on the bases of race, language and ethnic identity (Bunting, 2005). The Populations Registration Act, No. 30 of 1950, required people to be identified and registered from birth as one of four distinct racial groups: white, Bantu (black African), coloured and other (Bunting, 2006). It described a white person as one who is in appearance obviously white – and not generally accepted as coloured – or who is generally accepted as white – and is not obviously non-white, provided that a person shall not be classified as a white person if one of his natural parents has been classified as a coloured person or a Bantu (Reddy, 1997). A Bantu is a



person who is, or is generally accepted as, a member of any aboriginal race or tribe of Africa. (Reddy, 1997). A coloured is a person who is not a white person or a Bantu. The Population Registration Act No.30 of 1950 was repealed by Act, No. 114 of 1991, repealed the Act (Glücksmann, 2010). Glücksmann does not cover Indians in his racial classification, even though they were considered the fourth distinct racial group in South Africa.

By the beginning of the 1980s, the National Party had divided the country into five entities (Bunting, 2006:35):

- the Republic of Transkei (formed from part of the old Cape Province);
- the Republic of Bophuthatswana (formed from part of the old Transvaal);
- the Republic of Venda (also formed from part of the old Transvaal);
- the Republic of Ciskei (formed from another part of the old Cape Province); and
- The Republic of South Africa (which comprised the vast majority of the land of the old South Africa).

The first four entities became known as the ‘TBVC countries’ (using the first letter of each of the four – Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei – in the abbreviation) and the fifth as the ‘RSA’ (Republic of South Africa). The first four entities were said to be ‘independent’ countries but they were never recognised internationally (Bunting, 2006). Instead, these four ‘republics’ were internationally regarded as apartheid creatures, solely created to disenfranchise the black majority in South Africa. The ideology of the then ruling National Party was that Africans (who constituted close to 80% of the population of the old South Africa. Bunting (2006)) were supposed to be citizens of one of these and other potentially ‘independent’ republics (e.g. one for Zulus in the old province of Natal). They were presumed to be ‘aliens’ in the Republic of South Africa and therefore not entitled to representation in the national parliament (Bunting, 2006).

The apartheid government extended the disenfranchisement of its African citizens by introducing, in 1984, a new constitution for the Republic of South Africa (Bunting, 2006). This constitution divided the national parliament into three chambers (the ‘tricameral’ parliament): one house for representatives of white voters (the House of Assembly), one for representatives of coloured voters (the House of Representatives) and one for representatives of Indian voters (the House of

Delegates. No provision was made in the 1984 constitution for any representation of Africans in the RSA parliament, even though this group constituted at least 75% of the population living in South Africa, outside the TBVC countries (Bunting, 2006).

One of the key elements, according to Bunting (2006) in the creation of the three separate parliamentary houses in South Africa was the creation of 'own affairs' and general affairs. 'Own affairs' dealt with matters specific to the 'cultural and value frameworks' of coloured or Indian or white communities. General affairs were those that had an influence across all racial communities. Education was considered by the 1984 constitution to be an 'own affair' as far as whites, coloureds and Indians were concerned (Reddy, 1997). This implied that all education for whites (primary, secondary and higher) was the responsibility of the House of Assembly, for coloureds that of the House of Representatives, and for Indians that of the House of Delegates. This constitution considered education for Africans in South Africa to be a 'general affair'. Responsibility for the education of Africans was therefore vested in a 'general affairs' government department, which was termed the 'Department of Education and Training' (DET) (Bunting, 2006).

The universities were also classified in terms of these four distinct racial groups. In 1953, the Republic of South Africa's Minister of Native Affairs, Hendrik Verwoerd, took the floor in Parliament in Cape Town, to make the case for legislation restricting the quality of schools serving Africans (Sparks, 1990). In his speech, he said:

Racial relations cannot improve if the wrong type of education is given to Natives. They [Africans] cannot improve if the result of Native education is the creation of frustrated people who, as a result of the education they received, have expectations in life which circumstances in South Africa do not allow to be fulfilled immediately (Sparks, 1990).

Mawila (2009) recounts that the Afrikaner-dominated parliament accepted Verwoerd's arguments and approved the Bantu Education Act of 1953, which asserted government control of church-run schools and forbade African teachers from criticising the government or school authorities. In 1958, Hendrik Verwoerd became the Prime Minister of the Republic and he would rule the country with an iron fist, inculcating a repressive governance system. In 1959, Parliament passed the Extension of University Education Act 45 of (1959), which provided for the establishment of

African HEIs as part of the Bantu Self-Governing Act of 1959, (Sparks, 1990). Hendrik Verwoerd's term as Prime Minister ended when he was assassinated in Parliament in 1966. Mawila (2009) says that J B Vorster took over the reins and continued to advance the segregation agenda established and reinforced during Verwoerd's years in power. By 1985, 19 HEIs were created for the 'exclusive use of whites', two for the 'exclusive use of coloureds', two for the 'exclusive use by Indians' and six 'for the exclusive use of Africans'. The six institutions for Africans did not include the seven institutions in the TBVC countries, even though it was expected that the African citizens of the four 'independent republics' would use the latter almost entirely (Bunting, 2006:35). The Department of National Education assisted the Minister of National Education in determining national education policy (Mawila, 2009). Arrangements for higher education, as described, had special implications for access. All public HEIs were designated for a particular race, and students from other race groups were not admitted without special permits obtained by the HEI from its administering government department. In addition, the different legal status and racial basis of different HEIs led to complex differentiation in governance and funding arrangements (CHE, 2004).

Institutions were segregated according to their types like universities, technikons and colleges. While such differentiation was not peculiar to the apartheid state – indeed, it was in line with international HE practice – it did entail some nuances in the South African case (Mawila, 2009). According to the Van Wyk de Vries Commission of Inquiry into universities in 1973, universities advanced learning, inculcated particular qualities of character in the student, prepared students to practice a profession, and instilled standards of good citizenship. However, the relationship of universities to (apartheid) society was highly particularised in legal and policy terms (Van Wyk de Vries Commission, 1973). Legally speaking, each university was a 'corporation' founded by an act of parliament – meaning that its functions were prescribed and could be terminated by the state. At the same time, in policy terms, a university was an independent sphere of societal relationships (separate from the spheres of the state, religion and other spheres), meaning for as long as it existed, and the state could not interfere directly in its affairs. Neither could the university interfere in the affairs of the state by, for example, rejecting the state's designation of it for a particular race group (Bunting, 2006).

The technikons emerged from the former Colleges of Advanced Technical Education (CATEs), which were established by an Act of Parliament, in 1967 (CHE, 2007). Having investigated the training of engineering technicians, the Goode Committee, according to Mawila, (2009) recommended that ‘technikons’, as CATEs were called, should have the special function of training technicians and technologists, a function that would be parallel to, but separate from, that of the universities, and distinct from that of colleges, which focused on practical training in nontechnology fields. Thus, in policy terms, science and the development of knowledge was the domain of universities, while technology and its application was the domain of technikons. Accordingly, each institutional type had to have its own parallel qualification structure, as was put into effect through various policies in the 1980s and early 1990s (CHE, 2007). Before 1993, technikons did not award degrees and did not enjoy their own ‘independent sphere’, but were subject to central control of their curricula, examinations and certification (Bunting, 2006).

In sum, legal and policy provisions for higher education under the apartheid government were ostensibly meant to create a system of ‘separate but equal’ elements that catered for particular needs in parallel. The effect of this legal and policy framework was to engender a HE system that was highly fragmented and uncoordinated, fundamentally inequitable, ‘effective’ only in terms of rigid categorisations imposed by the state, and whose duplications rendered it profoundly inefficient (CHE, 2007:23-24).

The newly elected democratic government took over the Department of Education in 1994. In so doing, it was faced with a mammoth task of having to restructure the HE landscape in an attempt to redress the imbalances caused by the apartheid government, as well as to align its institutions with the broader transformation objectives of the new government (CHE, 2007). Section 2.5.1 retraces the policy foundations for the restructuring of HEIs in South Africa.

### **2.5.1 Policy context for mergers in South Africa**

Education policy has been identified in the first chapter of this study as the main driver of the restructuring of higher education in South Africa. Discourse on restructuring of higher education should be traced from 1994 because this is the period when it all started (Cloete & Bunting, 2004;

Jacobs, 2012). Previously in this study (see 1.10.1-1.10.1.3), the definition of policy was put across through the tripartite definition of policy of Ball (2006). His policy definition revolves around three pillars: policy as text, policy as a discourse, and the effects of policy (see Ball, 2006). These and their relation to the study have been discussed in (1.10.1). Applying Ball's classification of policy effects, the present study explored how the effects of mergers, processes and structures contributed to the articulation of post-merger institutional culture. In this section, the development policy of higher education in South Africa is traced from the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) in 1996, via the *Education White Paper 3: A program for the Transformation of Higher Education* (1997). The provisions on mergers and the conceptualisation of the merger process in the Higher Education Act are highlighted.

### **2.5.2 The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE)**

The source of the policy framework for the restructuring of higher education in South Africa can be traced back to the work of the NCHE between 1995 and 1996. The commission was seen as a platform where policy was debated, negotiated with stakeholders (NCHE, 1996). The commission found that the racialized system of higher education in South Africa had no place in the country's new dispensation. Furthermore, the education system was of no benefit to the country and its black majority; therefore, there was an endorsement that it should be in line with transformation of the country "there is a need for transformation of the higher education system to be planned, governed and funded as a single coordinated system" (CHE, 2000:31). The NCHE report, "A framework for transformation", was produced in 1996. According to Hall (2004), some of the commission's recommendations were principles of restructuring and concrete proposals regarding the shape and size of the system. NHCE recommended nine goals for HE system, including goals to conceptualise, plan, administer and fund higher education in South Africa as an effective and efficient system, which provides a full spectrum of advanced educational opportunities for as wide a range as possible of the population, irrespective of race gender or age. It was also to provide for diversifying the system in terms of the mix of institutional missions and programme offerings that will be required to meet the national and regional needs in the fields of social, cultural and economic development.

This historic document contained three sets of ideas, which subsequently emerged as “pillars” for a transformed HE system (CHE, 2000:4-7). These pillars are not discussed in detail here. It is only mentioned that pillars form the basis for the restructuring of higher education in South Africa and ultimately the merging of some of its institutions. Transformation goals included increased participation, greater responsiveness, and increased co-operation and partnership. As further clarification on the policy context of the mergers in South Africa, policy milestones are briefly discussed.

### **2.5.3 The Report of National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE)**

The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) was established by the then Minister of Education in 1995, to contribute towards reconstruction and development. According to the CHE (2004:34), the commission saw itself as producing policy that broke with tradition of key policy texts going back to those produced under the previous regime. An assumption that was central to the commission’s approach was that:

Higher education can play a pivotal role in the political, economic and cultural reconstruction and development of South Africa (p. 1). The roles of higher education in social transformation vary. At one end of this spectrum is the narrow conception reducing HE to the role of responding to the needs and demands of the economy. At the other, is the humanist emphasis expecting universities to empower individuals to assume the identities of active agents of a democratic society. The Commission saw higher education functioning to variously: a) train a skilled labour force; b) develop a research infrastructure; c) contribute to community development; and d) contribute towards the “building of a new citizenry” (p. 24). Naturally, these goals were considered to complement each other even though they could prove to be contradictory. The universities and technikons were to be transformed so that they addressed inherited inequalities, inefficiencies, faced up to new socio-economic and cultural challenges including “the changing skill and knowledge requirements for improved productivity and innovation, and the needs associated with the building of a new citizenry” (CHE, 2004:24).

The following principles were decided on by the Commission to “guide and direct the process of transformation” (CHE, 2004:4):

- equitable distribution of resources and opportunities in higher education;
- redressing historical inequities;
- democratic, representative and participatory governance (of the system and individual institutions);
- balancing the development of material and human resources; and
- quality in HE services and products.

The NCHE proposals revolve around three areas: participation, responsiveness and governance. Participation deals with the problem of increasing access to higher education and changing it from an elitist to a ‘mass’ system, a process referred to as “massification” (CHE, 2004:6). Bringing more poor and black students into universities and technikons requires –

- diverse programmes, curricula and qualifications;
- multiple entry and exit points;
- changes in institutional functions and structures; and
- more funding.

A single system will address inherited inequities, inefficiencies and be able to plan and manage increased access.

There were criticisms of the NCHE from most social spheres (see Cloete, 2004) and judging by the goals of the Ministry of Education through the Commission, and the history of education already given, mergers became a much-contested undertaking.

#### **2.5.4 Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (1997)**

The Education White Paper 3 (1997) contains many proposals, which set clear guidelines on transformation of higher education in South Africa. The notion of restructuring in the Education White Paper 3 (1997) was informed by government’s notion that higher education should be planned, governed and funded as a single coordinated system (Hall et al., 2004:32). To move the process of restructuring forward, the Education White Paper 3 (1997) proposed that the ministry should develop a National Plan for Higher Education, which would provide specific and

measurable targets for the ‘size and shape’ of the system. HEIs should in turn develop institutional rolling plans within the framework of the National Plan as a mechanism to promote regional planning and coordination in the system. The White Paper 3 of (1997) mentions a number of strategies by which the restructuring and diversification of the institutional landscape should be attained. Firstly, the White Paper 3 proposes collaboration between different institutions at the level of academic programmes. The programme-based approach to planning and development should eventually result in greater articulation, flexibility and diversity in the offered educational programmes. Programme-based planning and development would foster co-operation between institutions, eventuating in the emergence of structural changes and a reconfiguration of the institutional landscape.

Secondly, the Education White Paper 3 (1997) advocates the development of regional consortia and partnerships to co-ordinate and rationalise the provision of HE programmes, to build administrative and academic capacity, to refocus institutional cultures and mission and to make higher education more responsive to national and regional needs. Regional cooperation and partnerships should also lead to new institutional and organisational forms in the end.

Institutional landscape would be assessed, with a possible view to HE restructuring including mergers, closure and the development of a new institutional form, was a third policy strategy mentioned in the Education White Paper 3 of (1997). Such assessment should be undertaken in collaboration with the CHE. Ultimately, the White Paper 3 (1997) should provide the then Minister of Education with the ability to make informed decisions about restructuring. The role of the CHE in the restructuring of the HE landscape is noted specifically as including advice to the then Minister of Education with regard to regional collaboration, rationalisation, mergers and closures of institutions.

According to Hall *et al.* (2004), the first two strategies of restructuring in the 1997 White Paper – both centre on a new national and institutional planning mechanism with a defining element of regional coordination – are largely voluntary means. Within the national policy framework spelled out in the White Paper (see DoE 1997), the largely autonomous institutions should move towards greater collaboration in the provision of educational programmes, in infrastructure development,



and in academic and administrative capacity development in general. The assumption was that, in the process of increased collaboration, new partnerships between institutions would emerge, and the vast discrepancies between historically advantaged and disadvantaged institutions would be bridged by earmarked redress funds, regionally coordinated development plans and funding incentives (Cloete & Bunting, 2000). Eventually, voluntary regional collaboration would lead to a diverse and differentiated system and the development of the new institutional and organisational forms contemplated in the Education White Paper 3. Following, is the discussion of the NCHE Report because of its influence on the other documents that led to the legislation regulation in higher education.

### **2.5.5 The National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE)**

The National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) (2001) was crucial for the restructuring of higher education system. It came after the Education White Paper 3 (1997) and the then Minister of Education admitted to have been advised by the Council on Higher Education in its report titled; *Towards a new higher education landscape: meeting the equity, quality and social development imperatives of South Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (CHE, 2000).

In section 6.4 of the NPHE (2001:79) the new institutional and organisational forms were outcome number sixteen in which the document clearly says that; “The Council on Higher Education advises that the restructuring of the higher education systems to ensure its stability, including in particular, the efficient and effective use of resources, requires a reduction in the ‘present number of institutions through combining institution’” (CHE, 2000:56-57). This recommendation is based on the argument that the “current landscape and institutional confirmation of higher education has its roots in an apartheid past, is inadequate to meet socio-economic needs and is no longer sustainable. South Africa does not have the human and financial resources to maintain the present institutional configuration.” The suggestion here was that for efficient running of institutions and provision of better resources, some institutions had to merge.

The rationale for merging institutions was based on the principles of transformation identified by the CHE (2000) as the basis for assessing combination of institutions:

- Social and educational goals, in particular, the contribution of higher education to social and economic development, both regionally and nationally.
- Access and equity goals in relation to student and staff equity, as well as institutional redress.
- Quality and efficiency goals in terms of economies of scale and scope, both programme and infrastructural, as well as the spread and quality of programmes and graduation and retention rates.
- Institutional sustainability and viability goals in terms of student numbers, income and expenditure patterns and management and governance capacities.
- Institutional identity and culture goals in terms of overcoming the legacy of apartheid (CHE, 2000:58-59).

Outcome Eleven (11) in the NPHE refers to the creation of a single dedicated distance education institution. The then Minister of Education's rationale was that:

“A single predominantly dedicated distance education institution that provides innovative and quality programmes, especially at the undergraduate level, is required for the country. The opportunities that the present distance education institutions have created for students in Africa and other parts of the world must be maintained and expanded” (NPHE, 2001:58)

The advantages of creating a single dedicated distance education institution were purported to be the development of higher education system that will include:

- Developing a clear focus and strategy for the role of distance education in contributing to national and regional goals.
- Developing a national network of centres of innovation, which would enable the development of courses and learning materials for use nationally, thus enhancing quality within the higher education system?
- Developing a national network of learning centres, which would facilitate access and coordinate learner support systems?
- Enhancing access, contributing to human resource development within the SADC region in particular, and the continent as a whole.

- Enabling economies of scale and scope, in particular, ensuring that advantage is taken of the rapid changes in information and communications technology, which are expensive and where the additional investment is unlikely to be within the capacity of any one institution (NPHE, 2001:58).

The institutions that were targeted by the minister to form a single dedicated distance education institution through merger were Unisa and Technikon SA, incorporating the distance education centres of Vista University into the merged institution. In terms of the policies that governed the mergers, one can conclude that there was lack connection between the rationale, processes and the outcomes of the mergers. Access to higher education increased as per the Education White Paper 3 of 1997, but the output did not yield the intended results.

The critique of the Minister's policy and handling of merger at Unisa through the National Working Group is extensively discussed in Chapter 4, focusing on the merger of institutions that formed Unisa.

### **2.5.6 Jansen's post-apartheid merger typologies**

In South Africa, the current form of mergers can be referred to as post-apartheid HE phenomena (Jansen, 2002). The current mergers are a result of a comprehensive plan by government in an attempt to change higher education to be in agreement with the new democratic country. According to Jansen (2002), none of the literature on South African (SA) HE mergers, suggests the existence of these typologies. Having explored the nature of typologies internationally, as well as Jansen's merger formations in South Africa, I am confident in stating that Jansen's merger formations come because of research he and colleagues undertook on mergers in post-apartheid South Africa. The mergers pertained to the incorporation of the following HEIs (Jansen, 2002:161):

- the South African College of Teacher Education (SACTE) into the University of South Africa (Unisa);
- the Johannesburg College of Education (JCE) into the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits);

- Giyani College of Education (GCE) into the University of Venda for Science and Technology (UNIVEN);
- the merger of the ML Sultan Technikon (MLST) and Technikon Natal (TN) to form the Durban Institute of Technology (DIT);
- the Faculties of Veterinary Science (FOVS) of the Medical University of South Africa (MEDUNSA) and the University of Pretoria (UP).

The question may arise why the above-mentioned cases are considered merger typologies. The reason would be that, throughout the consulted literature, with the exception of Jansen, there has not been any categorisation of merged HEIs. Internationally, Jansen's merger formations present scenarios that provide common traits that make it possible to characterise a particular merger. This enables us to identify or categorise a merger in a manner that gives us an idea of its form or outcome. Jansen (2003) presents the following merger formations against which he judges and explains merger outcomes: institutional obliteration, protected enclosure, subsumed integration or equal partnership (Jansen, 2002:163). Each formation is presented below.

#### **2.5.6.1 Institutional obliteration**

In the case of the merger of the GCE and UNIVEN, the disappearance of the Giyani College in its entirety led to what Jansen calls "institutional obliteration" (Jansen, 2002:160). The physical plant was simply taken over for the establishment of the Agricultural School of the University of Venda. There were very few students to take over; in fact, it appeared as if the ongoing decline in student intake, made worse by the failure to develop an institutional strategy for recruitment and registration in 2002, meant that no new students were transferred from the college to the university. The lack of interest on the part of the provincial government and the lack of attention on the part of the university simply led to the disappearance of the college as an entity; in policy terms, there was no 'sub-division' to be created within the university (Jansen, 2002:163).

### **2.5.6.2 Protected closure**

‘Protected closure’ refers to the continued separate existence of a merged entity. According to Jansen, (2002:164) this was the case with the merger of the JCE. The institution was able to secure a separate dispensation of finances (the reserves), appointments, promotions, reporting lines, curriculum, autonomy and the campus status, which was allowed in the normal body of institutional regulations governing departments, schools and faculties (Jansen, 2002:164). Protected enclosure could be a temporary mechanism to ensure that the merger succeeds, or it could be maintained as a status quo.

### **2.5.6.3 Submerged integration**

In merger texts, Kotecha and Harman (2001:13) and Jansen (2002:164), describes a “take-over” as “... the smaller institution being absorbed as a department, school or faculty and [with] the large institution making only minimal adjustments to its structures and procedures. This applies particularly to specialised smaller institutions becoming part of larger comprehensive institutions”. In the case of the FOVS of a historically black university, Medunsa, the staff was absorbed, the students were taken over and the physical facilities were in fact not needed (Jansen 2002). The culture of the white, dominant, Afrikaans institution, the University of Pretoria, completely subsumed the Faculty of Veterinary Science of Medunsa. According to Jansen, black Veterinary Faculty did not disappear, but remains marginal and vulnerable in terms of physical numbers, language practice and political space (Jansen, 2002:164).

### **2.5.6.4 Equal partnership**

By ‘equal partnership’ the meaning is combination of two institutions, both established and with significant physical assets, student numbers and academic staff (Jansen 2002). This form of merger is unlikely to lead to the dissolution of one of the partners or to any visible downgrading of the status of either partner. It is, in many ways, the ideal type of merger, in which the combined resources of the two institutions lead to a stronger and expanded single institution (Jansen, 2002:164). In the case of MLST and TN, the two technikons represent an equal partnership with

similar academic profiles. However, the financial status of the two partners remained a matter of contestation. Recent studies like Vukuza-Linda (2014) indicates that the merger of the two institutions survived and now is currently known as Durban of technology.

Many lessons can be drawn from this discussion on merger typology, but to avoid pursuing a different direction I make very brief observations, the first being that we principally have two dominant merger typologies: voluntary and involuntary mergers (see Jansen, 2002). With the exception of acquisitions, the rest of mergers I have reviewed were not independent of these dominant typologies, and may be found in either of them. For example, the single- to cross-sectoral mergers do not depend on whether the merger is voluntary or not; they can fall on either side of these typologies. The second observation is that the voluntarism or otherwise of the merger is driven by the rationale for the merger (Jansen, 2002). Politics, resources, contracts, negotiations and processes all form part of the rationale for the merger (Kotecha & Harman, 2001). The last point to make is that the outcome of a merger is reliant on the type of merger, as we have seen in the examples I have given above.

Sufficient ground has been covered in securing a picture of the nature and typology of mergers. Since the study was based on South African HEIs, it will be helpful to review the SA merger discourse. This will not only help in identifying similarities, differences or possibly gaps, but also in attempting to understand the specific conditions under which mergers in South Africa occurred.

The next section presents, using tables and complementary narratives, the current university landscape in South Africa.

## **2.6 UNIVERSITY LANDSCAPE IN SOUTH AFRICA**

The merger process brought changes into higher education like the reduction of 36 universities and technikons by the then Department of Education to 24 HEIs. The public HE landscape in South Africa now consists of eleven universities, six comprehensive universities and six UoTs, (Mbabane, 2010). Universities offer a “mix of programmes including career-oriented degree and professional programmes, general formative programmes and research master’s and doctoral

programmes” (CHE, 2009:8). By way of introduction, I present in a table form the current university landscape and show three typologies of universities in South Africa, coupled with a summary of each of these configurations. These are traditional universities, UoTs and comprehensive universities. I call these ‘dominant typologies’ as there are other typologies within these dominant three that were identified from a case study conducted by Jansen (2004) and colleagues at five merged institutions in South Africa. This study uses the concepts ‘typology’, ‘type’ and ‘category’ interchangeably. I start by offering a policy statement on the nature of the first one, traditional universities.

### 2.6.1 Traditional universities

Traditional universities in South Africa date back to 1829, when the British colonial government established the South African College of Cape Town. The aim was to prepare students for matriculation examinations. In 1873, the University of the Cape of Good Hope was established as the country’s first chartered university. Other universities followed, including Unisa, which was founded in 1918. In time, a parallel system emerged with separate universities for white and black people. For the past 10 years, South Africa has been desegregating its universities and is trying to redress the country’s historical shortcomings. Eleven traditional universities offer theoretically oriented university degrees. Some of these universities were merged, while others were left unmerged. The university typology is presented in a summarised table form below.

**Table 2.1: University landscape currently in South Africa**

Name	Merged/unmerged	Institutions merged
University of Cape Town	Unmerged	
University of Fort Hare (UFH)	Merged	University of Fort Hare and Rhodes University East London Campus
University of Free State (UFS)	Merged	University of the Orange Free State, University of the North QwaQwa Campus, and Bloemfontein Vista University Campus
University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)	Merged	University of Durban-Westville and University of Natal

University of Limpopo (UL)	Merged	University of the North and Medical University of South Africa
North-West University (NWU)	Merged	University of the North-West, Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, University of Bophuthatswana, Vista University Sebokeng Campus, Vaal Triangle Campuses
University of Pretoria (UP)	Merged/incorporate	University of Pretoria and Vista Mamelodi Campus
Rhodes University (RU)	Unmerged	
University of Stellenbosch (SU)	Unmerged	
University of the Western Cape (UWC)	Unmerged	
University of the Witwatersrand	Unmerged	

Adapted from Sedgwick (2004)

## 2.6.2 Universities of Technology (UoTs)

These are types of HEIs in South Africa, which came into existence because of restructuring of the HE landscape (Bajinath, 2010). This type of institution has as its foundation the former technikons, which built a solid reputation in providing career-oriented programmes. UoTs offer “vocational education both at degree and sub-degree level” (CHE, 2009:8 in Mbabane, 2010). Technikons offered post-secondary programmes leading to diplomas and certificates until the promulgation of the Technikon Act (No. 125 of 1993), which authorised them to offer degrees. Under the recent reforms, all the old technikons, except for two (Mangosuthu University of Technology and Vaal University of Technology), were merged with other technikons or universities to constitute the new universities of technology and comprehensive universities. Technikons and universities of technology (UoTs) offer programmes in applied disciplines such as business, design, engineering, health sciences, the performing arts and technology, to name a few. Table 2.2 below presents the statistics of UoTs.



**Table 2.2: Universities of Technologies technology in South Africa**

Name	Merged/Unmerged	Merged institution
Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT)	Merged	Cape Technikon and Cape Peninsula Technikon
Central University of Technology (CUT)	Merged	Technikon Free State and Welkom campus of Vista University
Durban University of Technology (DUT)	Voluntarily merged in 2002	Technikon ML Sultan and Technikon Natal. It was then named Durban Institute of Technology (DIT), which changed to DUT in 2008
Mangosuthu University of Technology (MUT)	Unmerged	Formerly known as Mangosuthu Technikon
Tshwane University of Technology (TUT)	Merged	Pretoria Technikon, Technikon North-West and Technikon Northern Gauteng
Vaal University of Technology (VUT)	Unmerged	Formerly known as Vaal Triangle Technikon

Adapted from Vital Stats, CHE (2016)

### 2.6.3 Comprehensive universities

This is probably the one institutional type that drew the largest commentary from stakeholders of higher education. Parekh (2008) describes comprehensive universities as a combination of formative and career-focused education. The Department of Education (2002), argued that establishing comprehensive institutions as an institutional type that integrates university and technikon-type programmes would be well placed to address a range of goals, namely:

- to strengthen research in vocational, technikon-type programmes;
- to provide/offer students a wider range of programmes with different entry requirements and to increase access to technical education throughout the country, especially in rural areas where there is currently little provision; and
- to facilitate student mobility between programmes and to remove the barriers to further education.

This is central to government's human resource development strategy, in particular access to higher education and enhanced articulation between career-focused and general academic programmes, thus promoting student mobility, strengthening applied research, and enhanced responsiveness to regional and national human resource, skills and knowledge needs.

According to Asmal (Department of Education, 2002: Foreword), the new type of institution (comprehensive distance learning university) would be innovative and would enhance the institutional diversity of higher education. It was envisaged that the need for reassessing existing structure and programmes would be covered by this new type of university. I would like to indicate that the aim of the then minister Asmal of creating a comprehensive distance learning education was achieved as Unisa has created access to higher education for many previously disadvantaged people, as suggested in (Prinsloo, 2015). I will spend more time on this in Chapter 4, where the discussion is specifically focused on my unit of analysis.

**Table 2.3: Current comprehensive universities in South Africa**

Name	Merged/incorporated/not merged	Names after merger
University of Johannesburg (UJ)	Merged	Rand Afrikaans University, Witwatersrand Technikon and Vista University East Rand and Soweto Campuses
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU)	Merged	University of Port Elizabeth, Port Elizabeth Technikon and Port Elizabeth Campus of Vista University
University of South Africa (Unisa)	Merged	Unisa, Technikon Southern Africa and component of Vista University Distance Education Campus
University of Venda (UNIVEN)	Unmerged	
Walter Sisulu University (WSU)	Merged	Border Technikon, Eastern Cape Technikon and University of Transkei
University of Zululand (UNIZULU)	Unmerged	Reclassified as a comprehensive institution
Sol Plaatjie University (SPU)	Unmerged	

University of Mpumalanga (UMP)	Unmerged	
--------------------------------	----------	--

Adapted from Vital Stats, CHE (2016)

**Table 2.4: Public higher education institutions grouped together by size and type**

Subgroup	Range	Institutions in group
	<b>Universities</b>	
Large universities	Enrolments of 30 000 and above	UP, NWU, UKZN
Medium universities	Enrolments of 20 000 to 29 999	UFS, Wits, UCT, SU
Small universities	Enrolments below 20 000	UL, UWC, UFH, RU
	<b>Universities of Technology (UoT)</b>	
Large UoT	Enrolments of 30 000 and above	TUT
Medium UoT	Enrolments of 20 000 to 29 999	CPUT
Small UoT	Enrolments below 20 000	CUT, MUT, VUT
	<b>Comprehensive universities</b>	
Large comprehensive	Enrolments of 30 000 and above	Unisa, UJ
Medium comprehensive	Enrolments of 20 000 to 29 999	WSU, NMMU
Small comprehensive	Enrolments below 20 000	UNIVEN & UNIZULU

Adapted from Baijnath (2010)

For clarity, it is cardinal to indicate that now in 2016 going forward the university landscape in South Africa has changed with the new universities in Mpumalanga and Northern Cape provinces (added in the Table 2.3). Now that the current landscape of higher education in the country has been described, one might still wonder what made the institutions come together. Looking into the process of mergers itself can be an attempt to answer the question. Section 2.7 therefore presents the attributes for mergers to succeed.

## 2.7 KEY ATTRIBUTES OF THE MERGER PROCESS

The present study was an inquiry of conceptual nature and therefore it was cardinal to explicate the meaning of ‘processes. The explanation assisted in further clarification of ‘merger’, thus the term ‘merger processes. A ‘process’ can be explained as a series of actions or operations leading

to an end. As a verb, ‘to process’ refers to a systematic series of actions directed to some end; as a noun, a ‘process’ is an act of proceeding or continuing or a forward movement (Simpson & Weiner, 1989). Simply put, a merger process is the story of the implementation of the merger. By ‘attributes’, it simply means the ‘characteristics’ of a successful merger process.

The literature on merger typologies reveals that a particular type of merger is likely to have a major influence on the merger process. Harman and Meek (2002:2) also reveal the kinds of difficulties likely to be experienced in bringing different types of institutions together. In 2.3, I aligned myself with the description of a merger by the Higher Education Act, No. 107 of 1997 as a ‘process’. The question I ask is: what kind of process is deemed necessary for a merger? In asking this question, I acknowledged that the merger process might take different forms in different institutions. A review of international and South African discourses on mergers – in both business and higher education – revealed common critical points of emphasis to consider during the merger period. In considering these points, I tried to distinguish between everyday activities of a merger and what I consider critical processes.

As the literature was reviewed, it became clear that there are key attributes in any successful merger process. I argue that, without due consideration paid to these, any merger is likely to fail. Here I do not attempt to provide an exhaustive account of these attributes, as I continue with this discussion in Chapter 3, where I provide a more in-depth analysis of the importance of process. I have decided to limit my choice to three main attributes in order to make my inquiry manageable. These are interrelated and interdependent and together they provide a powerful critical hermeneutic lens through which to analyse how the merging of the three institutions reshaped institutional culture. I list these as follows:

- compatibility of institutional backgrounds, which for the present study referred to race, size, curriculum and location;
- strong decisive leadership, which refers to strategy and decision-making; and
- stakeholder involvement, which takes into consideration issues of inclusivity and communication.

## **2.7.1 Institutional backgrounds and their compatibility**

Institutional background has a bearing on a merger process and outcome; therefore, it can be considered as a strong determinant of the compatibility and workability of a merger (Harman & Meek, 1992; Goedegebuure, 1992; and Jacobs, 2012). As this study is of a conceptual nature, it is important to analyse concepts for a better understanding. I then have to answer that: what do I mean by institutional background? For the purpose of this study, institutional background referred to the categorisation of the institution – whether by race, size, curriculum or location. In 2.7.1.1, a brief exploration of how each of the background elements might affect the process of merger follows.

### **2.7.1.1 Institution by race**

Tyobeka and Schoeman (2007) highlight specific challenges relating to black and white institutions. This is irrespective of whether institution's academic profiles were similar or different. The challenges relate to the history of discrimination between black and white institutions during apartheid, which I have explained in Section 2.4.1. Without considering the historical context of higher education, it would be difficult to understand mergers in South Africa. This consideration reinforces the relevance of the methodology of this inquiry, critical hermeneutics, which conditions us about the centrality of historical consciousness as a necessary condition for understanding. If we understand the history of black and white institutions under apartheid, we are well on our way to understanding the basis for the challenges institutions of higher learning subsequently faced as they tried to find their way towards restructuring. Understanding the history of challenges, however, is not the same as having a view on them; it only means one is able to contextualise the conditions in which they existed.

### **2.7.1.2 Type of institution**

The type of institution here refers to a university or a technikon, extended to the type of courses it offers or the curriculum. It can be argued that the type of institution has a bearing on the compatibility and outcome of a merger. Tyobeka and Schoeman (2007) say that, while the mergers

between former technikons and traditional universities were probably the most difficult to achieve in South African HE mergers in terms of establishing a common academic platform, each merger presented itself as a special case and, given that, had its own context and micro-politics. In other words, even if the merged institutions were similar to the unit of analysis in this study, namely a technikon merging with another technikon, there would still have been challenges.

Institution type in higher education can be linked to the curricula being offered by the institution, which I have already discussed. It must occupy the minds of many how issues of curricula are dealt with when two or more institutions merge. In this regard, Mfusi (2004:108), who asks, “What happens to the curriculum of the merged institution”, assists me. Mfusi asks this question in his research involving five case studies about the effects of HE mergers on the curriculum. He explains that none of the policy documents he reviewed provided guidelines on how the curricula should be composed after the merger. His research revealed that power relations and power struggles clouded the merger process to such an extent that no due regard was given to curriculum issues. Mfusi (2004) concludes his findings by presenting at least three possible scenarios:

- the curriculum of one or both institutions could remain unchanged;
- the curriculum could be a partial compromise of the new curriculum to reflect both institutions; or
- a complete integration, whereby the curriculum of one of the institutions is completely discarded (Mfusi, 2004:98).

In the case of the Giyani merger, Jansen reports that the college curriculum, which had wealth of professional knowledge and widely regarded as a centre for innovation in teacher training, was simply ignored by the university (Jansen, 2002:164). In the merger of the UOVS, Jansen (2002), reports that the curriculum of the smaller institution (Giyani campus in Venda) was largely ignored.

### **2.7.1.3 Size and strength**

The size and strength of the merging institutions play an important part in the merger process according to the literature. This is the reason because size and strength of merger partners tend to

drive particular behaviours and attitudes that can be perceived as bullying and dominance. Size and strength can be related to a number of aspects, including student population, infrastructure or resources. Writing about the merging of TUT Tyobeka and Schoeman, (2007) observe that the relative size and strength of each of the merging institutions brought about perceptions of dominance and claims of takeovers, which did nothing for the smooth implementation of the merger. In addition to these, challenges were the very real discrepancies in resource allocation and infrastructural development, which, to them, made for an uncomfortable fit. Tyobeka and Schoeman (2007) accentuate this point when they state that there was a situation that required a total mind shift of the participants who, as a point of departure, had to accept an equality that was not borne out by the evidence around them. Referring to other takeovers, Buckley and Ghauri (2002:2) make two very strong statements. The first statement is that the acquiring firm can make more money out of the same assets than the current owners can. Secondly, the acquiring firm can pay the market price for the assets and can even then extract further value. In this instance, it is confirmed that size and strength plays a pivotal role in the direction of a merger.

#### **2.7.1.4 Location**

Kotecha and Harman (2001) identify the location of institutions as a significant attribute in the unfolding of the merger process. Not only location is a matter of public perception of the legacy of each institution, but also it matters whether a merger takes place in a rural or an urban area. My experience as a lecturer at a rural university is that universities there are often poorly resourced. Usually there is lack of libraries, laboratories, classrooms or residences, and they have a lack of access to better opportunities. These inconveniences include long distances between different campuses, and mergers could bring about possibilities of relocation, a consequence of which might be disruption of family life. This makes rural universities unattractive destinations for university communities. In order to attract and retain quality staff, these universities must pay a premium, which in most cases they cannot afford. Consequently, they run the risk of being poorly or understaffed. This is not to suggest that HEIs in urban areas are better off, as they tend to have, among others, problems of overcrowding or a lack of residential accommodation for students.

Having highlighted the importance of compatibility of backgrounds as a foundation for a successful merger, section 2.7.5.1 focuses on strong, decisive leadership. As I reflected on previous experiences of mergers, it became known that none of these mergers would have worked without a strong and decisive leadership with an inclusive plan or strategy on how to proceed with the merger process. The discussion therefore centres on leadership, strategy and decision-making.

#### **2.7.1.5 Strong and decisive leadership**

One of the essential skills of bringing a merger into effect is strong and decisive leadership in order to carry out high-level decisions (Baijnath, 2010). Mergers would barely succeed if strong, decisive and committed leaderships are found to be wanting. Any merger, by nature, is usually contentious because people are concerned about their futures, not willing to move to an uncertain future. Mbabane (2010) reveals that the histories of the institutions, their identity and culture have the potential to make people cling to their own. It can be asked who makes decisions during the merger. Hay and Fourie (2002:127) advise on the establishment of a task team that is representative of the participating institutions to provide leadership on the merger process.

Hart (2005:82) agrees and says these should ideally be the two governing bodies of the merging institutions, which should pass mirror image resolutions and approve heads of agreements setting out key issues. Such governing body will therefore play a leadership role until a leader is appointed or elected, as the case might be. Whether in families, communities or institutions, leaders are often associated with authority and power. This is accompanied by the ability to make decisions and to champion causes in a way that is coherent and cohesive. To be able to do this, leaders are expected to have a plan. In this study, reference is made to the plan as strategy. In 2.7.1.6, the role strategy can play during the merger process is discussed.

#### **2.7.1.6 Strategy**

Definition of concepts is important in this study, it might therefore be asked what exactly strategy is, and what would happen if there were none in the merger? Strategy can be described as the *direction* and *scope* of an organisation over the long term, which achieves *advantage* for the



organisation through its configuration of resources within a challenging *environment*, to meet the needs of markets and to fulfil stakeholder expectation, (Scholes, 2010):

- *Direction* shows where the organisation or business is going, so one could question the direction of a merged institution;
- *Scope*, on the other hand, involves the area or the kinds of activities that would be covered and involved, and here one could identify overlaps or duplications in courses and how these should be dealt with;
- *Advantage* would involve how the institutions benefit from the configuration of resources. In my experience, resources are central in any strategy exercise, as without these very little can be accomplished. Resources would for example include financial as well as non-financial resources, assets, salaries, structures, policies, people, skills, programmes and facilities; and
- *Environment* to which Johnson and Scholes (2001) refer as external factors that would affect the merged institution's ability to compete. In my view, such an exercise would help in reflecting on and forecasting possible enablers and disablers of the merger.

From this explication of strategy, we learn that, when a merger has a strategy, it indicates that it has a direction and will achieve its goals. This implies that a series of decisions will have to be taken. Section 2.7.1.7 explores the nature of these decisions.

### **2.7.1.7 Decision-making**

According to Pityana (2010), decision-making is important especially in a merger because through decision-making, an institution's stance in terms of the vision, background and experience before the merger is understood through experience before the merger. Such visions are often shaped by institution's history, ideology and perspective academic merits (Vukuza-Linda, 2014). Strydom (1999) and Hay and Fourie, (2002:120), on the other hand, suggests a bottom-up decision-making process in order to facilitate a participatory decision-making environment. For him, it is important that people from all hierarchical levels be included in the decision-making process.

The kinds of decisions taken during a merger are quite varied and may include, for example, who will lead the institution, in other words, and who will be the vice-chancellor of the merged

institution?” Hart (2005:83) cautions that disagreement over who will lead the merged institution is common and can wreck a merger process. She then asks what would happen when the respective vice-chancellors have contracts. This question can be asked of all other decision-makers in the institution. It will not be feasible to have two vice-chancellors, nor is the solution to make one a deputy of the other. There does not seem to be an easy way out in terms of resolving these problems, which may cause not only psychological problems, but may also impede the merger process. Hart (2005:83) suggests a negotiated solution as the only reasonable outcome in the unfortunate event that both principals and both directors want the position.

A second example with regard to decisions may include a name for the new institution. Hart (2005:83) characterises the process of naming the newly merged institution as a “battlefield of contestations”. He contends that the choice of a name attracts attention and carries symbolism with staff and students. Locke (2007) is of the view that the choice of a name for the new HEI is likely to take more time so as not to damage ‘brand recognition’.

Jansen (2002:137) recalls the process of choosing a name for DUT as one of the most controversial issues in the merger process. In this case, even though both councils agreed that the institution is called an institute of technology the issue of a prefix was said to have generated much controversy. The Sultan family and the Sultan Charitable and Educational Trust (together with the principal of ML Sultan Technikon) strongly argued for retaining the Sultan name in the new institution. With 97 proposed names received from public submissions, the committee eventually settled for Durban Institute of Technology (DIT), later changed to Durban University of Technology (DUT) and made its recommendation, which was approved by the Minister of Education. It is reported that not everyone was happy with the name, especially the use of the name Durban, as it was seen as being tainted with colonial connotations. This again emphasises the need for strong and decisive leadership, as not everybody will be pleased with every decision taken.

A participatory decision-making environment, as suggested by Strydom (1999) which implies involvement of stakeholders, remains an important aspect that leads to a fair decision process. Having explicated the role of leadership during the merger process, section 2.7.1.8 presents a discussion on stakeholder involvement.

### 2.7.1.8 Stakeholder involvement

A stakeholder can be explained as a person, group or organisation that has interest at an institution and may be affected by its actions. Hay and Fourie (2002) agitate for the involvement of stakeholders, both internally and externally. An investigation carried out on staff perceptions of three merging institutions in the Free State in South Africa revealed that the entire merger process should be underpinned by stakeholder involvement at every stage in order to develop a shared vision and joint ownership of the plan (Hay & Fourie, 2002:127). Hay and Fourie (2002:129) further report on the high level of insecurity experienced by the university community at all levels of the university structure during the merger.

This is a clearly demonstration of the power of a particular culture. In this case, African communalism was the catalyst in this regard. In a social system in which power is held by the most talented or intelligent people, it is not what the community stakeholders might want but what the merits of the situation dictates.

A study by Broadbent (1997) on the merging of Catholic universities in Australia found that the merger, either in a positive or in a negative way, significantly affected academics across all levels. Broadbent reports that a greater proportion of staff recorded negative effects, which related to staff fearing that they might lose their jobs, as well as the financial effect the merger had. For some, it was the end of a career and everything they worked and hoped for and aspired to. During this merger process feelings of frustration, anxiety and loss were understandable, whilst perceptions of unfairness and symptoms of depression, stress, fear of change, loss of commitment, demoralisation, unwillingness to do anything beyond the required minimum, feelings of not being kept well informed, and a loss of confidence in oneself and in management co-existed, (Hay and Fourie 2002:121). In an interesting turn, Robbins (1999) shares a perspective on those who survive the merger process. He explains that survivors feared further layoffs and felt over-rewarded, guilty and sad for those colleagues who had to leave, whilst having to cope with an increased workload.

Students, on the other hand, might feel betrayed, as the merger could be considered a breach of their contract with the original choice of institution in which to study. Hart (2005:84) explains this

point by saying that, on registration, the students entered into contracts to receive their education and to receive a degree from University A. A degree from University B, however comparable, is not the same. She says this should not be a problem if students are kept well informed ahead of time about what degree or qualification they will receive and students are assured of not being disadvantaged by the issue. She says the degree certificates of the merged institution could cite the names of the two predecessor universities to avoid confusion.

All relevant stakeholder groups, both internal and external, must receive communication about the merger early and often. Hart (2005:83) advocates for a careful, thoroughly planned and agreed-upon fair consultative process that will enable people to make choices. It is also important that people be given the opportunity to choose what they want, which hopefully will not make them worse off than they were before the merger. There is therefore merit in wide consultations and negotiations involving trade unions and other formations in the institutions because the process is deemed inclusive.

The discussion now moves to reviewing theoretical frameworks on mergers in higher education. A theoretical framework, simply put, is a lens or a set of lenses through which we explain the things we seek to understand (Hart, 2005). A framework can also be explained as a perspective or an angle from which to frame one's argument. Researchers usually use theoretical frameworks to substantiate what they say through the literature. In section 2.8, I present theoretical frameworks, which were considered appropriate for explaining institutional culture in a merged HEI.

## **2.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

A number of international as well as South African theoretical frameworks for widening of scope and understanding of mergers were reviewed. These ranged from business to public mergers, including those in higher education. Bresler (2007), in her evaluation of mergers and post-merger management at institutions in the country, points out at trivialisation of the importance of culture in the whole process. She further argues that institutions were left to their own devices and were expected to navigate through the process of cultural integration without knowledge of the process and its effects. For purposes of the present study, only two theoretical frameworks are presented

and an explanation is given as to their suitability for the study, as Hart (1999) states the importance of explaining a reason for choosing a certain theory in literature review. I, therefore, took into account that the unit of analysis in this study is in higher education, so for fair comparison, my choice of theoretical frameworks was based on HE mergers in the country. According to Vukuza-Linda (2014), there is significant growth in the body of literature on higher education in South Africa, which is gaining recognition internationally, and the work of Goedegebuure (1992) being one of these.

However, I was attracted to Kamsteeg's (2008) work on mergers, which he undertook at the merged North-West University. In his study, Kamsteeg (2008:440) investigated cultural meanings in a merged HE. I immediately found this approach appealing as, on the face of it, it bears similarities to this study. Kamsteeg investigated culture in a merged HEI in post-apartheid South Africa; I am also investigating a post-merger institutional culture of an institution. In undertaking this study, Kamsteeg (2008) used the narrative approach as his theoretical framework. For him, the narrative approach provides for a sequential account of events and locates their intentionality. Kamsteeg sees language as playing a pivotal role in achieving the objectives of this approach (Kamsteeg, 2008:440). My attraction to Kamsteeg's theoretical framework is its ancillary role in the application of the methodology of this study: critical hermeneutics. In allowing for the sequential accounting of events as well as the intentions behind them, the narrative approach is already historically conscious (Kamsteeg, 2008) and a solid foundation is laid for the work of interpretation to take place.

Section 2.7 of this study highlighted the importance of understanding how processes unfold in a merger. The process is simply explained as the story of the implementation of the merger (see Vaara, 2002). For the purposes of this study, no tension was found between the concept of process and the sequential accounting of events. If these were to be different, at the very least they would complement each other. By allowing for the sequential accounting of events to take place, one is already discussing process. To understand how the merging of the two institutions (e.g. Technikon SA and VUDEC), contributed to a reshaped institutional culture one would have to explore how the merger plans were implemented.

The last link of Kamsteeg's (2008) framework to this study is his implementation of language as a tool for achieving the objective of sequential accounting. Gadamer (1975) asserts that understanding occurs from interpretations embedded within our linguistic and cultural traditions. Gottesman (1996:14), on the other hand, points to the benefits of language as an opener to the understanding of alien horizons. Having gone through these attractive features of Kamsteeg's (2008) narrative approach, however, there was a realisation that it has limitations for this study in that it relies only on interviews, while my study is based on both documentary analysis and interviews. I therefore decided to review further literature and considered Jansen's (2002) Contingency Theory.

I found Jansen's (2002) contingency theory more adaptable and therefore more appealing to the study than Kamsteeg's narrative approach, in that contingency theory enables a deeper understanding of mergers. While the present study is based on documentary analysis and interviews, (Jansen's 2002) contingency theory is constructed on the back of interviews as well. There are however key lessons and common features regarding my study that are difficult to ignore. First, Jansen's (2002) contingency theory is based on a conceptual platform, second, its ability to assess and evaluate the merger and, lastly, its connection to mergers of politics. These then can offer an examination of a post-merger institutional culture. The interviews with Unisa staff members of their perceptions, on which institutional culture the institution had after the merger, will validate the accounting of events and add the human side of the narrative.

### **2.8.1 Jansen's Contingency Theory**

Jansen's (2002) contingency theory is derived from a principal proposition that can be summarised as follows: the origins, forms and outcomes of mergers are conditioned by, and are contingent on, the specific forms of interaction between institutional micro-politics, on the one hand, and governmental macro-politics, on the other, especially in turbulent or transitional contexts (Jansen, 2002:157). Informed by thick descriptions of the case studies of five mergers that have already been discussed. Jansen (2002:157) explicates his theory by saying it is not about the formal arrangements for politics, but the complex of political interactions – conflicts, contestations and compromises – that fuel and frustrate the trajectory of a merger. Jansen's research was motivated

by two related puzzles: Firstly, all the proposed mergers in South African higher education proceeded despite intense political resistance from various constituencies; and Secondly, the planned mergers unfolded in completely different ways, even though the legal and planning script for these unions was often tightly framed (Jansen, 2002:154).

Jansen's contingency theory exposes the assumption that policy implementation is a rational process in which institutional practice mirrors the formal intentions of government planners. It argues that, to date, the merger process in South Africa has been marked by behaviour and action that have been both irrational and incoherent, as well as not necessarily in the interests of the higher educational process.

The interesting features of Jansen's contingency theory and its lessons for this study are examined. Jansen (2004:156) offers a theory, which he calls a "conceptual platform for a theory of mergers". Through the conceptual platform, Jansen (2003) displays readiness to explore the concept of platform theory and interrelated concepts of mergers in a quest to uncover the nature of the concept, rather than merely narrating its events. For Jansen (2004), the major monographs on mergers in higher education tend to treat theory in a manner that provides merely detailed descriptions of specific events and localised incidents. For him, even though often fascinating, the monographs hold little generative power for reflection beyond the peculiarities of the case and the context in question (Jansen, 2002:155). By going deeper into what he calls a reality that lies beyond what we see as peculiarities of mergers, Jansen (2003:157) displays the readiness to change the disposition of the mergers against the domination of narratives. Being a critical thinker (see Jansen, 2002), this is not done by merely theorising, but through scholarly research-based evidence drawn from the five case studies that he and his colleagues reviewed (see Jansen, 2002:159). By going against the dominant and established ways of explaining mergers, Jansen's contingent theory can be seen as being critical. Horkheimer (1990:244) concurs that a theory is critical only if it has an emancipatory approach "to liberate the human being from the circumstances that enslave them". Waghid (2001:54) describes critical theory as a social theory geared toward assessing, evaluating and changing established ways of thinking and established forms of social life.

Jansen's (2003) contingency theory dares go to where others do not, explaining mergers against politics in a manner that does not hold back on what he discovers. Not many theories provide this connection. Jansen (date) observes that, in the existing studies, politics and political explanations sit uneasily within the dominant theories for how and why mergers happen. While politics is acknowledged, it is treated either as an organisational sideshow, disconnected from the merger process and its outcomes (see Jansen, 2004) or it is listed as a secondary feature of institutional change, dominated by organisational dynamics and networks (Goedegebuure, 1992:82-83).

Having explained the reasons why I decided to use Jansen's (2002) contingency theory for this study, the main pillars of this theoretical framework are discussed. Section 2.8.1.1 starts this discussion by exploring the context as well as challenges faced by government with regard to HEIs during the transitional period from apartheid to a democratic government.

### **2.8.1.1 Transitional context**

In South Africa, 'transitional context' can be understood as the period of change from the apartheid era to the democratic government. As in other parts of the world, such as Eastern Europe and Latin America, South Africa's dramatic changes in higher education were brought about by changes in political regime (Jansen, 2002:155). Wide-scale reforms in education are the result of changes in government from one electoral contest to the next. From time to time, such changes in government are fuelled by new ideological positions based on perceived changes in economy, institutions and society. From apartheid to democracy, South Africa was changing from one political regime to another; therefore, HEIs had to deal with major challenges imposed by the past imbalances in the education system. Jansen (2002:157) calls these "transitional challenges", and these will be explored in (2.8.1.2). To understand these challenges is an attempt to understand the conditions that led to the merging of HEIs in South Africa. Jansen warns that, without an understanding of these political imperatives of transition, it is difficult to comprehend the nature and intensity of the contestation that has accompanied the merger process and outcomes in South Africa (Jansen, 2002:160). I will therefore spend more time explicating the transitional context than with the other elements that constitute Jansen's contingency theory.



### **2.8.1.2 Challenges faced by HEIs during the transitional period (1990-1994)**

The first challenge facing the democratic government concerned the number of universities that were racially divided and unequal due to historical reasons. Jansen (2002:157) says that estimations of gross participation rates, (this refers to the total number of students from previously disadvantaged students enrolled at universities (GPR) for the age group 20 to 24). For African students, in 1994, four years on from the transition, the GPR stood at 12% compared to 39% for Indians and 47% for white South Africans (Cloete & Bunting, 2000:16). Worse still, African students were heavily concentrated in the humanities, arts and education, with only 3% of graduates in engineering, 12% in the natural sciences and 2% in accountancy for the period 1991 to 1998. Similar inequalities held for academic staffing on the eve of the 1994 elections. (Cloete & Bunting, 2000:16) In 1993, about 87% of academic staff in universities and technikons was white, with only 2% and 7% of African staff in technikons and universities respectively. This under-representation of especially African students and staff in higher education continued through 2001 (Jansen, 2002:158).

Of course, lately, the CHE (2016:7) reports that things have slightly changed. participation between of black students was 16% in 2013 and 55% - while the overall national participation rate, currently around 19%, has changed only marginally from the reported 17% of 1996, albeit in the context of population growth from 50.5 million to almost 2 million over the period CHE (2016:7). In terms of black academics at a faculty and senior levels of universities, there has been also a slight improvement but inequalities still persist, with 17 753 black academics in 2013 compared to 26 847 whites (CHE, 2016:8). I have to indicated that the aim of these; latest statics is to indicate that things are not like when Jansen presented his statistics in 2002, now I go back to HE challenges during transition period.

The second challenge was typical of the situation of “University W”, mentioned and discussed further in section 2.8.1.3. The challenge relates to the historically black universities and technikons, which, with a few exceptions, were deeply entangled in ongoing conflict, instability and crisis. Students were in conflict with the institutional leadership over their inability to pay tuition and registration fees; staffs were in conflict with vice-chancellors, senates confronted

councils, and councils were deeply divided among them, especially on the issue of management (Jansen, 2002:157). Sometimes staff and students created a common bloc acting against allegedly corrupt senior managers, who were constantly replaced by acting leaders. The changing nature of alliances among campus stakeholders ensured that the period after apartheid was highly volatile and unstable in historically disadvantaged technikons and universities. Fuelling much of this instability were the high levels of student debt and the steady decline in institutional revenue, leading many to depend on bank overdrafts to keep their institutions afloat. Much government money was spent in this period (1994 to 2000) on commissions of inquiry, as violent confrontations continued long after the first democratic elections.

The third challenge came about when South African HEIs witnessed a dramatic and unexpected decline in student enrolments, a trend that had particularly devastating consequences for the struggling black universities. In 1999, for example, the total headcount enrolments (universities and technikons) dropped by 41 000 students (or 7%) from the previous year, starting a downward spiral in especially university enrolments over the next three years (Cloete & Bunting, 2000).

The fourth challenge related to South Africa inheriting a wide range of institutions spread thinly and unevenly over urban and rural areas, with considerable variation in their capacities for teaching, research and development. The black institutions, unlike their white counterparts, were located mainly in underdeveloped, impoverished rural areas with little economic infrastructure for supporting local development and university expansion.

This account of these challenges is not exhaustive, as there would be many others as well. What one can glean from these is that, the new government inherited an institutional landscape that was racially fragmented to serve the goals and strategies of successive apartheid regime. The study now proceeds to explore the nature of a macro-political environment as the second pillar of Jansen's contingency theory.

### 2.8.1.3 Macro-political environment

Jansen's second pillar is the macro-political environment Jansen (2002:159). Within the context of the history of South African HEIs, a macro-environment can be understood as a policy environment often led by a Minister of Education (Jansen, 2003). For a deeper understanding of the policy environment, I refer back to section 2.5.2 in this chapter, where the policy context of mergers in South Africa is discussed. In the present section, my attempt is to explain how Jansen explicates his contingency theory using the macro-environment as a pillar of his argument.

The second post-apartheid Minister of Education, Asmal reacting to what he termed "the geopolitical imagination of apartheid planners" (Department of Education, 1999) as reflected in the divisions of HEIs, brought to his task a strongly interventionist policy (Jansen, 2001). The policy sought the merging of post-secondary institutions across the board – universities, technikons, and colleges of education and technical colleges. Jansen (2002) explains government's intervention in two ways. First, he sees the intervention as an attempt by government to resolve the apartheid legacy in higher education through the merging of its institutions by reducing the inequalities of resources between black and white institutions, as well as to create greater equity with respect to staffing and students within the former white institutions.

The second explanation, although it is said to be less pronounced in public policy discourse, pertains to the need to incorporate the South African HE system within the fast-changing, technology-driven and information-based economies described in globalisation (Jansen, 2001). For Jansen, the actions of the minister were an attempt to create a streamlined, efficient and effective HE system that would be competitive within the global economic system. Implicit in the categorisation of the environment as macro is the suggestion that there might be a microenvironment. In section 2.8.1.4 I explore what Jansen (2002:161) refers to as the micro-political arena, as a third pillar of his contingency theory.

#### **2.8.1.4 Micro-political arena**

“Micro-political arena” refers to the intense political contestations within the institution, without which it would be difficult to explain the course of mergers (Jansen, 2002:161). According to Jansen’s (2002) reports (referring to Soobrayan, 2002; Sehoole, 2002; Bandi, 2002; Lethoko & Chalufu, 2002), none of the mergers reviewed were uniformly and consistently welcomed and pursued by the institutions concerned. Indeed, government’s announcement of the intended mergers created deep concern among all levels of staff, from academics, administrators and technicians to clerks and maintenance workers. Before, during and after the mergers, there remained widespread concern about job losses, uncertainty about personal careers, anxiety about institutional futures, myths about who would (or would not) be retained. There are fears about the loss of autonomy on the part of the weaker partner, perceptions about white staff being advantaged over black staff, or black staff being ‘affirmed’ over white staff, and a general loss of morale on the part of all.

What the case studies revealed further was the considerable variation in reaction of the staff to these mergers. In some cases, there was outright contestation by the unions, directed at government. In other cases, there was intense contestation about the terms of engagement directed at the stronger partner, while the institution itself would be divided among its leadership about the merger proposal and its processes (Jansen, 2002:162). The weaker institutions are said to have been more vulnerable, to a point where some rectors who were clearly against the merger had to resign.

The conclusion from all the mergers reviewed by Jansen and his colleagues is that the specific interaction of government macro-politics and institutional micro-politics shaped the form and content of the merger (Jansen, 2002:163). Section 2.8.1.5 discusses the nature of these formations.

#### **2.8.1.5 Merger outcomes**

The overall argument in terms of mergers so far, according to Jansen (2002) is that mergers have their lives and how will they turn out cannot be predicted, even with the best intentions on the side

of government. In terms of merger outcomes, he maintains the same posture – the outcomes of a merger are contingent on the political forces initiating, shaping and sustaining the merger (Jansen, 2002:165). It was not the aim of the researcher to discuss in detail the outcomes of the case studies that Jansen and his colleagues reviewed, but to explain how he arrived at theorising about them. An analysis of research results based on key focal questions asked revealed that the mergers had not achieved any of the predetermined outcomes, which included (1) equity effects, (2) efficiency effects, (3) curriculum effects, (4) organisational effects (institutional culture), (5) student effects, (6) staffing effects, and (7) physical effects (Jansen, 2002:165). Instead, each merger evolved in its own direction and in a manner that gave rise to the merger formations and other lessons. In examining and analysing the results, Jansen concludes that outcomes are not determinable in advance. He also makes the point that merger policy is seldom merger practice. His theoretical stance is that “the outcomes of a merger are contingent on the political forces initiating, shaping and sustaining the mergers” (Jansen, 2002:174). This is not to suggest that mergers do not achieve any other outcomes and that there are no lessons learnt. Jansen (2002:174) writes about these in his book ‘*Lessons learned from mergers in higher education*’, but for the purposes of this section, these are not discussed.

In section 2.8 reasons for choosing Jansen’s contingency theory in order to understand mergers and their possible outcomes have been provided. This theory forms the basis on which the next chapter was developed.

## **2.9 SUMMARY**

This chapter outlined and discussed a conceptual framework on mergers by giving a detailed explication of the meaning, nature and process of mergers, based on the literature review. Through the literature review, I as the researcher explored the international discourse on mergers to gain deeper understanding of their nature, as well as the rationale for their existence. This is because HE mergers in South Africa are a new phenomenon, although they have been in existence internationally for quite some time. Within this context of international mergers, I have shown that not all mergers are the same. This was done by exploring merger typologies. Jansen’s post-apartheid merger typologies in South Africa were presented within the international context.

Having been satisfied that enough information about international perspectives international mergers was provided, an attempt was made to explore the South African discourse (see 2.5). Given the specific South African history, it would be meaningless to look at discourse on mergers without exploring the conditions that brought these about. This being a study of a hermeneutic nature, it became important to understand the specific conditions under which phenomena occur.

Based on Gadamer's (1975) idea of historical consciousness, I reviewed the historical and policy contexts as tools for understanding HE mergers in South Africa. This was done by tracing the historical journey of higher education to the current university landscape, which is presented in section 2.6. The body of literature available revealed that the success of any merger depends on a merger process. A review of different merger scenarios in terms of process, both in business and public institutions, led to me proposing what is considered the key attributes of a merger process: compatibility of institutional backgrounds, strong decisive leadership and stakeholder involvement and how this can have an effect on the post-merger institutional culture. I consider these as key for the reason that, without them, it would be difficult for any merger to succeed. The section ended by examining a theoretical framework, Jansen's contingency theory, which I believe best captures the conditions of the particular merger under study with regard to context, method and timing.

## CHAPTER 3

### INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the central concept of institutional culture is explored first, and later the post-merger culture, which the study was about. As this was a critical hermeneutic inquiry, it is proper to provide/offer the origins of institutional culture from disciplines like anthropology, sociology and psychology. The aim is to delve further into the formative aspects of institutional cultures. The discussion is introduced by exploring the concept of culture at universities and then by engaging in a discourse on organisational and institutional culture. Examples of international and South African institutional culture in higher education are explored in order to make see if there are contrast and commonalities in the institutional culture experiences.

Sometimes it can be assumed that institutional culture is the same in all institutions. The research in this study dealt with this assumption, as suggested in the literature by presentation of typologies of institutional culture. International discourses were explored in this study as a way of finding best examples of approaching institutional culture. The attempt to strike this balance is achieved by exploring views and approaches that different countries have on institutional culture in higher education as well as in South Africa.

#### 3.2 WHY THE INTEREST IN INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE?

Institutional culture is cardinal in South African higher education because of the restructuring that took place through government policies and various platforms. Higgins (2007) refers to institutional culture as a buzzword. He further states that institutional culture may well be the key to the successful transformation of higher education in the country.

Before the 1994 elections, higher education in South Africa was organised along racial lines with most black institutions offering education that was inferior to their white counterparts (Mawila,

2009; Vice, 2015). Transformation in higher education had to take place after the new democratic government had come into power, to ensure that the new HE system would overcome the inequities and polarisation caused by the apartheid regime (Sedgwick, 2004). The Higher Education Act of 1997 (No.101 of 1997) was passed, and it instituted a number of basic educational reforms that were designed to give the country a single and structured system of higher education in order to correct the inequalities of the apartheid system, while aligning higher educational reforms, with nation building.

One of the instruments of change in the HE system was the Education White Paper 3 (1997). Through its programme for the transformation of higher education, the 1997 White Paper 3 required re-evaluation of the then institutional practices and values in terms of their fitness for the democratic era (the Soudien Report as established by the Ministerial Committee of 2008). The Ministry of Education (2001) who states, as one of its key priorities, the need to refocus and reshape the institutional culture and missions of the institutions as South African institutions, further articulates this view. Institutional culture is identified by the CHE (2004:125) as a key driver behind HE restructuring. According to the CHE (2004), the achievement of a distinctive institutional culture in the merged institution, aligned to national transformation objectives, would be a key measure of success of a merger.

Institutional culture was identified as a cardinal issue that needed to be addressed in HEIs in South Africa (CHE, 2004). The Higher Education Act of 1997 was passed, and instituted a number of basic educational reforms that were designed to give the country a single and structured system of education in order to correct the inequalities of the apartheid system, while aligning these with nation building.

The views expressed in the above-mentioned documents indicate the new era in the HE spectrum in South Africa. Most documents that were drafted after the HEIs had merged attest to the difficult task, and the interest in the kind of institutional culture that has emerged in merged institutions after apartheid. Having explained interest in institutional culture, the next section 3.3 reports on an exploration of institutional culture.



### **3.3 WHAT IS INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE?**

Primarily the aim of this study was to conduct, through critical hermeneutics, an inquiry into the institutional culture of merged HEIs. The unit of analysis of analysis was an ODL institution, which is a merger of three distance-learning universities that were previously segregated by history, race and class. This kind of an institution merits our attention because of its sheer size, typology and the distance learning it offers. Furthermore, there has not been much focus on institutional culture at an open distance learning institution (ODL) in South Africa so far. In this section, it is indicated how the concept of ‘institutional culture’ has evolved from the use of ‘organisational culture’ in business studies. The history of how this concept emerged from businesses in the United States in the late 1970s and how this was imported into higher educational discourses in the 1970s, is examined. Both historical and recent trends are discussed by showing different cultural perspectives in higher education. Forms of institutional culture are discussed and the section is concluded by discussions of the context of institutional culture in South Africa. Before dwelling on institutional culture, it is poignant for this study to explore the centrality and the meaning of culture in organisations first.

#### **3.3.1 Centrality of culture in institutions and organisations**

Culture is central to an understanding of institutional culture. The literature indicates that culture is complex because it can be explained in many ways. According to Välimaa (1998:119), it is challenging to use culture as an instrument of research, for the simple reason that it can be defined in too many ways. Culture is drawn mainly from anthropology, and interprets how people live and organise themselves (Schein, 1992). Culture links surface characteristics of a society such as language, appearance and dress, with their roots in the knowledge, beliefs and values of the native population. As such, cultures are often represented as a system where behaviour, such as rituals and interactions, are based on people’s assumptions about the natural world, society, human nature and themselves.

According to Tlale (1999), these “deep truths” about the world come from how people are socialised, which is culturally determined, and are reinforced in the cultural institutions of the

homeland. Scholars of formal organisations have made the point that how a company goes about doing business is indicative of its culture (Marks & Mirvis, 1993). This is indicative of how scholars of organisational culture interpret the concept of culture from a sociological point. Schein (1992) of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), for example, contends that company cultures provide answers to people about how their organisation adapts to its environment and provides for their material and psychological needs (Marks & Mirvis, 1993). Expressed in another way, Pettigrew (1979) defines culture as the ‘glue’ that holds the human organisation together.

Culture connects the formal organisation (including company policy, strategy and structure) with the informal organisation (that is the way people interact, think and go about their everyday behaviour). The corporate and institutional culture has been likened to breathing by (Marks & Mirvis, 1993). One does not really think about it until it is threatened. Tlale (1999) states that people frequently take their company culture for granted until change, like a merger, creates fears that desired aspects of their way of life might be lost. Implicit knowledge of how their company works and how policies and systems sustain the firm, come to be explicit as employees compare their ways with those of the other side and reflect on what might be lost.

According to Marks & Mirvis (1993), managers agree that long after the merger had taken place, companies still struggle to integrate such diverse factors as personnel policies, career paths and management styles. The ability to recognise and deal with various corporate cultures can be critical to the ultimate success of a merger. The importance of working towards common culture in bringing together shared values and beliefs could generate high levels of cooperation and commitment. It could help create a highly efficient organisation. Marks & Mirvis (1993:74) argue that culture could affect organisations in many ways, such as:

- the way business is conducted
- structure: culture influences the way people and tasks are organised; and
- performance appraisal: culture determines how incentives and pressure are used to guide individual/group performances.

Business mergers and acquisitions can cause a variety of basic organisational behaviour problems prior to and after the transaction (Marks & Mirvis, 1993). The two major problems are corporate

culture shock and the loss of key management personnel. Other problems include role conflicts, ambiguity, anxiety, antagonism, anger, fear, personnel stress, depression, distrust, absenteeism, high staff turnover, job satisfaction, organisational ineffectiveness and overall resistance to change (Tlale, 1999).

Marks & Mirvis (1993:74-86), argue that when the two cultures of two organisations are mismatched – when the wrong ones are put together – the resulting organisation does not function effectively, and so does not achieve a natural harmony. There is therefore a need for numerous adjustments as a direct result of the attempt by the new organisation to integrate conflicting values, roles, organisational cultures and climate. A further argument is that merging companies generally fail to recognise the importance of people issues due to a lack of a meaningful framework that asks appropriate questions and provides concrete guidelines for assessing the people-fit issues in the consolidation process. Marks & Mirvis (1993) conclude that what is abundantly clear is that when different corporate cultures are brought together at an operational level, the scene is set for a number of conflict situations. It is precisely these differing values, beliefs and assumptions, which are major sources of conflict. In all mergers and acquisitions, one should expect to see some level of anger in the acquired organisation because of a change in the dominant culture (Marks & Mirvis, 1992).

### **3.3.2 United States business studies and organisational culture**

In the 1970's, the rise of Japan as a leading industrial power characterised the world of business. As a result, organisational managers and theorists paid attention to the relationship that exists between management and culture (Tierney, 1988).

One of the early writers to bring the concept of 'organisational culture' into the discussion on HE management was William G Tierney. In his influential article, "Organisational culture in higher education" (1988), he observed that the concept 'organisational culture' first emerged in the 1980s as a topic of central concern for those who study organisations (Tierney, 1988:2). He emphasises the notion that it is important to recognise that the emergence of a new term, concept or idea, such as 'organisational culture', is always an active response to a changing social and political reality.

In this instance, the idea of ‘organisational culture’ became a distinct object of analysis in business studies at a very particular economic and ideological moment, namely the crisis of the late 1970s and 1980s in which the perceived pressures of a global economic downturn led to an awareness of increasing levels of global competition. In particular, for USA business, the term came into focus as a way of examining and dealing with the sudden, disturbing visibility of Japan as a major competitor in the global economy. Japanese business culture became an object of anxious speculation and emulation. Within business studies, organisational culture was the basis of comparison between Japanese and American business practices (Tierney, 1998:2).

William Ouchi (1983), an academic with an interest in business studies, argues that the emergence of a new term, concept or idea, such as ‘organisational culture’, is always an active response to a changing social and political reality. William Ouchi (1983) argues that much of the success of Japanese businesses came from their organisational culture, and the ways that culture produced more committed, energetic and innovative employees. Organisational culture therefore offered a new dimension, namely improved management and control. This new focus was crucial in the search for ever-increasing efficiency in the midst of ever-increasing competitiveness (Higgins, 2007:110). The notion that some Japanese companies could compete successfully with their USA counterparts focused attention on organisational culture, Schein (1985) & Jacobs (2012). Here it is highlighted that although organisational culture originates from business point of view, as it got to higher education and was discussed more, it was moulded to suit universities.

### **3.3.3 Importation of organisational culture into higher education**

After the emergence of the concept of ‘organisational culture’ from the business environment, Tierney (1988) suggests that the concept was imported to institutions of higher education in order to run them as businesses. Unlike the proponents of the term in business studies who explicitly justify the need for the new coinage of the term in terms of the threat of Japanese competition, Tierney (1988) does not name the external pressures that necessitated the importation of the new term into higher education. This, according to Jacobs (2012), represents an internalisation of external pressures in HE discourse, and these reflect the pressures of hegemonic (predominant

influence of one state over others) thinking. According to Higgins (2007:104), hegemonic thinking is at its most visible when it seeks to make invisible its own enabling or directive presuppositions.

Tierney (1988:2-3) describes the aim of his work as, firstly, seeking “to provide a working framework to diagnose culture in colleges and universities so that distinct problems can be overcome”. Secondly “to point out how administrators might utilise the concept of culture to help solve specific administrative problems”. His suggestion is that leaders in higher education should view their institutions as cultural entities. Such a view could provide them with a better understanding of their institutions. Once there is an understanding of organisational culture, many of the difficulties associated with change in HEIs might be managed better. The need to manage change is therefore the central justification for the application of the new term.

Tierney (1988:9) describes HEIs as “cultural entities that are related to each other in an interconnected web, which can only be made sense of if the structure of the web and role players”, interpretations thereof are carefully examined. Organisational culture, therefore, is the study of particular webs of significance within an organisational setting. Tierney (1998:4) suggests that such a study could be enhanced by drawing on traditional anthropology, whereby the university is viewed at as a village or clan. He, furthermore, suggests an analytical framework for studying organisational culture in higher education. This framework (Tierney, 1998:8) places emphasis on the following questions, which need to be asked while conducting a cultural study:

- How does the organisation define its environment?
- How is the organisation’s mission articulated or defined?
- How do new members in the organisation become socialised?
- What constitutes information in the organisation?
- What strategy is used when decisions are made?
- What is expected from organisation’s leaders?

For me, Tierney’s (1988:9) framework is somewhat contentious in the sense that he uses the term “define” and yet in philosophical analysis, there is emphasis on clear articulation of ideas rather than on the definition of words. In this instance, however, the interconnected web theory may

somehow be helpful in determining how institutional culture features in the interviews and documents of Unisa.

### **3.3.4 Cultural perspectives in higher education**

This section introduces an understanding of cultural perspective in relation to higher education. Most studies on institutional culture come up against the “difficulty inherent in the multiple theoretical approaches that pervade such an enterprise” (Thaver, 2006:17). Among the wide range of theoretical approaches within the literature, I have identified some of the most important ones.

Välimaa & Ylijoki (2008:9) introduces three major conceptions of culture in higher education, namely: The first conception is “the understanding that HEIs (universities) are cultural institutions”. According to this view, HEIs are responsible for transmitting traditions and cultural and social values to younger generations. Universities are referred to as carriers of intellectual, academic and national traditions. In this sense, HEI’s are seen as cultural institutions partly responsible for the socialising function in society. Cultural institutions also refers to institutions with high social status, that they are the producers of the elite, hence the so-called ‘ivory towers’. As for the management of HEIs, universities are governed and managed by academics with the help of administrative staff. However, the emergence of mass higher education has changed these traditional views. HEIs are often criticised as being inefficient, bureaucratic and economically unproductive. This criticism is supported by the neo-liberal idea of higher education as industrial, in other words, as producing knowledge and innovation (Välimaa & Ylijoki, 2008). HEIs are also criticised for academic capitalism. These critical views are problematic because they only see higher education from a commercial perspective, and imply that HEIs are, culturally and institutionally, monolithic entities. This does not assist a comprehensive understanding of HEIs as they are fragmented into innumerable small worlds. It also does not help one to understand the dynamic interaction between society and HEIs.

The second conception is based on the “cultural variation seen in universities”. Even though HEIs are organisations, often described in hierarchical terms as part of a national HE system, they are also social spaces, where people work in the midst of their epistemic traditions, disciplinary

cultures, local institutional conditions and national traditions. This conception represents a more comprehensive perspective (than monolith perspective) with the potential of opening up alternative points of view, and is popular with researchers interested in the dynamics within HEIs.

A third conception of culture in HE research relates to “methodological issues.” It is assumed that a cultural perspective on higher education usually applies to qualitative studies only. However, according to Välimaa (1998) cultural studies can be conducted both qualitatively and quantitatively. Methodological issues are also related to the nature of knowledge. In cultural studies, the focus is on the particular situation of human beings (Ylijoki, 2008:11). This issue is rooted in the difference between the rationalist (general interests of knowledge) and humanist (specific interest of knowledge) traditions. If it is not investigated philosophically, cultural studies might belong to the humanist tradition, since it does not easily fit into the rationalist tradition. This is because in the humanist tradition, the relationship between the researcher and the object of research is of crucial importance. In the rationalist tradition, the aim is to explore the borderline that separates the researcher and the object of research.

As culture is a complex and multifaceted concept, as the above highlights, the present study attempted to explain the concept. Because of the cardinal role that culture plays in explanation of institutional culture, it is important to establish such understanding; hence, it was the focus of this study.

### **3.3.5 Recent cultural trends**

An overview of recent trends in HE cultural studies is presented in Välimaa (1998) and Ylijoki (2008) and these are based on articles analysed between 2000 and 2005. From the analyses of the articles, a number of categories came up in illustrating the variety of cultural perspectives in HE research.

In the first category, disciplinary cultures like History, Mathematics, Philosophy and Ethics are mentioned. These disciplinary cultures may be used in structuring the analysis of empirical data, or as a useful point of reference when academic identities are discussed. When research outcomes

are analysed, the disciplinary cultures have been used as “discussion companions” (Välilmaa, 1998; Ylijoki, 2008:12-19). This category is used across disciplines of studies, which is evident in all the studies seeking to gain better an understanding of the nature of variation in academia.

The second category relates to institutional and campus cultures. This is an especially useful category because it describes the social fabric of HEIs. This category focuses on institutional practices as rooted in tradition. It also points out that those institutional cultures may be subject to change.

Students are named as the object of study in the third category. Useful explanatory perspectives when analysing student movements are provided by cultural considerations. This also happens when analysing minority or non-traditional students in higher education, or when analysing learning difficulties or differences in learning outcomes, or when explaining student behaviour. The concept ‘national cultures’ is often used for explaining typical behaviour in a national system of education, according to the fourth category. The use of culture as an intellectual device makes it easy to explain traditional patterns or socio-cultural structures, which influence the social dynamics of higher education. This concept might also play a role in studies focusing on one nation state. In this context, culture is an academically economic concept, used descriptively when referring to a nation’s traditions without the need to analyse further, how these have developed. In this sense, culture might be used metaphorically as a description of complex social phenomena. Culture might also be understood as subject matter, which needs to be transmitted to people through higher education. In this case, culture is synonymous with tradition. The notion that different HE systems have different characters, rooted in their traditions, indicates that national cultural contexts are recognised as an important factor in explaining the functioning of HEIs.

In the South African context, there was very limited information of institutional culture before 1994 (Van Wyk, 2004). It was only after the establishment of the new Constitution that social justice and fundamental human rights found their place. The Constitution led to changes in national culture, and this in turn led to the discussions for the first time about institutional culture.



In the fifth category, culture is a social force. Cultural aspects of higher education are often used to understand differences between countries or between HEIs studied from different perspectives. Cultural perspectives are also often used as a discussion companion to assist understanding of the phenomenon being studied, or when analysing research outcomes.

In the sixth category, one of the most popular topics in HE research is change. Cultural change is used to explain difficulties that arise when trying to implement changes in HEIs. Studies of change processes in (Välilmaa, 1998; Ylijoki, 2008) aims to show that institutional cultures, which are often tied to institutional traditions, can be regarded as conservative social forces in HEIs. The unwillingness of HEIs to change is often rooted in institutional cultures in higher education. This suggests, firstly, that traditions, identities and cultures are real social forces in HEIs, and secondly, that culture as intellectual tool captures this most important social force in HEIs. The use of the cultural approach is also typical of studies that analyse change in higher education. A cultural understanding of HEIs plays a significant role in analyses of change in the management of universities or in their identities. The political power of the concept of ‘culture’ is also visible in policy goals where the aim is to change the social dynamics of the system of higher education. Evaluative culture, in turn, provides an example of the use of culture as an explanatory concept in the analysis of changes in the creation of national and institutional systems of evaluation.

Reference here is made to the Education White Paper 3 (1997), where the preferred concept is transformation (DoE: 1997:40) instead of change. In the White Paper 3 of (1997), it is stated that transformation of the HE system seeks to indicate changes that are occurring in society and to strengthen the values and practices of the new South African democracy. Strong emphasis on the democratic values is linked to institutional culture: it is stated that it is essential to promote the development of an institutional culture, which embodies the desired values, especially respect for difference and the promotion of the common good (DoE, 1997:3:41).

The seventh and final category relate to culture as a general perspective in higher education. This may be useful for studying the cultural element of the academic world, its functioning, new perspectives or social dynamics. The cultural approach may also be used as an analytical tool for explaining social phenomena, or as an explanatory concept emerging from the data. It may also be

relevant for classifying HEIs, or be useful when challenging monolithic or over-simplifying perspectives in higher education.

Based on this overview of the history and recent trends in cultural studies in higher education, it is clear that the present research can indeed be justified. The references to institutional culture in the fourth and sixth categories, namely “national cultures” (Välimaa, 1998; Ylijoki, 2008:12-19) and “studies of change processes” (see DoE. 3:42) (or transformation), are especially significant, because institutional culture cannot be divorced from the complex process of transformation, especially in the context of higher education.

### **3.3.6 Forms of Institutional Culture**

A better understanding of institutional culture could be achieved by exploration of the forms of the concept itself. Toma *et al.* (2005:55) state that the substance of institutional culture lies in the norms, values and beliefs of the institution or university. These norms, values and beliefs are made tangible through cultural forms, which include the symbols, language, narratives and practices of the university. Toma *et al.* (2005) furthermore contend that these cultural forms are unique to each university. This is an interesting observation, as I wanted to explore the post-merger institutional culture of Unisa to see how it is articulated. Not only did an exploration of these forms help to develop a better understanding of institutional culture, but it also assisted in constructing a theoretical framework towards the end of this chapter.

#### **3.3.6.1 Symbols**

Symbols stand for or suggest something else, as in the case of a logo or an object that is meant to convey trustworthiness or strength. Symbols represent what the organisation means to participants and help them make sense of their experiences in the organisation. Symbols furthermore pervade every aspect of organisational life, and are revealed in stories and myths, ceremonies and rituals, logos and colours, and anecdotes and jokes. Accordingly, institutions use symbolism to reveal the unconscious feelings, images and values inherently associated with the institution. Symbols range from intangible representations of institutional characteristics, to more representations that are

concrete. Symbols have several functions: they connect people with institutions, they provide a touchstone for people in the extended university community, and they are a concrete representation of what the institution is all about.

Symbols can also be descriptive (for example, academic dress at important academic functions), energy controlling (for example, carnivals) and system maintaining (for example, architecture and landscaping (ASHE, 2005). Another important characteristic of symbols is that they take the form of objects. Objects become imbued with meanings because of their association with particular institutions. A logo, like a university seal is such an object-as-symbol (see ASHE, 2005:60) and often contains information such as the founding date and the motto of the university. A university's physical setting (external environment) is itself a potent symbol, suggesting a proud tradition. Some institutions have signature buildings (for example, the Old Senate Hall in the case of Unisa). Individuals may also serve as important symbols. The president or head of an institution often represents the institutional icon. Members of the student body and other groups of diverse students, including athletes, can serve such a purpose as well. In conclusion, symbols have concrete uses. They evoke the institution as both concept and concrete entity, they encourage constituents to identify with institutions, they make more tangible what differentiates the image of one institution from another, and they underscore the drivers of institutional identification (ASHE, 2005:60-64).

### **3.3.6.2 Language**

Language is the system of sounds, signs and gestures people in any organisation use to convey meanings to one another. It allows a particular campus community to speak the same language, thereby strengthening the bonds of association, and it provides a means to express the image of the institution. Language takes on a multitude of forms. One of the most powerful forms of language is the metaphor. Metaphors offer the opportunity to understand and experience one type of thing in terms of another type of thing. They produce multiple interpretations and bring complex structures to life. For example, it is usually easier to understand a bureaucratic institution as being a 'well-oiled machine', than a metaphor. Jargon (specialised language particular to a specific group (see ASHE, 2005:65) and slang are other means of conveying a sense of belonging. Hammond (1994) and Toma *et al.* (2005:65) note the relationship between slang and culture, and argues that

slang has been used to describe almost every facet of campus life. As student culture often stands in opposition to the faculty, slang serves the important function of differentiating students from authority. Despite the significant role of slang in campus culture, it is not accepted as formal language. Jargon and slang might initially be inaccessible to newcomers and outsiders, but once they are learned, this demonstrates a desire to belong to a particular organisation. Proverbs and slogans are commonly used at HEIs. Proverbs are short statements of folk wisdom, while slogans are intentional statements. Proverbs and slogans often relate to the ideology (system of beliefs) common to campuses. The notion of ideology emphasises that, although cultural forms like language are common across institutions, the details associated with these forms differ from campus to campus because of different cultural contexts. What is common is the use of forms to make institutions more accessible while representing them in more tangible ways (than perceived rigid authority language of the faculty), thereby encouraging institutional identification.

### **3.3.6.3 Narratives**

Narratives use language and symbols in the form of myths, sagas, legends and stories. Myths are dramatic, vague and unquestioned narratives of imagined events, used to explain the origins of transformation of something viewed as serious or sacred. Sagas are like myths, but are based on accounts of historic events usually framed in romantic terms (ASHE, 2005:68). Institutional sagas facilitate loyalty and are deeply rooted in history. I find this form of institutional culture interesting because my study is interested in understanding how certain aspects of institutional culture emerge from history. Despite sagas' usefulness in formalising a sense of unity, Tierney (2005:69) disagrees with the view that sagas are organisational realities that everyone can understand and interpret, and notes that sagas do not reflect concern for social justice. Legends are similar to myths and sagas, but have the added elements of heroics or wonder. Stories convey important cultural meanings and are indicators of shared values and understandings about how things are done, and the consequences of compliance or deviance.

### **3.3.6.4 Practices**

Practices refer to activities such as rites, ceremonials and rituals (ASHE, 2005:70-74), intended to convey important cultural messages. Rites are planned sets of activities, full of drama, and carried out for the benefit of an audience. Ceremonials are several rites connected in a single occasion. These are deliberate, conducted in a particular style or manner and are repeated from time to time. For example, the inauguration of a new dean or faculty head. Rituals are standardised, detailed sets of techniques and behaviours expressing common identities that tell people what they are supposed to do. Rituals symbolise underlying social values, thereby reinforcing traditional social ties. The annual convocation ceremonies are examples of rituals that hold together past and present institutional practices. Rituals are important in institutional life because they keep ideology alive and encourage a sense of belonging. Furthermore, their influence on a large group of participants reinforces the values that communities hold or to which they aspire. Accordingly, rituals can be important socialisers of dominant cultural values, whether on behalf of the institution or the society; they provide meaning and purpose to participants. The interesting aspect in this case then would be ritual as like initiations at some white universities in South Africa, because they are said to be part of culture of those universities (especially in those Afrikaans is dominant). What would need to be investigated is whether those rituals foster a particular culture that somehow discriminates against a particular group of people are not.

## **3.4 INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT**

It is suitable that a discussion of institutional culture in higher education be entered into the South African context as this study was based on an institution in this country. This is not in any way to digress from the previous section; in fact, the purpose is to make an addition to the aforementioned suggestions of what constitutes institutional culture in HEI.

According to Cloete and Bunting (2000), it is not possible to determine whether the goals of the Education White Paper 3 (1997), which were transformation of higher education, were achieved. Vice (2015) further argue that, until recently there has been few number of studies over the years on institutional culture in South Africa both at institutional or at national level. The global context

of institutional culture was discussed in section 3.4, as additional to the South African context will be discussed when discussing findings in Chapter 5 because of their relevance to the study.

According to the CHE (2006), the institutional culture of higher education is viewed through the lens of whiteness critique. In this perspective, it is argued that institutional culture is above all; experienced by black staff and students as overwhelming whiteness of academic culture. Whiteness refer to the ensemble of cultural and subjective factors that together constitute the unspoken dominance in HE of western European and Anglo Saxon values and attitudes, as these are reproduced and reflected in South Africa.

This whiteness can be experienced as alienating and disempowering sense of not being fully recognised by the institution one is at and consequence impossibility of feeling at home in it. This argument was also confirmed by Sehoole (2016) arguing that not feeling at home by both black academics and students at some white universities is exacerbated by the curriculum of the institutions. He further argues that because of euro-centric approach of the curriculum, at times the approach leads to the continuation of the Anglo Saxon values and attitudes at some of the historically white institutions.

The recent student's protest that started around October 2015 and most of 2016, among other things indicated frustration of black students at historically white institutions due to lack of change in terms of institutional culture. Student's movements like #RhodesMustFall, #FeesMustFall and #Decolonising HE, all brought to the public the issues of funding, transformation and institutional culture in the country's higher education. These protests after 22 years of democracy in South Africa confirms what Cloete (2004) questioned as to whether the goals of the Education White Paper 3 of 1997 were achieved or there is willingness to even attempt to achieve them.

Maringe (2016) views knowledge and knowledge- production as important aspects of institutional culture that needs to be changed at institutions across the country. This for him should have happened many years ago, and for the students to be protesting about it only a year ago, it is an indictment on the lack of progress by stakeholders responsible for change in the higher education. Maringe further argues that knowledge and knowledge-production have been ignored for the past

22 years and academics have been complicit in perpetuation the domination and hegemony of the West, which continues to be cemented here in South African and elsewhere in the African continent.

There is a need for academics to pause and reflect at what has been their role in this project of imperial knowledge. Higher education system has become an integral part of the sub-imperial project through which capital accumulation is facilitated, through which our resources continued to be extracted for external benefit (e.g. the brain drain to first world countries). When academics return from studying abroad, they become imperial academics themselves and become part of “sub-imperial project”. Maringe (2016) insists that for institutional culture to change at previously white universities, those black academics that are in position of power must be agents of change, not to maintain the status quo.

Proposed basic argument on the notion of changing knowledge and knowledge spaces as part of changing institutional culture are that: There is a need for inner form and structure of a decolonised higher education. Decolonising of higher education requires a complete transformation of the purposes of higher education in South Africa. Decolonised education must be underpinned by Afro global ecological epistemology. Prioritise local indigenous languages in teaching and learning (like all the developed countries teach in their mother tongue!). Decolonisation must be embedded in a coherent policy framework and unless it changes the curriculum, South African higher education will remain relevant to the few (Maringe, 2016).

The issue of de-colonisation of curriculum as means of change in institutional culture is said to be “an important conversation, and long overdue, given that the Western Model of academic organisation on which the South African University is abased, remains largely unchallenged” (Le Grange, 2016:1). Le Grange’s approach on decolonisation is in three fold; defining why is there a need to colonise, what is meant by colonisation and decolonisation of curriculum. He states that decolonising of curriculum is long overdue as it will mean “rethinking of Western disciplines, which Odora-Hoppers and Richards (2011:3) describe as ‘distant, antiseptic and removed from the experiences of the lived world[that] comes from recognising the pain, anger and anguish being experienced in society’. Le Grange (2016:8) further suggest that decolonisation can take place

when a shift from an arrogant ‘I’ of western individualism to the humble ‘I’ that is embedded, embodies, extended and enacted. Le Grange acknowledges that the process of decolonising curriculum will not happen overnight, but it must be started to avoid ongoing student protests.

### 3.4.1 Diversity

With the exception of few, the majority of universities in South Africa have not implemented the systems where programmes across the campuses are created in order to promote diversity, tolerance and building of communities, according to Cloete and Bunting (2000). Some of the reasons for this are that universities are overburdened with change and “diversity-fatigue”. The latest *Report on Transformation in Public Universities in South Africa* by HSRC (2016:27) on issue of diversity agrees that some institutions have been found wanting. For an example University Free State concurred that while demographic changes per se will not bring about the necessary change, lack of demographic change is a fundamental obstacle to cultural, epistemological and pedagogical change. This view was shared by the TSG, which expressed the view that changing the demographics of students and staff was a good starting point in transforming universities, as these changes had the potential to foster new culture and ideas within institutions of higher learning.

The Department of Higher Education provided 2012 demographic statistics to the (HSRC Report: 28), in light of the challenges of diversity in higher education. In terms of student demographics enrolled at public universities, the following were outlined:

- (a) 69% of students were Black
- (b) 6% of students were Coloured
- (c) 6% of students were Indian and
- (d) 18% of students were White

Although in the above submission indicated that student’s demographics have changed, at some universities, not much diversity has taken place. According to (HSRC Report, 2016:28) in this regard the University of North West (NWU) although an overall proportion of 50% of enrolled students at the university were Black, 97% of students at the Mafikeng Campus were black, 74%



of students at the Potchefstroom campus were White, and 75% of students at the Vaal Triangle Campus were black. A similar case was observed at University of Pretoria, although UP's admission policies are aimed at achieving transformation. From the above information by HSRC Report (2016), one can concur with what (Cloete, 2000; Vice, 2015) alluded to that diversity in some institutions is viewed as something that needs to be accommodated within the established structure and social relations of the institution. In a way then, this becomes different from the intended welcoming or embracing of diversity as a central and essential component of modern HE systems.

### **3.4.2 Political activities**

The student protest that started 2015 brought political activism on many campuses in South Africa. This happened after what Cloete and Bunting (2000:58) referred to as “lull after excitements of the 1994 elections has generally faded out, especially among the younger generations. According to Sehoole (2016), the protests united many students and it was something that the country has not seen since 1976. #FeesMustFall protest occurred when some campuses, for example, were struggling to get students to vote in campus elections. For a while, this has led to a creation of a perception that little or no transformation has been made since the dawn of democracy in South Africa. Letseka and Pitsoe (2013) indicate that lately at most universities there is growing dissatisfaction among student's organisations with issues ranging from accommodation, fees and general issues of transformation. The formation of Economic Freedom Fighters party (EFF) which appeals to young people, has led to contestations of political views among student's parties. More university campuses, it seems, (see Mawila, 2009; Vice, 2015; CHE, 2016) are actively assisting students to develop a meaningful new role in the transformation from political education to educational transformation.

### **3.4.3 Debates**

The report by Centre for Higher Education (CHE, 2000) stated that there was an almost virtual absence of debate on most campuses in South Africa, then. Most campuses have few posters announcing debates or discussions relating to contentious issues. Few universities systematically

encouraged debate by, for example, having a special fund for such activities and a specific slot on the timetable.

#### **3.4.4 Cultural activities**

When it comes to cultural activities, there is an increase in the cultural representation including religious societies on campuses. Nevertheless, there are still institutions that have cultural activities that might be alienating. For example, the HRSC Report (2016:46) points to activities like initiations at UFS and UP that presents a cultural shock to other students. The policy of placing students at residences, leads to certain groups participating in certain cultural activities and not the others. The HSRC Report (2016:47) argues that inclusive cultural activities must be promoted. This can happen when residences get rid of “repugnant subcultures and practices founded on ideologies of cultural superiority and discrimination”

#### **3.4.5 Harassment and violence**

In the report by Cloete and Bunting (2000) to the CHE, it was found that most HEIs in South Africa have in place policies that deal with sexual harassment, as well as codes of conduct for staff and students. Because of this, South African HEIs are at the same level with other HEIs in the world in this regard. The only difference and challenge in South African universities are in terms of how the policies are implemented on various campuses.

#### **3.4.6 Student development**

On many campuses, organisational measures are taken to improve the delivery of student services. These include appointing a dean of students and establishing student services sections. The SAHRC Report (2016) indicates that there are some challenges in terms of learning -related services to students. To be specific, an example is NWU’s language policy where each campus has its own policy. According to NWU’s submission, the translation services from Afrikaans to Setswana are sometimes not available because translators are mostly temporary and are mostly students enrolled in the same modules they have to interpret. However, the university has disputed

this, arguing that most of interpreters are professional and permanently employed and are mostly postgraduates, with a very small number of students interpreting their own classes (SAHRC, 2016:25).

The UFS, on the other hand, claims that its Language Policy (2003) is aimed at fostering multilingualism. In line with Language Policy of Higher Education, English and Afrikaans remain the main languages of tuition at the university, and education is offered on a parallel-medium basis. The SAHRC Report (2016:25) states that the parallel-medium language policy had unintended consequences (together with the hostel placement policy of the university, which allowed students to choose the hostel they wanted to live in), was the creation of two campuses on the main campus: one Black and one White. These are just examples of student challenges that are happening at other historically black institutions. The development needs must include those concerned with gender, race and broad diversity awareness, as well as those involved with the instilling in students of a better awareness of democratic processes. A particular problem is that where institutions have taken up issues of, for example, race and gender, this has been in an add-on mode rather than in a mode of central curriculum transformation.

### **3.4.7 Curriculum**

A cardinal question concerning the curriculum, according to Cloete and Bunting (2000), is whether diversity and tolerance are included and taught. The CHE Report (2000) suggested that institutions were seemingly embarking on curriculum reforms. The focus was on masking the curriculum to be relevant to the labour market and focus on issues like bridging gender, race and broader socio-political awareness into the curriculum. A decade after this observation by Cloete and Bunting, things seem to have drastically changed. The recent student protest in the past two years, among other things included #decolonising HE. At the heart of the protest was a call to change the curriculum at universities in South African, which is perceived to be “Eurocentric” (Maringe, 2016). Lyster (2016) says that “Fee increases were no longer the sole issue; the protesters now demanded higher education that was both free and decolonized—scrubbed of its apartheid-era European bias. In a way, student protests have started a debate that has ensued about curriculum transformation and Africanisation of the curriculum. A recent review (see CHE, 2016) has

indicated that issues of curriculum being diversified are rather taking place at a snail's pace or not at all at some other institutions.

Besides the above reports in the South African context, there have been multitudes of studies investigating institutional culture at HEIs. These studies have been conducted from a variety of perspectives.

- Mnguni (2007) looked at the influence of leadership on institutional culture at the University of Cape Town (UCT);
- Nkomo (1984) and Soko (1995) examined institutional culture in terms of power relations;
- Ruth (2000) was interested in ethnic interaction among students of the University of the North;
- Steyn and Van Zyl (2001) found a link between elements of race and male dominance at UCT;
- Du Toit (1996) focused on the University of Port Elizabeth in an attempt to understand institutional culture in terms of strategies for change developed by its leaders;
- Goduka (1996) investigated the problem of cultural alienation at the University of the Free State (UFS), regarded as a traditionally white Afrikaner institution;
- Jappie, Cross and Johnson (2003) conducted a study of how students and staff at Wits perceived institutional culture in terms of challenges related to diversity and social interaction;
- Niemen (2006) conducted an empirical assessment of the effect of human resource diversity in South Africa, and provided strategies for managing diverse institutions, constructing clear guidelines for handling diversity in institutions; and
- Van Wyk (2008) explored institutional culture at SU, and found that the institutional culture there has not changed enough to effect transformation from its historical position as a white, advantaged institution. Jacobs (2012) in her study on institutional culture at SU, indicates that there has been minimal change towards institutional culture at Stellenbosch. She concludes, “SU has, in my opinion, an excellent base of well-prepared and carefully compiled institutional documents. Leadership initiatives in both the Brink and Botman eras are characterised by attempts to document or publicise visions, strategies, objectives, plans and projects to transform the University; this includes the need to transform its institutional

culture. However, most of these documents are a reaction to the need to ensure that quality is not compromised, and there a compliance with national policies. There is little evidence of significant actions or strategies to address the challenges related to the transformation of the University's institutional culture" (Jacobs, 2012:214-14).

Even though there seems to be several applied research studies on institutional culture in the South African context, there is a paucity of published literature in two respects. Firstly, with regard to conceptually analysing institutional culture in the university context, very little research has been done on breaking down or analysing the concept 'institutional culture' into its constituent parts in order to gain a better understanding.

Secondly, there has not been a thorough philosophical exploration of the concept of 'institutional culture', especially in an open distance-learning context. In spite of a number of studies on the topic, there does not seem to be a sufficient number of what I would call 'philosophical studies'. The current research was an attempt to fill these gaps.

### **3.5 Meanings of institutional culture**

This section considers institutional culture as phenomenon, and institutional culture is described in terms of four of the most re-occurring meanings. This angle is also setting a stage where institutional culture is viewed through the lens of research as institutional culture was found to be a less researched phenomenon in South Africa. From the consulted literature, the following recurring concepts and key features of institutional culture could be identified:

- a set of norms, values, practices, beliefs and assumptions (Tierney, 1988);
- guidelines for the behaviour of individuals or groups in an institution (ASHE, 2005);
- a frame of reference within which to interpret the meanings of events and actions (Pettigrew, 1987);
- a means of conveying identity, facilitating commitment, enhancing stability and defining authority (Schein, 2006);
- regarded as "substance" articulated through "forms" (ASHE, 2005:63), where the 'substance' are the shared assumptions, values, meanings, understandings and

perceptions; and the ‘forms’ are the more tangible ways of expressing meaning in organisations, such as through symbols, language, narratives and practices (ASHE, 2005:63);

- related to social change (Kezar & Eckel, 2002);
- related to leadership strategies (Tierney, 1988);
- related to how decisions are made and who makes them (Kezar & Eckel, 2002);
- consists of subcultures (Sporn, 1996);
- refers to how people interact with the various environments at (higher education) institutions (Välimala, 1998) and how people are socialised into the institution (Tierney, 1988);
- provides an important focus for knowledge production (Robertson, Scarborough & Swan, 2003); and
- Takes into account the influence of external factors (Martins & Terblanche, 2003).

The above-mentioned twelve features include meanings, which can be associated with the concept of institutional culture. These illuminate what institutional culture is and in this way, they provide the core meanings for the concept ‘institutional culture’.

In constructing the theoretical framework and drawing on Van Wyk (2004), I attempted to establish the “constitutive rules” (see Fay, 1996:116) of institutional culture. First, however, an attempt is made to establish a conceptual link between ‘constitutive meanings and ‘constitutive rules’. According to Fay (1996:116), constitutive meanings are the presuppositions of activities. He also argues that constitutive rules make certain forms of activity possible. Out of this then a contention is made that since both constitutive rules and constitutive meanings relate to activities, there is a conceptual link between the two. Having established this link, an attempt was made to clarify what is meant by constitutive rules. Searle (1964; 1969) points out that we usually think of rules as applying to behaviour, which could be available to us whether the rule existed. Some rules, like commandments, are regulatory. However, there are also other rules, which are not as inseparable, for example the rules governing a cricket game. If these rules were suspended or waived, then the whole game of cricket and its associated behaviour would not exist. The basic activities of batting and fielding would still be present, but it would no longer be cricket. Rules of

this kind are constitutive rules (Taylor, 1985). If this is related to the constitutive meanings identified, it follows that these meanings are also not regulatory, but constitutive. Therefore, the meaning is that in their absence, culture is non-existent.

Central to the aim of the study was to explain the organisation, construction and articulation of institutional culture in the post-merger context of Unisa. I hoped that a self-understanding of post-merger institutional culture would be attained. Taylor (1985) posits that a society is a set of institutions and practices, and these cannot exist without certain self-understandings on the part of the participants. These self-descriptions can be called constitutive (Taylor, 1985:93). Constitutive rules can therefore also be applied to institutions as social phenomena.

In this section, twelve meanings of the concept of institutional culture were identified. These meanings will be narrowed to a few to facilitate easy discussion. According to Harvey (1990), while there may be a long list of concepts in practice, it is not necessary to attempt a separate critical analysis of each. They are interrelated, and so the key is to locate a central concept and to analyse that critically. From that, the other concepts can be derived or reconstructed.

Following Harvey (1990) and Cloete (2002), as earlier indicated, I narrow the meanings down to eight main meanings from the South African and international perspectives, which formed the core of my theoretical framework. ASHE (2005:47) concentrated on four meanings, which are shared values and beliefs, language, symbols, and knowledge production. I have added four for the purpose of my present research as well as focusing on more meanings that are cardinal to understanding institutional culture:

- shared values and beliefs and norms;
- a shared language;
- a shared set of symbols;
- a shared curriculum;
- leadership
- shared practices; and
- staff and student development.

These meanings represent both implicit and explicit features of institutional culture. It can therefore be regarded as an attempt to balance the implicit and explicit features of institutional culture. This attempt at balance has the potential of being holistic and mutually shaping (ASHE, 2005:47). Like Ouchi and Wilkins (1985:463), I regarded such a balanced approach as essential for this study because it could lead to a more rigorous understanding of the concept ‘institutional culture’.

### **3.5.1 Detailed discussion of meanings**

This section explains how the meanings were arrived at and a brief discussion on each and how they might relate to Unisa’s institutional culture. In Chapter 5, where I discuss both interviews and documents from Unisa, further and thorough discussion will be provided on each meaning,

### **3.5.2 Shared values and beliefs**

All institutions have a unique set of basic values and beliefs (also called moral codes [see ASHE, 2011]), which is shared by most of their members. These are the mental pictures of institutional reality, which form the basis of defining what is right or wrong in the particular institution (Shukla, 2011). No, wonder then that, when reviewing the literature on institutional culture, the words ‘values’ and ‘beliefs’ occurred repeatedly. This signifies their important role as elements of institutional culture, exemplified by the way they guide the behaviour of individuals and groups in HEIs. This furthermore provides a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions both on and off campus (ASHE, 2005:39). These values and beliefs focus institutional energy toward certain actions, while discouraging other behavioural patterns. As such, values and beliefs are part of what is called the “substance of institutional culture” (ASHE, 2005:56).

According to Sackmann (2000) and ASHE, (2005) the substance of institutional culture is common descriptions (“what exists”), common practices (“how things are done”), prescriptions for repair and improvement (“how things should be done”), and reasons and explanations given for an event (“why things are done the way they are”). In higher education, one of the most prominent ways of



promoting a sense of institutional identification is through the ideal of community “how things should be done” (see ASHE, 2005:56-57). This ideal of community is a common value or belief in the context of higher education. Building community involves articulating the values that mark a strong institutional culture. The notion of community is useful in that it can improve the lives of those involved in the institution, and ultimately, the institution itself.

Another important observation in terms of building community is that membership at universities is fluid (ASHE, 2005:58). There are always new students and graduates, new employees, recent departures and retirements. Because of this fluidity, it is important for universities to work hard at building a community, and this is central to maintaining their values and beliefs. This aspect is also important in terms of strengthening connections with former students and building active alumni.

In considering the values and beliefs, which constitute the substance of institutional culture, it should be borne in mind that different groups, particularly groups that have been marginalised, might not share all the elements of the dominant culture or perceive themselves to be fully integrated into the overall university community. Such groups might include part-time students, commuters, students from other countries, or students from particular ethnic or language groups. Some of the forms, which communicate institutional values and beliefs (like language and symbols), might even tend to exclude certain groups. Institutional culture can thus exclude, even when it is intended to include. This contention confirms the point made by Sporn (1996:55), who argues that institutional cultures can be alienating or accommodating. This means that it is paramount for universities to consider the perspectives of sub-groups on campus, otherwise the institutional culture and the ideal of community building might be curtailed.

Through this discussion, I have shown that it is in the interest of universities to build institutional communities, which effectively articulate the values and beliefs that mark a strong institutional culture. Such communities should include all sub-groups. In this way, the functioning of institutions can ultimately be improved.

### **3.5.3 Language**

Ouchi and Wilkins (1985) and Jacobs (2014), build on the view of most social scientists suggest that there is a strong connection between the language of a society and its culture. I contend that there is a similar strong connection between the language of an institution and its culture. The language of an institution reflects what is important to that institution, to its new members and to those outside of the institution. This connection between language and institutional culture explains why language as an element of institutional culture plays an important role in identifying the culture of an institution. While language is a universal means of communication (see Ouchi & Wilkins, 1985), most institutions tend to develop their own unique terminologies, phrases and acronyms. Such specialised use of words and phrases makes the language of an institution incomprehensible to those who do not belong to that culture. Language thus becomes a means of identifying insiders from outsiders, a means of inclusion or exclusion.

Elaborating on the strong connection between language and culture, Bellwood P., Chambers, Gross, M & Hung, H (2011) argues that the cultural importance of language stems from its function in transmitting cultural information from one person to another. Cultures cannot continue to exist without being passed on, and this passing on always involves language. Due to the closeness of language and culture, each influences the other in terms of the information that is passed on and how this affects other areas of life, such as politics, economics, technology and decision-making. In addition, every experience and every concept that is seen, heard, thought about, felt, debated or philosophised about has a related word or a way of explaining that experience. Language determines how a person processes information and helps to formulate or sculpt his or her ideas because it carries culture. Students might have certain words, which reflect, for example, every stage of the initiation process of first-year students, whereas the term 'initiation' might be sufficient for those outside the campus community.

Studying the literature on organisational culture and identity, I came across an interesting perspective. Parker (2000:83) offers a more technical view of language and its relation to institutional culture. Borrowing from the Swiss Linguist De Saussure, Parker argues that language is both structure (*langue*) and process (*parole*) (2000:84). While the former refers to the general structure that facilitates communication, the latter refers to a particular act of speaking or

communicating. Further, Parker (2000) states that every speech act relies on the existence of a prior set of grammatical rules, but those rules only exist insofar as they are employed in speech acts. This means that the status of the structure that facilitates communication can be hypothetical, in other words, an “unwritten rule” (Parker, 2000:39). Translating this argument into cultural terms suggests that any competent person can engage in meaningful practices because culture provides a grammar or framework within which they can be understood. This is an important observation because it means that the language associated with a particular institutional culture allows that particular campus community to speak the same language, thereby strengthening the bonds of association, and ultimately, the institutional culture.

What is quite evident from the literature (see Berger & Luckman, 1995) is that language, with its immense variety and complexity, can typify and stabilise institutional experiences and integrate those experiences into a meaningful whole (Pettigrew, 1979:575). These processes of typification are essential for creating an institutional culture. However, language is not just outside us and given to us as part of our cultural and historical heritage; it is also within us: we create it and it creates us. Language is also a vehicle for achieving practical effects. By acquiring the categories of a language, we acquire the structured forms of behaviour of a group, and along with the language, the values that attach to their way of doing things.

From the above discussion, one can conclude that language, as an element of institutional culture is much more than just words: “A vocabulary (language) is not merely a string of words; immanent within it are societal textures— institutional and political coordinates” (Pettigrew, 1979:575). This implies that the language associated with a particular university campus is more than just the words uttered; it also reflects other institutional elements, such as diversity and leadership. Language, as one of the meanings of my theoretical framework, therefore enabled me to unveil all of these institutional ‘textures’, thereby leading to a deeper understanding of institutional culture.

#### **3.5.4 Symbols**

Symbols are integral to institutional life. They are not simply by-products of an institution, but elements that influence members’ construction of sense, knowledge and behaviour (Rafaeli &

Worline, 1999). Most scholars discuss the role of symbols in terms of organisations, but in this research, I refer to the role of symbols in institutions (universities). Symbols are visible, physical manifestations of institutions and indicators of institutional life. Symbols take on important meanings in institutions and their meanings are expressed through cultural and social interactions. While some research implies that symbols are easily manipulated. Rafaeli and Worline (1999) show that symbols are powerful indicators of institutional dynamics, which are not necessarily easily changed. This was an important consideration in the context of this research.

Symbols serve four important functions in organisations, and this can be applied to institutions. Rafaeli and Worline (1999) support this. Symbols reflect underlying aspects of culture, generating emotional responses from members and representing organisational values and assumptions. They elicit internalised norms of behaviour, linking members' emotional responses and interpretations to organisational action. They frame experience, allowing members to communicate about vague, controversial or uncomfortable organisational issues. They also integrate the entire organisation in one system of signification. I am drawn to the first function, symbols as a reflection of organisational culture, or, as is the case in this research, institutional culture.

As explained previously (see 3.5.1) institutional culture has been construed as a network of meanings or shared experiences and interpretations that provide members with a shared and accepted reality (Pettigrew, 1979; Schein, 1993). Symbols provide a tangible expression of this shared reality. This viewpoint has its roots in the psychotherapy of Freud (Ricoeur & Savage, 2008). The idea is that symbols reflect underlying values or realities. It is commonplace in disciplines such as anthropology to study cultures through their use of symbols, and this idea has been applied to organisational culture. Schein (1993) specifically identifies symbols as the first layer of culture, comprising the observable artefacts that make up the sensory experience of an organisation. Gagliardi (1990) and Rafaeli and Worline (1999) conclude that symbols enable us to take aim directly at the heart of culture because they represent and reveal that which is tacitly known and yet unable to be communicated by the members of an organisation. These obvious physical manifestations of an institution can therefore tell us more than we might suppose.

Symbols can tell us much of what we know about institutions. As the tangible, sensory, felt expression of institutional life, symbols provide a way to understand the institutions they represent. Through apprehending symbols, institutional members come to feel as if they know the institution. This process may suggest that symbols help bridge the gap between feeling and thought in institutions. Because of the process of sense making, the emotional experience sparked by symbols leads to a cognitive understanding of the institution. Symbols are said to be a bridge between members' emotional and cognitive reactions, meaning that symbols spark feelings and help make those feelings comprehensible.

I concur with Rafaeli and Worline (1999) that a study of symbols cannot consider itself complete, because symbols and the meanings that people attach to them are subject to change. Institutional symbols relate to one another and to the external environment. This implies that members of a university community continuously read and respond to the institutional landscape. Without careful monitoring, the study of symbols can become misleading and unproductive. However, if careful attention is paid to the physical environment and the conversations, thoughts, emotions and actions of members of an institution, the study of symbols can provide a deep, rich and worthwhile understanding of institutional culture.

### **3.5.5 Curriculum**

Curriculum in higher education in South Africa especially after 1994 has been focused on in relation to changes that brought about a democratic dispensation. Le Grange (2009) and Botha (2009) argue that the focus has been narrowed more to what should be taught rather than focusing on the processes that underlie the curriculum development. On the other hand, Jansen, (2009) takes further the issue of curriculum and refers to it as an institution. Here Jansen (2009:126) emphasises the curriculum not only as a text inscribed in the course syllabus for a particular qualification, but as an understanding of knowledge encoded in the dominant beliefs, values and behaviours deeply embedded in all aspects of institutional life. Then the implications of what is suggested above then are that which Mathews (2015:57) calls the Africanisation of the curriculum in most universities so that the knowledge might reflect the fact that universities actually exist on the African continent.

It is important for the different programmes offered by universities to provide skills and knowledge that will enable student to be participating in the economic development of the country.

Unisa as an institution offering distance education has lot of accredited programmes offered by contact institutions, so that it becomes easy for students who cannot study at a contact university. As a method of quality assuring the curriculum at Unisa, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) evaluated university programmes in terms of evidence-based self-evaluation reports and on-site visits, which resulted in re-accreditation or de-accreditation of such programmes and had a specific focus on distance delivery as well (Botha, 2009). Despite varying ideas on what curriculum is and how it should be approached (Cloete & Bunting; 2000; Jansen, 2009; Bitzer & Botha, 2011), there is a common understanding that a curriculum (especially in a South African context) should address current issues in higher education. The examples of these are vocational/liberal curricula, certificate to a diploma and to a degree, mass education, selective education, contact/distance education, internalisation/ localisation, and the extent of diffusion among disciplinary boundaries.

### **3.5.6 Practices**

Toma *et al.* (2005:70-74) refers to practices as activities such as rites, ceremonials and rituals, intended to convey important cultural messages. Rites are planned sets of activities, full of drama, and carried out for the benefit of an audience. Ceremonials are several rites connected in a single occasion. These are deliberate, conducted in a certain style or manner and are repeated from time to time, for example, the inauguration of a new dean or faculty head. Rituals are standardised, detailed sets of techniques and behaviours expressing common identities that tell people what they are supposed to do. Rituals symbolise underlying social values, thereby reinforcing traditional social ties. The annual convocation ceremonies are examples of rituals that hold together past and present institutional practices. Rituals are important in institutional life because they keep ideology alive and encourage a sense of belonging. Furthermore, their influence on a large group of participants reinforces the values that communities hold or to which they aspire. Accordingly, rituals can be important socialisers of dominant cultural values, whether on behalf of the institution or the society; they provide meaning and purpose to participants.

### 3.5.7 Staff and student development

Institutions of higher learning in South Africa have and are still undergoing many changes emanating from the restructuring like mergers. All of a sudden, universities find themselves confronted with an increasing number of students from previously disadvantaged communities, less resources and shrinking funding subsidy from government (Vice, 2015). In a study conducted by Cross and Carpenter (2009:95) at former white university found out among other things that that universities take students who are less prepared, find themselves in a situation where they are caught up between two hardly reconcilable logics – the logic of performance and the logic of competence, which renders difficult the adjustment of “new students”. Both lecturers and students are subject to these contradictory logics, characterised by ambivalences and lack of clarity about expectations and what constitutes good academic practice. This they found to be a source of misunderstanding and frustrations.

Cross and Carpenter (2009) focused on Wits and how it deals with the issue of students from disadvantaged social groups and how the culture of the institution accommodates these students. Vice (2015) also focused at Rhodes University and how institutional culture there alienates students in almost every aspect of campus life and how does that affect their academic process. For the purpose of this research, I do not intend to discuss the findings of these two studies, but just to highlight that student issues are multiplying at HEIs and not only limited to merged institutions. I also highlight that institutional culture is usually a major challenge because it always makes student from disadvantage societies to feel not at home (Vice, 2015).

Academic Staff is an important component of the institutions because they represent a culture of the institution. Harman (2004:92) states that academics manage and sustain traditions, ideas, and many other forms of symbolism that are not familiar to universities and occupational work. Those not happy tend to feel very disoriented, unsettled, frustrated, unprepared for change and unable to compete with the demands of the newly created institutions. Other challenges relate to qualification requirements as per level of teaching, salary packages and related benefits, teaching responsibilities, research requirements, age, promotion, staff development, and geographic

challenges as they relate to relocation. Other effects include feelings of being disadvantaged and powerless among staff (Locke, 2007:88).

Locke (2007:88) cautions that differences between merging institutions are not always adequately recognised and taken into account. He says this often leads to an intensification of these differences that can also create conflict within the new institution between factions who stay loyal to the identity and culture of the old institutions. Harman (2002:98) agrees with Locke and sees political allegiance of the old institution as an important area of collision. Grant Harman (2002:104) raises an important point that links to Jansen's Contingency Theory – the issue of politics. He says we often attribute the politics of a merger to government and he urges us to cast our eyes wider by looking at political motives at the level of institutions and academics. He says institutions and academics in many merger situations are as political as governments. In his view, researchers must try to tease out who all the players are in a merger, what their interests are and what they are trying to achieve.

### **3.5.8 University leadership**

Leadership is paramount in steering any process of change at an institution and that kind of leadership is referred to by Manning (2013:104) as transformational leadership. Manning further describes transformational leadership as one, which is defined as a power, and influence theory in which the leader acts in mutual ways with the followers. The transformation leader appeals to people's higher needs to inspire and motivate followers to move towards a particular purpose.

Tierney (1998) alludes to the importance of the behaviour of institutional leaders in helping manage the culture of an institution and adapting in and to higher education. Baijnath (2010) indicates that leadership at Unisa for an example, managed the merger process through turbulent times even when the university took the then Minister of education to court against the merger. Paul and Berry (2013) also contends that effective change management assists in focusing the human side of change by helping people to understand and accept changes like a merger. One of the tasks of management is to assess the current state, creating common vision, designing the



desired end-state, establishing new behaviours and working towards implementing the actual change.

### **3.5.9 Knowledge production**

Changes on many fronts are forcing HEIs to determine how they should position themselves to achieve success in the future. The result is that it has become necessary for HEIs to adapt to forces such as demographics, technology and knowledge (Bowman, 1999).

A wide variety of government interventions in higher education can be linked to the cultural changes associated with globalisation and the emergence of the knowledge-driven economy (Naidoo, 2008:43). The key to this change lies in the fact that the ability of the state to compete successfully on a global scale is no longer dependent on material production and manual work, but is now seen to rely on the production of higher value-added products and services, which depend on knowledge and innovation. This implies that there is a greater focus on a high-skills economy, with higher education being a major contributor. The result is increased government attempts at developing policy frameworks to regulate higher education, accompanied by strategies to lift the entire national skills base. This is reflected in the increased pressure on national HE systems to move from being elite institutions to being mass institutions. This means that access to high-level education should not be limited to a small elite group, and this may fundamentally change the culture and thereby the terms on which teaching and learning take place in higher education. Such pressures on higher education, coupled with the introduction of neo-liberalism, have led to a phenomenon which Naidoo (2008:44) described as the “disappearing social impact”. This refers to higher education having become more of an industry rather than a social institution. Another concept, which comes into play in the context of the disappearing social compact, is consumerism, which can be described as an attempt to change the traditional structures of higher education by introducing new models of rationality and new value systems.

The question now is how consumerism change organisational culture, or in the context of this study, institutional culture. While the significance of organisational culture is widely acknowledged, difficulties in defining the concept are well documented. Pettigrew’s early

definition of organisational culture as a system of publicly and collectively accepted meanings operating for a given group has been widely accepted and utilised (Pettigrew, 1979:574). Researchers in higher education applied this definition to higher education, and this resulted in attempts to differentiate HEIs from other organisations. It was noted by Naidoo (2008) that academic institutions possess distinctive cultures which are developed and sustained by actions of community members, and that academic institutions are more complex than other organisations since activities take place at different levels (Naidoo, 2008:46).

Pierre Bourdieu's work has contributed to understanding culture in higher education. According to Bourdieu (1988), the field of university education is one with a high degree of autonomy. It generates its own organisational culture, consisting of values and behavioural imperatives, which are largely independent of forces emerging from economic and political fields. The capital invested in higher education is called academic capital (Bourdieu, 2003:74) and it consists of intellectual or cultural assets rather than economic or political assets. The culture underlying practice in higher education is therefore shaped by deeply ingrained rules, values and professional protocols that revolve around the belief in, the struggle for and the acquisition of academic capital.

It is my argument that government intervention to regulate higher education threatens the preservation of a culture of academic capital. The new focus on strong economic performance on a global scale means that economic forces are affecting universities more powerfully, leading to an undermining of academic capital. The researcher concurs with Naidoo (2008:47) who posits that higher education has become an area of "commodification" with academic capital being compromised in order to comply with market frameworks, or in the context of this study, in order to respond to the pressure to produce high-level skills to enable government to compete globally. In essence, political assets have become more important than strengthening academic capital.

### **3.6 SUMMARY**

This chapter presented a discussion on the phenomenon of institutional culture, and demonstrated its complexities as a phenomenon that affects almost every aspect of the university. The concepts 'institution', 'culture' and 'institutional culture' were explored in order to establish the meaning

of ‘institutional culture’. As an indication that institutional culture is not the same in all institutions, I have discussed international discourses and South African contexts.

My enquiry has been framed against the existing conceptual frameworks. After analysing four frameworks (see 3.3.6), a number of different meanings of institutional culture have been examined and I have chosen six (see 3.5.1) to form the foundation of understanding institutional culture at merged institutions. The next chapter focuses on the unit of analysis, which is Unisa.

## CHAPTER 4

### A CASE STUDY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with the case study of the university under study. The chapter reports on an investigation into how the merger of three ODL universities to form the current Unisa contributed to the reshaping of institutional culture after the merger. I do this by reviewing the nature of Unisa as a distance learning institution. As this was a hermeneutic study, emphasis was placed on the historical consciousness of the institution as a cornerstone for understanding how it came to existence and how the merger led to the current post-merger culture. As this was a methodological cornerstone, historical backgrounds of each institution that merged are provided. I further examined how the current Unisa came into being. This is started by exploring the process of merger from the pronouncement by government, the institution's responses to it and the perceptions of people from each distance learning institution that formed part of the merger. All the relevant institutional documents are listed in order to demonstrate their merging-attributes of merger and the meaning of institutional culture after the merger phase. This is done against the main sub-question of the study. The nature of universities is examined but emphasis is placed on ODL institutions as the context of this inquiry.

#### 4.2 DISCUSSION ON UNIVERSITIES

This chapter reports on the nature of a university, specifically Unisa, which is the focus in the study. In other words, the main question of the study is revisited, which is from a conceptual and literature perspective, how can the post-merger institutional culture of Unisa be articulated? For one to be able to understand post-merger institutional culture, it is important to explore the concept of a university generally and later (in section 4.3.1) in the context of Unisa, an ODL institution. Exploring the question of a university gave me the idea of institutional culture that is associated with universities generally and after the merger.

In Chapter 2 the meaning of university was briefly explained (see 2.5.1) as well as the nature of Unisa (4.3.2 and 4.4) but in this section, an in-depth discussion of the history and nature of Unisa is provided. As this was a hermeneutic study, the history of the university in question is briefly elaborated upon.

I provide the history before attempting to explain what a university is. The reason for this is that during the literature review, I have gathered that universities historically drew their nature from their respective backgrounds and were therefore the result of social creations. Brzezinski (1997) concurs with this, and he describes a university as an autonomous institution that is organised in various ways depending on its geographic location and historical heritage.

#### **4.2.1 History of the university**

The history of universities is divided into four stages, according to Du Pré (2009:13). The first stage is traced from Bologna, Parma, Paris and Oxford from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries. The universities specialised in training of professional lawyers, clergies, clerical and lay administrators that could be regarded as vocational schools. Educational elite characterised the universities during 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (second stage), although the curriculum remained the same as that of vocational universities. The focus was not for training but for education.

Vukuza-Linda (2014), citing Du Pre, (2009) says that from the 19<sup>th</sup> century up to the 1950s was the third stage, when knowledge was fragmented and teaching and research were separated. At a university, one could isolate a very small domain of possible knowledge, and focus one's entire energy on it. This single-minded pursuit of knowledge resulted in the isolation of those who could produce knowledge that was ground breaking like scientific inventions. The notion of pure knowledge could, of course, not accommodate 'mundane' technological enterprises, with the result that engineering, for an example, was first avoided and only included in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Du Pré, 2009:13).

The new era of the existence of universities was introduced in the 1960. During this period, university life was characterised by economic growth, which led to esoteric studies of an

unthinkable number of subjects, as well as democratisation that led to open access and the opening up of the social sciences in universities.

It then became clear that the nature of the university kept changing from century to another. This means that each century would interpret a university according to the needs of that time. Universities in South Africa were formalised by the University Act, No. 12 of 1916 in the then Union of South Africa and that resulted to the creation of Unisa, which incorporated various colleges that were situated in different parts of the country. These colleges gradually became independent universities and by this time UNISA had become a fully-fledged correspondence university Behr (1984) and Raju (2004).

Additional universities were created in the 1970s (and by the mid-1980s; there were ten residential universities for white people in South Africa). The University Act, No. 45 of 1959 was extended to create universities for Africans, coloureds and Indians (Raju, 2004) to the extent that by 1990, South Africa had about 23 universities.

In Chapter 2 of this study, an in-depth discussion of higher education under a democratic government has been provided 2.5.1. Section 4.2.2 below provides information on the role of the university in modern days.

#### **4.2.2 The role of a university**

‘University’ is explained as an autonomous institution that creates, investigates and evaluates and conveys culture through its scientific and teaching activities (Raju, 2004). The activities of the university must be morally and intellectually independent of political and economic authority. Agreeing with Brzezinski (1997) on the role of a university in cultural conveyance through its activities like teaching and research, Du Pré (2009) further states that universities should incorporate learning that accommodates cultural aspects of its community. For Du Pré, these activities (conveyance of a particular culture through teaching and research) are offered within the organised cadre of the contact between lecturer and student, and are supported by networking,

cooperation and collaboration with external academic partners to create, develop and transmit new knowledge.

If Brzezinski (1997) and Du Pré (2009), in their discussion of the role of a university, put emphasis on research, teaching and learning, the philosophical question I ask would be: what are the implications? Teaching can be constructed as complex processes and skills that bring about higher-order learning. Clark & Neave (1992) and Barnett (1990) on the other hand, view learning as when a student identifies with the truth claim and can offer it as something of which he/she has personal experience and can ultimately evaluate it for him/herself. Allen (1998) completes the picture by suggesting that research can be taken as a form of investigation that leads to the new knowledge that has not been previously known. Section 4.2.4 provides the background of universities in the context of South Africa in before and after apartheid.

### **4.2.3 The role of the university in a post-apartheid era**

As indicated earlier 2.5.1, in the period before 1994, higher education was racially differentiated, causing universities to play different roles. Some black universities, for instance, became grounds for struggle against the apartheid regime, while some white institutions were forts of the system. After the restructuring of higher education in 1994, one of the major aims of government was to have a system of higher education that is relevant to the new democratic system, as stated in the Education White Paper 3 (DoE, 1997). Specifically, according to the then minister, ‘a university should respond to a democratic society and must be at the forefront of shaping a citizen of the new South Africa’.

Pityana (2010) sees a relevant and good South African university as one with an atmosphere that encourages robust engagement of views of workers, students and academics. The atmosphere must allow free expression of views on any issue that affects the well-being of a university. For Pityana (2010), some universities do not prosper in environments where power dynamics serve to exclude ideas not in accordance with the prevailing norms, but rather only, where ideas are contested by other ideas, and truth is the winner.

Van Wyk and Higgs (2004) espouse an encompassing culture of South African universities. These authors explored the possibility of incorporating African philosophy into higher education in South Africa. Post-apartheid universities, according to the vision of Van Wyk and Higgs (2004), must be set against the meanings of ‘institutional culture and ‘commonality’. I concur with Van Wyk and Higgs as they argue that HE discourse in the country would be impoverished if it failed to recognise African philosophical thought and practice. Waghid (2010) explains ‘*Ubuntu*’ as the co-existence of people along the lines of having respect for each other, recognising their vulnerabilities and actually, doing something about changing people’s lives. He believes in the *Ubuntu*, which is an African way of life. For him, *Ubuntu* might be practiced worldwide, but it is the conditions under which it is practiced that makes it different from one society to the next. *Ubuntu* practiced in post-colonial African society, for example, will invariably be different to human interaction in other non-African societies.

Based on the assertions of Waghid on post-apartheid universities and *ubuntu*, it was interesting to find out whether the universities were indeed practicing this philosophy. If not, why not, and which kind of institutions would they be if they were to practice such a philosophy? Which post-merger culture would exist in those that merged if they adhere to principles of *ubuntu*? Would we have had the turmoil in terms of protests about statues on campuses that symbolise certain cultures in 2015? These are the challenges that are facing some of HEIs that still need to unlearn the ideologies of the past and embrace the notion of being a university in a post-apartheid era.

#### **4.2.4 Themes about the South African idea of a university**

Because this study is of a conceptual nature, it becomes clear that a student of philosophy must be inquisitive about any concept. From the discussions on the nature of a university in the current context in South Africa, it further more became clear that universities are associated with research, teaching and learning, culture, knowledge, community engagement, intellectual independence, democracy, humanity and compassion. The literature on what a university is has been discussed. The next sections 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6 present the three institutions, i.e. Unisa, TSA and VUDEC, which merged to form the current Unisa, a university offering open distance education.



### **4.3 A DISCUSSION ON OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING (ODL) EDUCATION**

Historically, open distance learning was a phenomenon that emanated in the United States around 1918 and became a worldwide model by the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Burgess, 1997). Distance learning is not new and various postsecondary institutions for over a hundred years have offered correspondence courses. He gives the example of Pennsylvania State University in the 1890s, which started its first agricultural course and added credit correspondence courses for professional engineers in 1918 (Burgess, 1997:17).

An educational institution that provides lesson material, prepared in a logical and sequential order, by mail and email, (see Gibson, 2008:22), offers traditional correspondence study, also known as home study or independent study'. When the student has completed the course, he/she is granted credits that may apply to a degree or diploma. Non-credit participation is also possible, whereby the student receives a certificate or diploma for successful completion of a course or series of courses. As logical progression of this mode of study, a variety of modern media methods are used to deliver courses to students. The media included are audiocassettes, audio conferencing, broadcast television, computer conferencing, teleconferencing, videocassettes, and other forms to enhance the learning possibilities in a multitude of disciplines reflects on an answer to a question that might arise, namely what distance learning is.

#### **4.3.1 What is an open distance learning institution?**

A debate about distance education has been in terms of how it is conceptualised and its dependence on the situation from country to country. The debate about conceptualisation is more prominent in literature than the actual definition of open distance learning. Gibson (2008:81) argues that most of the research in distance learning has conceptualised distance teaching and learning in terms of its key elements of teacher, student, and communications medium and content. Central to this research, is the influence of parents, the involvement of family and the effect of subsequent changes in family values on a distance learner. Change in family values refers to change in terms of time spent with family or limit in activities in which a student would usually be involved in the

family. Another important aspect which needs to be addressed in distance learning is the context in which the teaching and learning occurs.

On the other hand, Holmberg (1988:4) views distance education as meaning the same thing as correspondence education. For him, distance education includes all types of non-contiguous teaching, meaning teaching that takes place without having a teacher and a learner in the same room. Traditional correspondence is one application, but the use of media has taken open distance learning to new levels. The content to be learned is presented in print, in audio form, sometimes even video discs and/or compact discs or on the radio. However, apart from the pre-produced presentation of learning matter there is always an element of real communication in what is here called 'distance education'. This communication takes place in writing and over the telephone. Other media and electronic mail are likewise possible.

Holmberg (1988:2) prefers the term 'distance education' to the term 'correspondence education'. Two-way communication, both real and simulated, between the student and the supporting institution is regarded as characteristic of distance education. Holmberg (1988) further argues though that any form of organised study in which the teacher is not physically present, might be described as 'distance education'. This would include, for example, a self-study course, which contains all the usual components of a correspondence course, such as lessons, exercises, tests, answers, examinations hints, except physical access to a tutor. Distance rather than non-contiguous two-way communication is characteristic of education that does not require a teacher to be physically present. Having explored distance learning, section 4.3.2 reports on the role of open distance learning.

### **4.3.2 The role of open distance learning**

The role of open distance learning is to do away with learning barriers whether they have to do with age, time, place or space. Prinsloo (2015) suggests that in open distance learning, individuals take responsibility for what they learn, how they learn, where they learn, how quickly they learn, who helps them, and when they have, their learning assessed.

Jones, Kirkup and Kirkwood (1992:6-7), states that:

There is a general agreement that distance instruction is likely to remain an outstanding feature of the South African university system for the near future. It is widely felt though, that because of its significant contribution to the process of democratisation access to tertiary education, distance education should be an activity undertaken by a large number of universities, for example through regional consortiums. Distance education is too important to be monopolised by one or two institutions.

The above extract obviously has an effect on what the policy on new distance learning should be influencing both the Green and White Papers on distance higher education, in South Africa. Prinsloo (2015:430) described open distance learning as “making provision to support a wider range of student choices regarding access, curriculum, pacing, sequencing, learning modes and methods, assessment and articulation”. According to Prinsloo (2015:431), the implication therefore is that ‘participation’ means, “increasing the participation in HE of pupils from lower socio-economic backgrounds and other under-represented groups”. The historical legacy of apartheid disenfranchising scores of youth from participation in higher education as well as the persistent effect of one’s social-economic status (SES) in either creating opportunities for success in higher education or hampering such opportunities will continue to play a definitive role in participation rates in higher education (Prinsloo, 2015).

In other developing countries, distance-learning education has been instrumental in providing quality higher education for the ever-increasing populations. In Africa, and for many countries, distance education seems to be the only option that can play a role in widening participation to HE provision. While acknowledging the necessity of distance education in widening access, it must also provide academically credible and quality education content at a low cost (Makoe, 2015).

Unisa specifically provides most of the distance education in Africa, according to Letseka and Pitsoe (2013). Unisa is the only dedicated distance education institution plays a leading role in increasing access to higher education for marginalised communities. Its aim is to open up more opportunities for people to further their studies by removing possible barriers (geographical distance, time constraints and funding) to accessing higher education by offering flexible learning, providing comprehensive student support, and charging reasonable fees that make higher

education more affordable (Unisa ODL Policy, 2006:2). With regard to openness, Unisa operates a wide range of minimum statutory admission requirements for specific programmes as well as Senate discretionary admission requirements programmes (see Unisa, ODL Policy 2007). The university's view is that its open access policy provides opportunities while its materials, quality assurance and student support based on best practices in open distance learning ensure success for the reasonably diligent student. The university's responsible open admission aims at:

Identifying potential and appropriate support for students. It constitutes competency evaluation and recognises students' educational background. It promotes equity of access and the provision of appropriate student support interventions aimed at bridging the gaps in students' academic and social readiness for higher education (Unisa, 2008e:2).

Unisa provides flexible options for students who choose to study at their own place and pace, using appropriate technologies and having access to a range of learning support (Unisa, 2006:15). Perraton (2000:1) points out that the main advantage of open distance learning is its flexibility. People who have jobs can study in their own time, in their own homes, without being removed from their work for long periods. Perraton, Robinson and Creed (2001:3) concur, and argue that the flexibility inherent in open distance learning, and the fact that it can be combined with a full-time or near full-time job, makes it particularly appropriate for the often widely distributed force of teachers and school managers. Such flexibility allows reduction of opportunity costs in forgone earnings, and facilitates a higher integration of working and studying, which may be significant with a changing age structure of the student population, and a shift towards part-time studying (Perraton & Hulsmann, 2003:9).

#### **4.4 History of University of South Africa (Unisa)**

The history of Unisa can be traced from its colonial background as earlier indicated in the history of universities in South Africa (see 4.2.4). The British colonialists established what was called the South African College in Cape Town in 1829 after a period of development of its programmes and facilities (Baijnath *et al.*, 2010:118-19). Baijnath *et al.* further state that the government of the Cape was granted authority to establish an examining university in 1872, leading to the establishment of the University of Good Hope in 1873. The new university was not engaged in any teaching activities but conducted examinations and maintained academic standards for various

degrees and certificates in humanities, arts, law, divinity, engineering and music, among others. The university was bestowed with a Royal Charter by Queen Victoria in 1877, admitting it to the elite band of British and imperial universities. The outcome of this was that the degrees of the university were recognised throughout the British Empire, enjoying a status equal to the British universities (Bajjnath *et al.*, 2010:118-19).

The following years saw growth in the number of academic programmes and establishing rules of the university. The fields of study responded to the needs of the time by expanding and establishing the School of Mines in 1890. A degree of uniformity developed in the educational system up to the period of Union. As the existing and newly formed colleges merged and became established in their own right, mirroring developments in Britain, where the University College of London shed its colleges, allowing them to become fully-fledged universities. Aside from mining, which had grown considerably, a burgeoning economy demanded an even more diverse range of skills in Britain.

A debate developed on how the South African university system could be started and it culminated into the passing of three university acts in 1916. Through these acts, the two existing colleges became universities in their own right, with the University of Good Hope becoming Unisa. As the country grew and developed, these colleges became autonomous universities:

- In 1922, the South African School for Mining and Technology in Johannesburg became the University of the Witwatersrand.
- In 1930, the Transvaal University College in Pretoria became the University of Pretoria.
- In 1949, the Natal University College in Pietermaritzburg and Durban became the University of Natal.
- In 1950, the University College of the Orange Free State became the University of the Orange Free State.
- In 1951, the Potchefstroom University College became the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education, and
- In the same year, Rhodes University College in Grahamstown became Rhodes University.

Later the following university colleges, which had been affiliated with Unisa, also became autonomous universities (Unisa, 2008c):

- the University of the Western Cape, in 1970;
- the University of the North, in 1970;
- the University of Zululand, in 1970; and
- The University Durban-Westville, in 1971.

In the changing educational landscape, Unisa had to redefine its role. The role it played as the establishment of other universities diminished an examining body. The university concentrated on offering education to students through the process of correspondence. A Director of External Studies was appointed, and this became an indication of the stance of the university on becoming a distance education institution. Below is the table indicating student's enrolment at Unisa (2001-2002) before the merger.

**Table 4.4.1 UNISA student numbers**

YEAR	Female	Male	African	Asian	White	Coloured	Other	Total
2002	14 216	3 818	14 710	617	2 486	220	1	18 098
March 2001	7446	2 081	6 316	560	2 459	11 192	Nil	9 527
March 1999	5 787	1 734	5 240	354	1 817	11	Nil	7 521

Source: Soobrayan (2002)

According to Cloete and Bunting, (2002:23) student numbers had dropped at Unisa between 1995 and 1999, but the university saw an increase in student numbers from 2001 until the time of the merger. The next table indicates departments at Unisa before merger and student enrolment:

**Table 4.4.2 Student enrolments according to faculties at Unisa before the merger**

Science & technology	Business, Commerce	Education	Social Science & Humanities	Total
11%	37%	10%	42%	123 586

Source: Bunting and Smith (1999)

The picture provided by the above table indicates the number of students that were enrolled at Unisa at various faculties indicated. Science and Technology included section like medical and paramedical sciences, all life and physical sciences, computer and mathematical sciences, engineering and related disciplines such as, agriculture and architecture. The business and commerce category includes all business studies, accounting, economics and finance. The social science and humanities includes the standard social sciences like psychology, sociology, social anthropology, political studies, history, social work as well as fields such as visual and performing arts, law, languages and literature and theology. The education category includes primarily courses concerned with the training of school teachers (Bunting & Smith, 1999). The majority of students are enrolled in the social and human sciences. Therefore, it can be concluded that by the time merger took place Unisa had a sizable number of students.

In 2001, higher education aligned itself with the democratic system values like inclusiveness, equity and redress, underwent a complete reconfiguration that resulted in Unisa merging in 2004 as South Africa's single, dedicated, comprehensive distance education institution (amalgamating the old Unisa, Technikon South Africa and the Vista University for Distance Education Campus. Unisa define itself as a public-spirited institution with a clear social mandate. It is focused on quality, development, and transformation through education teaching, research and community engagement-national, continentally and globally (Unisa Annual Report, 2014:4).

According to the Unisa Report of (2014) Unisa historically was always a democratic institution because of providing higher education to all races, although graduation ceremonies were differentiated in terms of race. This vibrant past is indicated by the number of alumni who are prominent in the South African society and across the world. Given its rootedness in South Africa and the African continent, Unisa today can truly claim to be the African university shaping futures in the service of humanity.

To date Unisa is the largest open distance learning (ODL) institution in South Africa, and one of the world's top 30-mega institution. With more than 35000 students, Unisa enrolls over one-third of all South Africa's tertiary students (Unisa, 2014:4). The students profile reflects the demographics of South Africa's democratisation process and its status on the continent since 1994,

underscoring the pivotal role that Unisa plays in higher education and its strategic position nationally, continentally and globally, as a key vehicle for transformation, growth and development.

Unisa has developed and matured into a modern, and innovative and effective 21<sup>st</sup> century university. It has been governed and managed in such a way that its structures have adapted and adjusted to the emerging regulatory requirements, socio-economics dynamics and the institutional spirit of transformation and growth (Unisa, 2014:4).

#### **4.5 Background of a technikon**

As this is a hermeneutic study, the history of a concept is paramount, and a historical background of technikon is provided first in order to understand how they operated as institutions of higher learning. The historical background of Technikon SA (TSA) will be discussed.

‘Technikon’ is a term unique to South Africa, as it is a South African invention and it was used for twenty-five years (1979 to 2004) (Du Pré, 2009:12). The roots of the technikon as an institution in South Africa were in technical colleges whose responsibility was to attend to the theoretical aspects of apprentice education and training throughout the country. In 1923, certain technical colleges in South Africa were declared places of higher education in terms of the Higher Education Act (No. 30 of 1923). As time went by, these colleges offered community courses other than those related to the theoretical aspects of apprentice training Raju (2004:2). Because of a growing shortage of skilled and high-level personnel to meet the needs of commerce and industry in the country, the Advanced Technical Education Act (No. 40 of 1967) created a new type of institution that was an intermediate between a technical college and a university Behr (1984:128) and Raju (2004:2). The new type of institution was called a college for advanced technical education (CATE) and was located in the HE sector (Raju, 2004:2). By the late 1970s, the recommendation by the Van Wyk de Vries Commission that universities and CATEs should enjoy free vertical development, but with a difference in focus, was accepted (Raju, 2004:2).



This not only represented an important development in the history of what was to be known as a technikon, but also highlights the fact that these two types of HEIs had different focus. This difference in focus is further highlighted by the fact that the Advanced Technical Education Amendment Act (No. 43 of 1979) changed the name from ‘college for advanced technical education’ to ‘technikon’. By the early 1990s, fifteen technikons had emerged nationally. As had been the case with the universities, apartheid had been deeply entrenched in the technikon system as well. The Technikon Act (No. 125 of 1993) established technikons as degree-awarding institutions (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 1997b). The Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997) firmly established technikons within the HE sector (Raju, 2004:2). One could wonder, if technikons had the means and authority to award degrees, why it was necessary to change them to universities of technology (UoTs). That was however not the focus of the present study. Section 4.5.1 provides a historical background of Technikon South Africa.

#### **4.5.1 A brief history of Technikon South Africa (TSA)**

Technikon South Africa (TSA) came into existence on 1 April 1980, as an “offshoot of Technikon Witwatersrand’s correspondence wing” (Baijnath *et al.*, 2010:119). Its initial purpose was to provide correspondence-type education for police students at tertiary level in view of the dearth of learning opportunities in this field at the existing HEIs. According to Baijnath (2010), internal security policing had been catapulted to the top of government priorities following the student protests of 1976.

TSA was situated in Braamfontein, central Johannesburg, when it was established and it comprised 4 000 learners and 22 academic staff. By 1989, it moved to the Florida campus as the learner enrolment had grown rapidly. The growth in numbers resulted in expansion of fields of learning, like management, business and science in addition to those of police-related subjects, which already existed. The growth and development at TSA during the 1990s led to its management reviewing its method of correspondence learning (Unisa, 2008e).

Discourses about open distance learning locally and abroad have shifted towards institutions to develop to rethink their educational models. The call has been for far greater flexibility in entry and exit of students, provision of quality software, and increased level of community support.

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

In August in 1993, according to Baijnath *et al.* (2010), the technikon re-launched its identity in a new name Technikon SA (TSA), which also marked a decisive shift from correspondence to distance learning. In order to provide solid conceptual foundations to the paradigm shift, the technikon introduced its model of integrated learning-centred distance education (ILCDE), which aimed at curriculum development aligned with leading-edge distance learning practices, and which sought to provide quality learner support. To provide further impetus to the ILCDE model, a network of regional centres was set up throughout the country.

The technikons were accorded degree-granting status by the Committee of Technikon Principals organised by the Ministry of Education in 1995. This gave TSA the authority to confer degrees up to the level of doctorates in its three divisions of Applied Natural Sciences and Engineering, Applied Community Management Sciences, and Public Safety and Criminal Justice. A number of academic institutes were also established at TSA to promote academic research.

By the year 2000, the numbers of students at TSA had grown rapidly and it had 23 regional offices (Unisa, 2008e) throughout the country. TSA had earned itself status of being the largest institution for career-specific distance education in southern Africa. At the time of the merger with Unisa and Vudec, the institution was in the process of expanding its operations in Africa (Baijnath *et al.*, 2010:121). For further illustration of this point below is the table indicating staff and students at TSA before the merger

**Table 4.5.1 Student head-count by population group at TSA in 2000**

African	Coloured	White	Indian	Total
13 172	1246	24 289	537	39244

Source: TSA, financial and related Statements (2000)

The above table indicates that number of white students was more compared to all the other groupings, making a larger percentage of the total of students make-up at TSA by the time of the merger. The reasons for the imbalance in student demographics are historical as it was established in terms of Act 40 of 1967, during apartheid era, exclusively for white students to provide correspondence-type of education for policy studies (Bajinath *et al.*, 2010:119).

**Table 4.5.2 TSA staff by population group**

Personnel Category	Black	Coloured	Indian	White	Male	Female	Total
1.0 Professional staff	100	21	03	380	268	252	520
1.1 Instruction/Research Professional	46	6	13	161	130	96	226
1.2 Executive/Administrative/ Managerial Professionals	14	6	2	39	44	17	61
1.3 Specialist/Support Professionals	40	9	4	180	94	139	233
2.0 Non-Professional Staff	223	64	25	304	214	402	616
2.1 Technical Employees	1	9	0	21	17	14	31
2.2. Non-Professional Administrative Employees	121	39	20	263	103	340	443
2.3 Crafts/Trade Employees	33	9	5	18	55	10	65
2.4 Service Employees	68	7	0	2	39	38	77

Source: TSA, Financial and Related Statements (2000:700)

The above table indicates that a different type of employment equity at TSA. It is clear that white males occupied most senior, professional and managerial positions more than any other racial group. From the table above, it is clear to see that there was no gender equity in terms of employment policy of the institution. The disparities in terms of race make-up of the institution suggest that a particular institutional culture existed at TSA and it will be interesting to find out later how did that influenced the current culture at Unisa. It is also worth noting that the time of

the merger TSA had students in Southern Africa countries and was in a process of expanding its branches throughout the African continent, yet it had such low percentage of black staff members.

**Table 4.5.3 Information on fields of study**

<b>Science and Technology</b>	<b>Business, Commerce</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Social Science and Humanities</b>
Agricultural and Renewable Natural Resources	Business, Commerce and Management Sciences	Communication Education	Arts Visual and Performing Health Care and Sciences
Architect and Environmental Design	Industrial Arts, Trades and Technology	Philosophy, Religion and Theology	Home Economics
Computer Science and Data Processing	Public Administration and Social Services	Physical Education and Health & Leisure	Languages, Linguistics and Literature
Engineering and Engineering Technology		Languages, Linguistics and Literature	Law
Life Sciences and Physical Sciences			Libraries and Museums
Mathematical Sciences			Social Sciences and Social Studies
Military Sciences			

Source: TSA, Financial and Related Statements (2000:2-12)

This background offers an idea of the sheer scale and capacity that TSA had as an institution of higher education and predictable reaction to the news that it had to merge with other institutions. That matter will be dealt with extensively in the section dealing with the technikons response to the merger. Section 4.6.provides a brief background on the history of VUDEC.

#### 4.6 History of Vista University Distance Education Campus (VUDEC)

The Vista University Distance Education Campus (VUDEC) was an integral part of Vista University. According to Baijnath *et al.* (2010:121), any account of VUDEC must begin with the history of the establishment of Vista University. Vista University was established in 1981 in response to the growing need to expand the skills base, and to provide higher educational opportunities to black people in the urban areas (Fourie, 2008). The rationale behind this was also that it was becoming difficult to maintain a policy of sending black students from urban townships to far-flung universities in the homelands.

Baijnath (2010) further states that Vista University started to function with small number of academics about 14 and 300 students in 1982. By 1983, five campuses were in operation and the first certificates and diplomas were awarded. In 1984, a sixth campus was added Baijnath, (2010:121). The first faculty to be established was that of Education. Except for the Education faculty that was established at the time, the Faculty of Arts followed in 1983. Other faculties started as a cluster of departments and evolved into faculties.

Below is the table indicating a number of student enrolment at different faculties the then Vista University

**Table 4.6.1 Students headcount by race and faculty qualification (1996)**

Faculty	African	Coloured	Indian	White
Arts	5658	163	13	53
Economics & Management Sciences	1442	93	15	59
Education (Contact Tuition)	1372	91	7	21
Education (Distance Tuition)	18696	18	1	1
Law	462	86	5	21
Science	77	10	0	1
Occasional	78	4	0	0

Source: EPU Report (1996)

From the above it can be concluded that Vista had a majority of African students, who made up almost 98% of student population (EPU, Vista, 1996). The majority of the African student's body was based more in the Education distance tuition. The coloured, Indian and white students make a low percentage of the whole student body.

The above picture had changed drastically (with the exception of Faculty of Education) by the year 2003 few years before the incorporation of VUDEC to Unisa, according to Van der Merwe (2007). In the last year of registration (2003) as VUDEC of 8000 students 3 8000 were registered in the Faculty of Education. Students at the Faculty of Arts were about 1800, Faculty of Economic Sciences, 500 in the Faculty of Natural Sciences and 400 students in the Faculty of Law (Van der Merwe, 2007:544).

The first degrees were awarded in 2000, when HE policy makers were already drafting the fate of the Vista and of VUDEC. Table 4.1 below indicates the timeline of Vista University's existence.

**Table 4.6.2: The history of Vista University**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
1978	Government appoints a commission of inquiry to investigate the tertiary needs and requirements of urban black people in South Africa
1980	The Commission submitted its report to Government's ,proposing the establishment of Vista University
1982	The new institution came into being on 1 January 1982 in terms of Act 106 of 1981
1982	In April 1982, Vista University Further Training Campus with fifteen staff members is established in Pretoria, taking over the function of teacher education from the then Department of Education and Training
1998	The name of the campus is changed to Vista University Distance Education Campus (VUDEC)
2003	Vista is unbundled

Source: Fourie (2008)

#### 4.7 GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSED MERGERS OF DISTANCE LEARNING INSTITUTIONS

In this section, the background to government's proposal for the merger of institutions, specifically those offering distance learning education, and the institutions' reactions to the merger is traced. The work of the National Plan on Higher Education is presented, as this was a structure that recommended mergers for distance education institutions.

The South African Tertiary Education Sector Assessment Report (1992) indicated that distance education was offered along racial lines, although by 1989 black students at Unisa had increased (SATEAR: 6-5). In terms of its staff and governance, Unisa remained an essentially white university. In 1991, 19 of the 22 members of its all-white council were Afrikaners. The Report suggested a further expansion of distance higher education stating that:

There is general agreement that distance instruction is likely to remain an outstanding feature of the South African university system for the near future. It is widely felt, though, that because of its significant contribution to the process of democratising access to tertiary education, distance education should be the activity undertaken by a large number of universities, for example through regional consortiums. Distance education is too important to be monopolised by one or two institutions (SALTEAR, 1992:6-7).

It is because of this assessment report that the Working Group on Distance Education (WGDE) relied for restructuring distance-learning higher education.

Barnes *et al.* (2010:122) state that whether the literature says mergers are voluntary or involuntary is not the important issue. The process, the inducements, the model and internal and external support for the motives for merger, are important. Whilst there might have been major objections to these government-initiated merger proposals, grasping the opportunities available in such mergers, and taking ownership of the process and making institutional proposals for a model, was the pro-active route to go.

Although the merger of TSA and Unisa was among the first, it began at a slow pace because of the sheer size of planning, mobilisation and organisation of resources and personnel. There was not

much to go on in terms of process or the anticipated shape, form, identity and character of the new single dedicated distance education institution (SDDEI). Baijnath *et al.* (2010:124) recount that in May 2001, the Minister of Education announced a working group focusing on the merger between TSA and Unisa and the incorporation of VUDEC. Among other things, the working group would produce the following:

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

During this period, the Minister of Education (as an overseer) was making sure that the challenge of restructuring higher education was translated into reality. Therefore, in the case of the Unisa/TSA/VUDEC merger, the approach was assertive and interventionist. This was a strongly driven merger, the WGDE was instructed to report directly to the Minister of Education, and this did not go down well with the merging institutions (Linington, 2002).

The level of imposition of the merger by the Minister of Education led Unisa to go to court in order to stop the process. There was a feeling that the Minister was friendlier to the former TSA than Unisa itself. He even addressed the TSA staff members at some stage (Seepe, 2003). Going to court did not yield any results for Unisa and the WGDE established a steering committee and nine inter-institutional task teams (IITs) representing the key functions of the proposed new single dedicated distance education. Unisa and TSA established an institutional working group (IWG) for functional areas and this led to a merger office at each institution to co-ordinate the inter-institutional merger process.

The agreement was that each of the three institutions would present comprehensive profiles of student enrolments, staff compositions, academic programmes, research outputs, financial status and physical infrastructure reports. A template for these presentations would be provided by the Department of Education.



In the early days of the merger, there was a pervasive sense of an intention to take over TSA, while the paradigm at TSA was one committed to establishing a new institution in national interest. Initially, the anticipated outcome of the work of the WGED was a merger implementation plan. On the part of Unisa, there were strong representations, that led to a review of terms of reference of the WGED and that led to a revised plan that was not dominated and driven by the WGED steering committee. The terms of reference of the steering committee's work were amended to involve the development of a report to the Minister based on IITT activities. The report had to advise the Minister on characteristics and a high-level planning framework of the new institution to facilitate merger implementation.

The process plan submitted to the Minister on 30 June 2002 dealt with a status report on the interrupted merger process. Progress with developing IITT plans was interrupted by decisions by the statutory structures of both TSA and Unisa. In the former case, the observation that was made was that the perceived merger of equal partners was giving way to dictates of a self-proclaimed major partner, while in the latter case; a court case was brought against the Minister of Education. This action by Unisa delayed the process and demonstrated the failure of the WGDE to have an agreement with both institutions on the merger. Barnes *et al.* ' (2010) narrative presents a case of different approaches to opposing the merger by two institutions. The executive member of TSA viewed Unisa's court case against the merger as a power play in terms of timing and a strategy to position itself as a stronger partner in the merger. On the other hand, Unisa's stance in opposing the merger referred to the Minister's lack of operational thoughts on the merger regarding people, processes and going concerns. Despite all these different views, government went ahead with the merger after signing a memorandum of understanding with the new vice-chancellors who took over the three institutions.

Here the phases of the merger of the three institutions set out by the Minister of Education and the committee that was formed to see the merger through have been discussed. In the next section, the reasons given for the merger of these institutions are discussed.

#### 4.7.1 Government's rationale for merging Unisa, Technikon SA and VUDEC

The rationale for merging Unisa, SA Technikon and VUDEC was to shape and form a new single dedicated education institution. The NPHE (see DoE, 2001:64-65) had identified the following as reasons for having a single dedicated distance education institution:

- Focus on undergraduate studies;
- Expanding distance education provision for South African and global students;
- Clearly focused mission and strategy for the role of distance education in contributing to national and regional goals;
- Developing a national network of learning centres to facilitate access and to coordinate the learner support system;
- Enhancing access to higher education and contributing to human resource development within the Southern African Development and Cooperation (SADC) region in particular and the continent as a whole; and
- Enabling economies of scale and scope, in particular ensuring that advantage is taken of the rapid changes in information and communication technologies.

Lennington, (2002) reveals that, during this period, the Minister of Education was still grappling with the challenge of ensuring that the stated intention for the restructuring of the HE system was translated into reality. Baijnath *et al.* (2010:123) sum up the approach in the merger of Unisa/TSA/VUDEC as assertive and interventionist, due to the influence and pressure that the Ministry of Education exerted. Baijnath *et al.* (2010) further posit that mergers can be very complex especially if there are no clear guidelines to handle processes because contestations between leaders from merging institutions, individuals with opportunistic bent can take the gap. The following table offers an illustration of reconfiguration of TSA, Unisa and VUDEC into a single dedicated distance education institution.

**Table: 4.7.1 The reconfiguration of TSA/Unisa/VUDEC**

<b>National Group</b>	<b>Working</b>	Endorses NPHE proposal to establish SDDEI
	<b>on Distance</b>	Supports NPHE

<b>Education(WGDE) proposal</b>	Proposes limits to contact institutions offering DE programmes at residential institutions without curtailment of high-quality DE programmes at contact institutions
<b>Ministry's proposal</b>	NPHE proposes SDDEI through merger of TSA and Unisa and incorporation of VUDEC
<b>Ministry's rationale</b>	Maintain and expand opportunities of students in Africa and the rest of the world Clear focus and strategy for role of DE National and regional development goals National network of centres of innovation National network of learning centres-enhanced learner support Economies of scale and scope Harnessing ICT possibilities Pooling of resources Rationalisation of duplicated programmes and facilities Programme compatibility
<b>Institutional type</b>	Open learning/DE institution Comprehensive institution with university bias
<b>Post-merger characteristics</b>	Largely university (70%) Technikon (30%) Multi-level from undergraduate UG certificate to post graduate PG

**Source:** Adapted from National Working Group, Restructuring of Higher Education System, 2001:40-41 (in Baijnath *et al.*, 2010:24).

From the issues alluded to in 4.7.1, the question that arose was whether there were any clear guidelines from the government as to how the merger should occur.

#### 4.7.2 Guidelines for mergers

To ask whether there were guidelines or not is important to a student of philosophy, because an analytical question is posed in this dissertation. A number of words could be used to explain

whether government guided the merger process. The correct wording of the National Working Group (see Department of Education, 2001) document notwithstanding, government did provide some kind of guidance. Its first document, produced by the Department of Education, contained what not to do rather than what to do. In this first document was the stern warning for institutions not to sidestep what was called substantive integration. I quote from the merger proposals (Ministry 'June 2002), which reiterated:

It is important to emphasize that substantive integration involves much more than formal adoption of new policies, procedures and structures. It requires ensuring that the new policies, procedures and structures give rise to the creation of a new institutional culture and ethos more than the sum of its parts. It cannot be based on the culture and ethos of the stronger partner in the merger process. This would be a recipe for disaster (Barnes *et al.*, 2010:191).

Some stakeholders did not find this statement instructive enough as to what the merging institutions should do. The government statement to institutions clearly had shortcomings. The researcher asks the question: What does one make of the statement? One can attempt to decipher, however vague and falling short, what message it might carry. When this statement is examined closer, it is found that it might provide at least three elements that could be considered crucial. The first element relates to scope – “the substantive integration must be more than policies, procedures and structures” (Barnes *et al.*, 2010:191). This might mean that government expects more to come out of mergers than compliance with policies, procedures and structures. What could this “more” mean? The following sentence might shed some light.

“Policies, procedures and structures must give rise to new institutional culture and ethos that would be more than the sum of its parts (DoE, 2002:9).” This sentence could be interpreted as giving direction and outcome – another lost opportunity for government to make explicit what it means by institutional culture that would be more than the sum of its parts. In a limited way, the policy (see Barnes *et al.*, 2010) could point to the objective of the merger, as well as to indicators of success for the merger. The third element cautioned against dominance by one partner. This may be interpreted as providing some guidance on how to behave and not to behave.

In 4.4.3, an analysis of what Barnes *et al.* (2010:190) call a “loose framework of merger governance” is analysed. For lack of a better concept, I refer to this as ‘the merger model’.

### 4.7.3 Framework for governance of the envisaged new institution

Baijnath *et al.* (2010:127) state that the then vice-chancellors of the merging institutions – Prof Barney Pityana of Unisa, Prof Neo Matlabe of TSA and Prof Setiloane of Vista University (who later was replaced by Prof Sipho Seepe due to ill health) – took charge of the merger. The first step was to sign a memorandum of understanding in 2003. Because the process itself was riddled with many challenges, such as Unisa taking the Minister of Education to court, there was a feeling that many differences had to be ironed out in order for the process to progress. There was recognition that the merger would take place in the distance education context and it was necessary to begin with a common understanding of distance education.

The biggest challenge was to give effect to the merger while maintaining the ongoing concerns. Baijnath *et al.* (2010:127) observe that the existing institutions were still registering students, providing tuition and engaged in the business of HEIs, following registration, tuition and examination cycles – all which could be thrown into disarray by rash action. To avoid this, it was agreed that the merger would span three phases so that it could happen in a planned and controlled manner, with a minimum disruption

- Pre-merger: October 2002 - December 2003
- Transitional stage: January 2004 - December 2005
- Implementation of the merger plan/integration: 2006 - January 2008

Despite the proposed schedule, (Unisa, 2008:17) there was a need to clarify what was going to take place during the stipulated periods. A conference was held in November 2002 by the merging institutions to consider the rationale for the merger. Among the issues that were discussed at the conference were philosophies and underpinnings that informed HE restructuring in South Africa. Presentations were made on national and international best practices on mergers and how those examples could help Unisa situation. During the conference, common ground was reached on most issues and common grounds for a merger were indicated. However, the Ministry of Education still controlled the process and made sure that key milestones were met. Barnes *et al.* (2010:198) observe that the Ministry wrote a letter to the chairperson of the council of the three institutions requesting them to respond collectively to the following:

- Date of the merger;
- Preferred name of the institution;
- Physical location of the new institution;
- Process to be followed for compliance with labour and industrial relations legislation; and
- Nominees for the interim council.

After these issues, all indications were that there was no turning back from the merger process, although issues like merging different campuses and the names of the institutions remained. Baijnath *et al.* (2010:129) concur by stating that there were still underlying issues like failure by the Minister of Education to gazette the merger as planned, coupled with protracted negotiations, served to increase anxiety and insecurity among individual staff members at institutional levels. Anticipated erosion of the boundaries between university and technikon and the unknown nature of the proposed new comprehensive institution exacerbated the uncertainty.

Among a number of misgivings that people had about the merger process, the most outstanding ranged according to the asymmetry in the merger, effects on the people, staff perception of the process, institutional cultures, communication, perceptions of the benefits, and student's fees. In the following section, the range of issues is discussed in depth.

#### **4.7.4 Asymmetry in mergers**

The merger between TSA and Unisa is reported (Unisa, 2008e) to have been not a vertical merger since both institutions were already producing graduates and postgraduates. Baijnath *et al.* (2010:130) say that even though the types of programmes were different, there was no earlier and later stage of production and TSA could not be viewed as a sub-university. The difference in terms of clientele for both technikon and university meant that the classification of a horizontal versus equal partnership merger was not applicable (this is where two institutions are established and with significant physical assets, student numbers and academic staff) (Jansen, 2002), even though the core business and stages of production were almost the same (Unisa, 2008). If the merger was to

be treated as a horizontal merger, the different geographical locations of the various components may have posed major difficulties.

Because of the difference in terms of the size of the merging institutions, the merger became an asymmetrical one (meaning a form of competition in which the acquirer wins all out) (Harman, 1988). The Ministry of Education (see DoE, 2002) insisted that the merger was of equal partners, and the leaders in merging institutions de-emphasised the unequal relations and focuses on the task of merging. Pritchard (2008) argues that on these kinds of configurations like TSA and Unisa, squabbles are possible because mergers can be a manifestation of either competition or cooperation (sometimes both at the same time). If they are on equal terms, they are what Harman (1998) refers to as consolidation. If both partners are of equal or nearly equal strength, the relationship is symmetrical and cooperation predominates, but this is rarely the reality. In practice, most mergers are on unequal terms (asymmetrical) and have a major and a minor partner – what would be termed in the language of business, an ‘acquirer and a ‘victim’. Asymmetrical mergers can be viewed as a form of competition in which the ‘acquirer’ wins.

There were differing perceptions about the Unisa/TSA merger on the ground, although the leadership was portraying a spirit of cooperation. The interviews that Baijnath *et al.* (2010:131) conducted with members of incorporated institutions confirmed his perception on mergers, as never been that of equals, stating that a decision was made to make the Pretoria campus the headquarters of the new university because of its sheer size. An academic from former TSA indicated that:

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

Another TSA academic manager expressed a similar reservation and perception of the takeover with the aggravating factor of work ethos that was expected to overwhelm the smaller partner as well:

It is unfortunate that the former/merging partners are bigger than us, now their value system influences us. I think the massive gains that TSA had had over the years have been just lost. TSA had made inroads, great strides in addressing employment equity in the

programme group for instance where blacks were well presented. It cannot be said of the Old Unisa staff profile, it is skewed (Baijnath *et al.*, 2010:131).

These were the misgivings voiced by some academics from the institutions that merged, clearly indicating their perceptions in terms of the form that the merger took, especially between Old Unisa and the then TSA.

#### **4.7.5 Effects of mergers on people involved**

In most cases, mergers affect people in various ways, and this was the case in the merger of Unisa/TSA and VUDEC. There was a sense of insecurity, upheaval and uncertainty that affected staff members at different levels (Seepe, 2003).

According to Unisa (2008e), the initial feeling was that of loss of power over control and one's future. In this case, the asymmetrical merger aggravated matters where people who previously were in senior positions were relegated to lower positions in a post-merger institution. From the incorporated institution, there was a change in terms of the weight of positions, which then became different. For an example, a former TSA principal indicated (Unisa, 2008e) that he was involved in all the structures of his previously university, like the council, executive management and the senate. He was fully participating in all those structures but after incorporation, he was just confined into one portfolio. A management member at former TSA indicated that although he was coping with the merger he was not sure how influential he would be in changing things. What concerned him most was to travel daily to Pretoria because all the meetings were held there, and the work distribution was not fair.

Staff members from TSA (Baijnath, 2010) interviewed were more positive about the merger, especially where the relocation meant that they would be closer to home. For example, the TSA manager indicated that he was lucky that his personal life was not affected because he was already commuting from Pretoria to TSA Florida Campus on a daily basis. On the other hand, he was affected professionally in terms of his employment contract. Previously he had two-thirds in terms of management of people, budget and scope, etc. but now this changed. However, while it was not



without negative effects, the general experiences were positive as another staff member from TSA indicated that, at personal level, he was stressed about the final product (merger).

The issues of travelling of staff came up frequently as several staff members had to travel between two geographically dispersed campuses 75 kilometres apart. A TSA administration officer expressed the following sentiments: “At the personal level I am stressed, I think I am very concerned about the travelling. The big change to me is the travelling; not the work itself” (Linington, 2002:13).

Increased stress levels were indicated as in the case of a professional staff member when he indicated that the staff morale was low, even when one walked along the corridor, negativity could be felt because of a lack of leadership in terms of taking everybody along in the merger. There was a sense that the TSA leadership settled itself into comfortable positions and had forgotten about staff.

Although the character of the merger was asymmetrical, even at the large institutions, staff was affected by the uncertainties and potential relocations. A member of management, who said, indicated this,

It has brought lot of uncertainties –the employees are very demoralized. Even though one tries to reassure them, they felt insecure. As to the way forward, people accepted that there were going to be changes but they do not find it easy to change, especially if the conflict or principle of the merger and what its meaning are taken into consideration. They are aware about the implication of the merger, but soon as it comes down to a personal level, you get a lot of resistance. People find it difficult to adapt to change, as they do not want to move from their comfort zones. With regard to relocation, people are reluctant to move (Barnes *et al.*, 2010: 133).

The effects of the merger on individuals within the organisation aside, Applebaum *et al.* (2000) warn of the other complexities that might affect individual staff members in a climate of vulnerability. However, it is not just a merger that makes employees anxious; it is the perceived decline in the organisation after the merger takes place, the lack of other jobs elsewhere, or other constraints that do not allow the employee to leave that create excessive stress when an

organisation merges with another. Employees feel as though they have lost control over important aspects of their lives. In an attempt to regain control, they often withdraw. The withdrawal creates heightened stress within the individual, which sometimes leads to lower productivity and reduced job satisfaction (Applebaum *et al*, 2000:134).

#### **4.7.6 Staff perceptions of the process of merger**

The perceptions of the merger in general can drastically differ from those of members who are affected by the merger in their day-to-day operations. Mostly the views that were expressed by staff were positive, as expressed by a TSA member of management (Baijnath *et al*, 2010:134):

I think that the merger process is visible and undoubted. The top management strategy is in place and I think the Council if we must look at what they have done, none of the senior personnel (executive management from old, pre-merged institutions) have been sacrificed, and everybody has been (appropriately rewarded and) placed.

From other TSA members there was a positive response about the minutiae of integration, alignment and consolidation of the merger. The member indicated that their college had developed interest in the integration process and that was achieved by mixing faculties from Old TSA, few departments from VUDEC and one department from the Old Unisa and that made them a comprehensive college.

Equally, members of the Unisa management expressed positive perceptions of the process, with a few criticisms thrown at the systemic arrangements for driving the merger process. The management member stated that, as Unisa, they reinforced their human resources. Their academic strength and their research capacity were reflected in the new institution. Furthermore, their management of the merger was rewarding and they never experienced problems with the MIC (merger integration committee); hence, they did not understand why the DoE Merger Unit still existed. The other complaint was that the merger guidelines were not helpful as they came late and the Unisa group already had its merger plan.

Perceptions were also about the pace of the merger, namely that it was not fast enough with negative effects. A TSA manager commented:

I think the process is too slow because it leads to lots of uncertainties. I understand it is a huge undertaking that needs planning. A lot of planning was done in my portfolio; the longer the merger process takes, the more it will get rid of the 'us and them' feelings. In addition, this will affect negatively on the service delivery to our students. I think both sides are ready to integrate but it is taking too long (Unisa, 2008 (a) 16).

A lack of resolution of staffing structures and appointments was indicated by a TSA manager as a central factor in speeding up the merger process. He indicated that the process disappointed him but he was also happy that the process had taken place. The low point in the process, according to him, was that other senior people in the department decided to resign or move to other departments. Some decided to move to departments like University Press because of the perception that those departments offered stability.

At the other end of spectrum, another member of the merging institution felt that the merger process was too chaotic. His views were that people were confused and not sure, what was going on. Placement of people in the new structures was done haphazardly. People felt leaderless, the process was over six months old and there was no placement in his lower rank; he was not aware of his manager and that made planning impossible for him. It was difficult to put much effort in planning for something that might change within three months. These were his views shared in Fourie (2008).

Despite the above comments, other staff members felt that there were positive spin-offs from the process, as indicated by an HR manager of Unisa

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

If we could have moved faster on the HR issues, it could have accelerated the entire process. All aspects of the HR issues are lagging behind. We are still working under two different sets of working/service conditions. The conditions of service are not harmonized (Bajjnath, 2010:136).

From the above assertions, it is clear that perceptions of the merger differed among various staff members from other campuses. The perceptions of institutional culture of the merged Unisa from the point of view of various staff members are next reflected.

#### **4.7.7 Institutional culture**

As institutional culture was the main research topic of this inquiry, institutional culture of the merged Unisa was cardinal to establish how the new staff members perceived it. In the previous studies on merger of Vudec by Fourie (2008) and Padayachee *et al.*, (2003:29) institutional culture is described as:

Corporate culture peculiar brand of an institution's values, traditional, beliefs and priorities. It is a sociological dimension that shapes management's styles as well as operational philosophies and practices. In merger situation where cultural clashes occur behaviours and practices that were once approved of and rewarded might now be suddenly disapproved of and even sanctioned.

Institutional culture sometimes becomes more than people's beliefs and practices. It consists of leadership and management style, corporate governance as well as an institutional ethos that favours technicity, managerialism or bureaucratic approaches to management. At times, institutional culture becomes a reflection of an ethos that employs a soft touch to leadership and management on one end of the spectrum, to command and control types of leadership on the other, ranging also in degrees of transparency. In this situation of institutional culture, there is the creation of an environment that allows people to feel comfortable in the work environment and have a sense of belonging, a place they can connect to at various levels.

Barnes *et al.* (2010:137) argues that in an asymmetrical merger situation, it is not unusual for the smaller partner in the merger process to feel subsumed by the larger one's culture, as the following comment by a TSA academic indicated:

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

In another interview that Baijnath (2010:138) conducted with a TSA academic, the same view was echoed:

Another shift from our focus to their focus; we had our paradigm they had their paradigm. We get the sense that they are forcing their paradigm on us and that was affecting various industries. It could be that they have been around for more than 130 years and now think that they do not need industry for survival but we see it very different.

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

Obviously, there are differences because the Unisa focus and TSA focus are different in terms of academic offerings. TSA dealt with industry. The employment practices were different. They cater for different students than the old Unisa. The entry requirements were different. I do not see any different administrative differences. The difference in culture is merely influenced or informed by the nature of academic offerings the two distinct pre-merger institutions were offering (Fourie, 2008:52).

Management styles, methods and approaches to technologies were also perceived as provoking divergences in institutional cultures. The argument was that there were huge cultural differences.

The TSA manager felt that by merging they have moved three years back in terms of information technology advances they gave up in merger. Technologies that they employed and deployed were not aligned with the old Unisa IT shop. The management styles that existed in the former TSA were very different from those of Unisa.

Institutional culture was also perceived to be prevalent in how work was allocated and capacities developed as was confirmed by Unisa (2008e). The TSA manager confirmed:

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

Institutional culture was even seen in the way in which staff engages with students. This is how a TSA academic reflected on it (Baijnath, 2010:138):

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

#### 4.7.8 Perceptions of benefits of the merger

It is important to consider the view of university members about the benefits of the merger at Unisa, as benefits were cited as reasons for the mergers in higher education. Views about benefits or none of the merger varied from sceptical to optimistic and to other perceptions that the staff members expressed. The concern was the inability of the staff members to influence the students in terms of offering quality-learning experience/support, as they would have liked to. The concern was further about the large number of enrolments due to the merger and that affected the attention given to students.

Optimism was however expressed by a management member indicating that the merger represented transformation, change and the then new constitution of the country. According to him, the merger aimed to establish equity in terms of employment, access in terms of the disadvantaged and bringing services nearer to where the students were. These goals were perceived to be better achieved by the merger because of the size of the university. The merger was also perceived to be bringing about a fair distribution of resources and expansion of facilities and services across merged campuses. A senior management member indicated that, in terms of learner support system, resources like library and computer centres are found in the regions. The indication was that the service was taken to where the students were. The service was also going to be accessible in rural, urban and areas across the borders of the country (Bajjnath, 2010).

Some of the perceptions of the merger were around benefits of complementary capacities and resources brought together to create critical skills. There was a feeling that TSA's expertise in terms of staff technical expertise and Unisa's strong research background would complement each other. That was viewed as a major benefit to the students, especially the experience of Unisa staff in the field of open distance learning. For smaller campuses like that of VUDEC, there was an opportunity to have many courses from a technikon and a university, and that brought wide choices for students.

The negative perception that the merger was forced on Unisa was expressed, but there was also an acknowledgement that benefits of transforming the HE sector were more. A senior management

member from VUDEC indicated that Unisa was not singled out for transformation; it was a national policy. The Education Minister's intervention to drive the merger at Unisa came about because Unisa was perceived as not willing to transform. Although a perception of forced marriage was created, that forced marriage eventually led to the much-needed transformation in higher education. An example of a merger between Rand Afrikaans University (RAU) and Wits Technikon was said to be an excellent way of merging different cultures.

There were few questions and not so positive feelings about the merger as earlier indicated. For example, a management member from Unisa contested that, because of the numbers of students that both TSA and Unisa had, there were no financial problems, and therefore there was no need for a merger. There was a failure to understand the reason of the then Department of Education to give other institutions a leeway to offer a number of distance education programmes and to prescribe the number of students that these institutions enrol.

Benefits of pooled resource strategies and the obvious strength of Unisa were acknowledged by the merging partners (Fourie, 2008). A senior member of TSA stated that social transformation needed a solid base to work from, and Unisa was a solid base because of its size and nature. It was recognised as a major role player in open distance learning in the country and the world (Seepe, 2002) and the merger with two other universities would add value to the transformation agenda. Unisa was recognised as a transformation catalyst in Africa (see Unisa, 2008e). Its ability to deliver quality distance education programmes places it in a good position to transform society. Therefore, the technologies of the university and the network systems could assist in making a positive contribution to the development of Africa.

Perceptions about students also indicated that they would be the most likely beneficiaries of the merger. Opportunities for both students and staff were going to be more than before and there were going to be more courses from which to choose. Access to education was going to be widened by the merger, as per aspirations of the National Plan for Higher Education (see DoE, 2001). Student morale was going to be boosted and the entire continent of Africa and its young people would have access to quality education.



Having exhausted the merger at Unisa, in terms of looking at policies, merger and institutional culture, and by reading the interviews, it became clear that there are many contradictions. These are in terms of what the policies say concerning the issue of institutional culture (after the merger), and the views of individuals about the same issues at the university. These will be reflected upon in details in Chapter 6 where findings of this study will be discussed.

#### **4.8 SUMMARY**

The focus of this chapter was a case study of Unisa, and an investigation was made into how the merger at Unisa might have led to the reconstruction of a post-merger institutional culture. In providing background, the study explored the origins of a university (see 4.2.1) as well as a merged university. Through literature, the typology of the university (open distance learning) was thoroughly explored, providing its origins, how it works and the South African context (see 4.3.1 and 4.3.2). As a typical hermeneutic study, exploring historical contexts of a phenomenon was paramount for understanding.

The historical background of the three institutions that merged – the old UNISA/Unisa, TSA and VUDEC – were presented. This was traced from when government announced its intention to merge them. From the literature, perceptions of what the merger meant to individuals from three institutions were recounted (see 4.4.5). This was laying ground for the perceived institutional culture of the merged institution.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL DOCUMENTS AND INTERVIEWS

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

It is important to highlight from the onset that qualitative data is analysed in many ways. Patton (2002:432) says, “Qualitative analysis transforms data into findings. No formula exists for that transformation. Guidance yes, but no recipe.” Coffey and Atkinson (1996:3) reiterate that there are multiple practices and possibilities of data analysis that qualitative researchers can use. What links all approaches is a central concern with transforming and interpreting qualitative data – in a rigorous and scholarly way – in order to capture the complexities of the social world we seek to understand. It is therefore in that context that data analysis was approached in this study.

As this is a hermeneutic study of the institutional culture of a university that merged, in the first chapter, (see 1.5.3 and 1.6.5) presented an explanation of the role of hermeneutics in philosophic study. Danner (1995) explains as being helpful at three levels: to make something explicit (to express), to unfold (to explain) and to translate or interpret. The main objectives of this dissertation are therefore:

- to express, by way of analysis, the merger of these institution;
- to explain how the merger contributed to the reshaping and articulation of a post-merger institutional culture; and
- based on the assumptions established, to generate an interpretive understanding of HEIs and institutional cultures within the post-apartheid HE merger context.

In this chapter, I report on an analysis of Unisa policy documents and interviews conducted with Unisa staff members from various colleges, departments and centres in order to establish what they thought about the meanings of institutional culture as constructed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. The call for the reshaping of institutional cultures of the merged HEIs was made in the NPHE (Ministry of Education, 2001). Goal Five of the NPHE aims articulates the need for the building of new institutional and organisational forms and new identities and cultures as integral

components of a single, coordinated national HE system. The NPHE further states that one of its priorities is the need to refocus and reshape the institutional cultures and missions of South African institutions. It is within the context of this priority that I set out to research how the merging of the two disparate institutions (a technikon and a university) into Unisa contributed to the reshaping of its institutional culture. Through the analysis of institutional documents and interviews, the concerns expressed in my sub-questions were also addressed, namely:

- How did the institutions interpret the goals of reshaping new post-merger institutional cultures as outlined by policies?
- Which institutional culture existed at the different institutions before they merged?
- Which processes and programmes did the university employ in forging a new institutional culture?

## 5.2 INSTITUTIONAL DOCUMENTS

The following documents were analysed:

- The vision, mission and strategic plan of Unisa (2006)
- Unisa Charter on Transformation (2010)
- Unisa institutional operating plan (2008–2010)
- Unisa's self-evaluation portfolio for the HEQC (2008)
- Audit report on Unisa (2008)

The vision, mission and strategic plans were developed to guide planning, resource allocation and activities of Unisa for five years from 2004 onward, and were adopted by Council at its inaugural meeting (Unisa, 2008a). In 2010, Unisa went back to the drawing board to revise its 2006 strategy to be replaced by Vision 2020: the strategic plan of Unisa designed to provide a shaping framework for Unisa's actions over 10 years (Unisa, 2010:2). The audit report was conducted by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of CHE, a statutory constituted body in terms of the Higher Education Amendment Act, No. 39 of 2008 and the National Qualifications Act, No. 68 of 2008 to conduct institutional audits of HEIs. HEQC's approach to an institutional audit is based on the institution's self-evaluation and its own declaration on its mission, vision and strategy. This

culminated into Unisa embarking on a self-evaluation process and the subsequent Unisa self-evaluation report.

I also report on personal perceptions of the current Unisa staff members (on what is the institutional culture after the merger) who came from the merged institutions (TSA, VISTA) to form Unisa. These members are now at Unisa in different colleges, centres and departments, occupying different positions, as indicated in Chapter 4 (see 1.9.5.1). I begin the report on the analysis of institutional documents by presenting and analysing Unisa's strategic plans.

### **5.3 THE NATURE OF A STRATEGIC PLAN**

Strategic plans are referred to as documents that offer direction of the institution's intentions and how it plans to accomplish these (Jacobs, 2012). A different question in this section is asked using my understanding of strategic plans: what is the basis for strategic plans in HEIs? An answer to this question is found in The Education White Paper 3 (DoE, 1997:55) which describes it as follows: "The basis for improving public accountability in higher education is making public funding for institutions conditional on their Councils providing strategic plans and reporting their performance against their goals." Public institutions HEIs are funded by government and are accountable to the public, and this accountability is driven chiefly by strategic plans. Jacobs (2012:219-220) explains the main purpose of strategic planning in higher education as to provide an ongoing examination and evaluation of an institution's strengths, weaknesses, goals, resource requirements and future prospects, and to set out a coherent plan to respond to the findings and build a stronger, more effective institution. Cloete and Bunting (2010) describes strategic planning as a process whereby an institution assesses its current state and the likely future condition of its environment, identifies possible future states for itself, and then develops organised strategies, policies and procedures for selecting and getting to one or more of them.

The aim of analysing Unisa's Strategic Plan is to establish whether it relates to articulations of post-merger culture as indicated in the section 3.4 of this study, namely:

- shared values and beliefs;
- language;

- symbols;
- university leadership;
- staff and student development;
- curriculum; and
- practices.

### 5.3.1 Relationship between strategy and culture

This is a cardinal point in seeking to explain why there is need to analyse strategic documents in order to explain a culture of a particular institution. Rick (2011) provides some suggestions in addressing this matter. For Rick (2011), strategy is just the headline on the company's story – culture needs a clearly understood common language to embrace and tell the story that includes mission, vision, values and clear expectations. He says a strategy drives focus and direction while culture is the emotional, organic habitat in which a company's strategy lives or dies. Rick (2011) emphasise then that strategy lays down the rules for playing the game, and culture fuels the spirit for how the game will be played. When culture embraces strategy, execution is scalable, repeatable and sustainable.

Van Wyk (2009:235) attests to the difficulty of analysing institutional culture within the context of higher education, as institutional culture analysis has to include as many elements of HEIs as possible. Toma *et al.* (2005) suggest a way to proceed. They suggest that exploring institutional culture in higher education not only involves questions of whom to study but also of what to study. Furthermore, the mission of the institution, as defined, articulated and used on campus, and its history are central in understanding institutional culture (Toma *et al.*, 2005 & Vukuza-Linda, 2014).

As I reviewed the institutional documents of Unisa that have a bearing on the post-merger culture, I came across three strategic documents, (the first after the merger in 2004 -2008 revised in 2008-2015) two of which articulated the institution's respective visions, missions, value statements, strategic directions (Unisa, 2008; 2015). The third strategic document related to Unisa's transformation plans (Transformation Charter, 2010b). The presentation of the two strategies has

been a challenge for me. I was not sure how to approach them. I decided to present each statement alongside the other in order to understand them. I also do this to keep my analysis within the scope of the study. In 5.4, I start by mapping out the basis for Unisa's strategic plan followed by the discussion of the 2006 and 2020 vision, mission and value statements and strategic plan. In section 5.4. I discuss the transformation strategy.

## **5.4 UNISA STRATEGIC PLAN**

Unisa's strategic plans are drafted to be in line with the principles of the Education White Paper 3 (DoE, 1997), namely:

- Effect a seamless transition to harmonised and coherent structures, policies, systems and practices for the merged institution
- Position Unisa as a leading provider of quality distance education programmes through an academic product range that expands on its comprehensive character
- Promote research, increased capacity and productivity aligned with national priorities for knowledge development
- Utilise the resources and capacities for the university community development initiatives, and collaborative partnerships
- Establish service-oriented, technology-enhanced learner support to increase retention and throughput
- Create a nurturing environment to promote student well-being, to foster a sense of belonging to Unisa, and to mobilise alumni in the service of the university
- Establish quality governance, planning, administrative and management systems led by best practices
- Manage financial, human and infrastructural resources rationally to monitor expenditure, optimise value, manage risks and ensure financial stability
- Foster a healthy, secure and stimulating environment for staff, students and visitors, and protect the assets of the university
- Establish a performance-oriented approach to management, promote quality assurance, and assess outcomes and reward productivity and excellence (Unisa, 2004:14).

Given this background, it is important to explain what informs a strategic plan. A thorough explanation of this matter is given by means of reviewing the process of drafting Unisa's vision. Process is significant as this is a hermeneutic study because a process gives an understanding of how consensus is arrived as an important element of critical hermeneutics (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The important element of Habermas's (1989) critical theory is communicative action and the ideal speech situation. Habermas (1989:87-90) refers to this as the "interaction between at least two individuals who can speak and act and who establish an interpersonal relation". This, in a simple way, suggests that there should be listeners and communicators when people are engaged in a process of communication. A possibility presented by this practice is that participants may enter into an argumentative process, present good reasons and critically examine the truth. I found that this type of communicative action was evident in the drafting of Unisa's vision, and in 5.4.1, I present the process of the drafting of Unisa's vision.

#### **5.4.1 Drafting of Unisa's vision and mission**

For a critical hermeneutic student, it is critically important to understand the process of the drafting of Unisa's vision, mission and values. The reason is that during the drafting one needs to understand the processes that were followed, arguments and communication that took place and how all those had led to the consensus that was reached about vision, mission and values, as critical theory suggests. History and tradition are central as bases for understanding, thus also for critical hermeneutics. It was argued (in 1.7) that analysing processes is crucial if one is to develop a deeper understanding. The recounting of events alerts us not only to the merger process, but also to a possible emergence of a new culture. The process of drafting the vision, mission and values statement might not have been easy for two universities and a technikon that had disparate histories. It involved a joint drafting of a common future and an agreed-upon process, which could prove very difficult for institutions that have very little in common. The drafting of the vision, mission and values statements for Unisa is explained in Unisa's 2015 Strategic Plan.

The vision and mission of the new Unisa, as well as its values and strategic objectives, were formulated at a management breakaway in July 2004, and were adopted by Council at its inaugural meeting on 23 July 2004. This was followed by a major institutional project to amplify the vision,

mission and objectives into a detailed ten-year plan, driven by the Vice-Principal: Strategy, Planning and Partnership. The resultant strategic plan, entitled *Unisa 2015: an agenda for transformation* was completed in December 2005. Implementation began in earnest in February 2006 (Unisa Institutional Audit, 2008a:15).

The process of drafting the vision and mission took almost two years because it was important for the new institution, especially because among the three merged institutions, one was a technikon that had a completely different way of operating. Inclusion of all institutional structures and how crucial that process is, has been alluded to in section 1.8. This concurs with Habermas's communicative theory (see Habermas, 1989). In addition, Vukuza-Linda (2014) says it is important that people from all hierarchical levels be included in the decision-making process. In the case of Unisa, the hierarchy comprised people from three different levels of the merged institutions; hence, the inclusive approach was cardinal. Beukes (2010) and Gadamer (2004) are of the view that through dialogue, different interpretations of the phenomena under investigation are brought together to produce a shared understanding. He refers to this as the "fusion of horizons" (Beukes, 2010:21). Fusions of horizons can be explained by stating that only in conversation, confrontation with another's thought that could also come to dwell within us, can we hope to go beyond the limits of our present horizon. For this reason, philosophical hermeneutics recognises no principle higher than dialogue (Gottesman, 1996:18).

In the following section, the vision and mission of Unisa are presented. The rationale for the two is provided and an analysis of them in relation to the possible post-merger institutional culture at Unisa is discussed. Kezar and Eckel (2002:438) who explains vision or mission as the key elements of culture support the reason for this approach.

#### **5.4.2 Unisa's Vision**

Unisa's Vision in 2004 stated:

Towards the African university in the service of humanity

'**Towards**' – indicates that the vision sets the University on a developmental journey, and signifies dynamism, inquisitiveness, a sense of adventure, and boldness. It also points to clarity of purpose



and destiny. Moreover, the vision statement is emphatically not about taking over or colonising Africa, but rather about being part of Africa. The statement is also founded on the premise that South Africa is not part, but 100% Africa. As such, Unisa seeks to be completely **African** in this sense.

The emphatic the in the vision statement refers to the excellence that the University will continually strive for. The boldness of the statement is therefore intended to reflect our aspirations as a university in this regard.

‘**Service of humanity**’ underscores the traditional ideals of a university to promote universality, to produce and disseminate knowledge; critical scholarship from an African perspective becomes an authentic part of the global knowledge enterprise. Our intention is that African knowledge and knowledge systems should be developed in their own right and that they should mitigate the dominance of western canons. Through such scholarship, we intend to contribute to a multiplicity of voices, alternative canons, and diversity in thought.

Next the focus will be on Unisa’s SER (Unisa, 2008b), which includes the vision, and I analyse it in terms of theoretical framework on institutional culture.

### *Shared values and beliefs*

The 2015 strategic plan for Unisa reflects a fundamental basis of how Unisa viewed itself from the time it merged and beyond the year 2015. These views are expressed through a mission statement, a vision statement, commitment statement, and value statement. Of particular interest to me are the value statements, which represent statements of the values, which the university believes, ought to guide the conduct and interaction of individuals (Unisa, 2015). These values are integrity, social justice, fairness, and excellence. Explanation given to each value indicates Unisa’s commitment to what it refers to as ‘service of humanity’:

**Integrity** – subscribing to truth, honesty, transparency and accountability of conduct in what we do;

**Social justice** – promoting equity of access and opportunity so that all may develop their full potential; and

**Excellence** – upholding high standards of aspirations in all our practices, with continuous attention to improvement of quality (Unisa, 2008c).

### *Language*

Historically, Unisa's languages of tuition were Afrikaans and English. Over the years, due to changes in higher education in the country and mergers, the shift has been towards English as a medium of instruction because Unisa has expanded into the country and onto the African continent. In the Strategic Document, language is not directly addressed but hinted at by making sure that Unisa "is accessible to all students, specifically those on the African continent, and the marginalised, by way of a barrier-free environment, while responding to the needs of the global market" (Unisa, 2008e:7). The university language recognises the role that it plays in terms of enabling masses to access higher education, its focus on being established in the Southern African region, the African continent and internationally. In this instance, the prevalence of English in all the courses has made sure that a "barrier-free environment" (see Unisa language policy, 2002) has been created for the fully participation of both the students and staff at Unisa.

### *Symbols*

The constitutive meaning of my theoretical framework for policy analysis does not feature prominently in the strategic framework (see Unisa, 2008c). Brief reference is made to the preservation of the university's environmental and cultural heritages (see Unisa, 2008c:42). Even though these concepts are not explained, they relate to the university's environmental setting. As mentioned in Toma *et al.* (2005) a university's environmental setting is a potent symbol, suggesting a proud tradition. I therefore regard the university's environmental setting as an important form of institutional culture, which should help to promote a campus culture that welcomes a diversity of people and ideas.

### *University Leadership*

The strategic document states that leadership of the new Unisa was formed under the Standard Institutional Statute (Unisa, 2008c:5):

In terms of this statute, a permanent Council was appointed from July 2004 and the Senate and Institutional Forum constituted. The process followed in developing the new Unisa

Institute was a consultative one. An Institution Statute Task Team was constituted with representatives from management, Senate, the SRC [Student Representative Council], the Institutional Forum and Legal Services department. The Chairperson was the Registrar: Governance. This task team compiled a draft statute, which was forwarded to all stakeholders including members of the Council for comment. Council approved the proposed Institutional Statute, which was submitted to the Minister of Education for her approval. The Institutional Statute was published in the Government gazette in February 2006. When drafting the statute, the task team considered the statutes of the former Unisa and TSA.

The Institutional Statute had the following governance structures, although more may be added:

- Council
- Senate
- College boards
- Management Committee
- Extended Management Committee
- Institutional Forum
- Convocation
- Student Representative Council

According to this document, leadership at Unisa is comprised of various structures like the Council, which is said to be diverse with a number of –

Sub-committees focusing on central issues such as the HR Committee and Council and the Finance Committee. The council comprise of diverse members from civil society and local government, nominees of the Minister of Education and representatives from some internal stakeholders (Unisa, 2008c:9).

The Senate is the highest academic decision-making body of the university. The senate may appoint any number of committees to assist it to fulfil its functions.

Unisa's Management structure reflects streamlined and functional portfolios, which carry out the business of the university as effectively as possible. According to the strategic document, management structure created in (2008c) comprises of the following:

Vice-Chancellor (Pityana) having a Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Prof MS Makhanya) and Assistant Principal (Prof DH van Wyk)

(a) Vice-Chancellor Cluster: Strategy, Planning and Partnerships

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) and Academic Research

Registrar

(b) Assistant Vice-Principal Operations

Vice-Principal Finance and University Estates (just to clarify that at 2016, the management structure has completely changed because some have left e.g. Prof Pityana and Prof van Wyk and Prof Makhanya is the current Vice-Principal).

Some of the positions in the university leaderships were created in order to accommodate the former principals of the merged institutions as indicated above. The inclusive management structure relates to what Tierney (1988) refers to as inclusive leadership at institutions as a significant element of leadership culture in higher education. Schein (1993) also identifies the inclusivity of leadership as being cardinal in understanding institutional culture. This is indicated in the Strategic Document in pronouncing that, for Unisa to produce a vibrant intellectual culture within the institution and management at large, leadership plays a vital role:

Hardly a day goes by when a seminar, lecture, or other intellectual event with local and international speakers is not advertised on Intcom [an internal university website]. We are spoiled for choice and we cannot manage to attend all of them. Many of our academics are regularly featured in the media, providing commentary on a diverse range of topics. The Vice-Chancellor is recognized as a leading public intellectual in his own right. He is frequently featured in the local and international media on a diverse spectrum of issues including human rights, higher education, law and politics (Unisa, 2008a:386).

### *Staff and student development*

Development of both staff and students at Unisa is based on the premise of the context in which Unisa offers its education. In the strategic document (Unisa, 2008c:28) it is spelt out that “one of the biggest challenges of distance education, particularly in our context as a developing country, is overcoming transactional distance; that is, achieving effective and efficient communication between students and the institution, lecturers/tutors, and fellow students.”

The following are proposed ways of bridging the transactional distance, building on existing good practices and introducing change plans where needed. These plans include:

- Combining a number of delivery options to facilitate flexibility;
- Optimising students' access to and participation in higher education (openness); and
- Enhancing the engagement and autonomy of the student were modelled in what is has become to be known as the 'student walk' (Unisa, 2008c).

It becomes evident that the strategic development of staff and students is in line with the nature of transformative objections of the Education White Paper 3 (DoE, 1997) on which the notion of merger was founded. The entire strategic document takes into account the role of a university, namely teaching and learning which takes place in an environment that is conducive. Access to higher education of students and development of academics at Unisa deems a suitable partnership that will contribute to a meaningful post-merger institutional culture.

### *Curriculum*

The curriculum at universities in the country has been criticised for negating the environment in which universities are operating, and only concentrating on economic-related issues (Cloete & Bunting, 2000; Fourie, 2008; Vice, 2015). An important aspect of the curriculum at Unisa, according to the strategic document, is that it is aligned to the vision of the university of being “the university in service of Humanity” and focusing on “bringing solutions to Africa’s challenges” (Unisa, 2008c:383). The process of Africanisation of the curriculum was planned to have taken place by 2015 and Unisa is striving towards that realisation. All the colleges at Unisa focus on Africanisation of the curriculum for example:

- The applied nature of the sciences taught in College of Agricultural and Economic Science(CAES) allows Africanisation of the curriculum
- The Department of Business Management in the College of Economic and Management Sciences (CEMS) – the content of the majority of its modules reflects an inclusive approach that offers insight into Africa
- College of Human Sciences (CHS) is engaged in African outreach programmes and benchmarking (Kenya, Angola, Sudan and Ethiopia)

- The College has established an African Centre for Arts, Culture and Heritage Studies in the Department of Anthropology (ACACHS)
- The College of Law has made sure that it has permanent presence in the continent. The School of Law has a significant number of postgraduate enrolments while the School of Criminal Justice participates to a considerable extent in Ethiopia, Sudan and other African countries (Unisa, 2008c:383).

### 5.4.3 Unisa's Mission 2004

Mission statements generally describe what an organisation is, why it exists and its reason for being (ASHE, 2005). In the case of private companies, mission statements describe who their primary customers are; they identify the products and services they produce, and describe the geographical location in which they operate. The relevance of a mission as a way of understanding culture is explained (see Toma *et al*, 2005:46) in the following manner: "Furthermore the mission of the institution, as defined, articulated, and used on campus, and its history are central in understanding institutional culture." Given this background, below follows the presentation and analysis of the mission of Unisa as indicated in the vision, mission and strategic plan of 2008c:

Unisa is a comprehensive, open learning and distance education institution, which, in response to the diverse needs of society:

- provides quality general academic and career-focused learning opportunities underpinned by principles of lifelong learning, flexibility, and student-centeredness;
- undertakes research and knowledge development guided by integrity, quality and rigour;
- participates in community development by utilizing its resources and capacities for the upliftment of the disadvantaged;
- is accessible to all students, specifically those on the African continent, and the marginalised, by way of a barrier-free environment, while responding to the needs of the global market;
- addresses the needs of a diverse student profile by offering relevant student support, facilitated by appropriate information and communications technology;
- develops and retains high quality capacities among its staff members to achieve human development, by using the resources at its disposal efficiently and effectively;

- cultivates and promotes an institutional ethos, intellectual culture and educational experiences that are conducive to critical discourse, intellectual curiosity, tolerance, and a diversity of views;
- contributes to good and responsible society by graduating individuals of sound character and versatile ability; and
- Meets the needs of the global competitive society by nurturing collaborative relationships with its stakeholders and other partners.

The notion of comprehensiveness and open distance learning are central to the mission, which are also highlighted in the strategic plan (see Unisa, 2008a:27-32). Below, the mission is analysed according to my pillars (meanings) of institutional culture.

#### *Shared values and beliefs*

The mission statement of Unisa is based on a business model according to which the institution operates. Being an ODL institution, there is a common goal of providing HE opportunities to disadvantaged groups. Based on the strategic plan, the needs of diverse students are addressed through relevant support using information, technology and communication. Of particular interest to me are the links between the institutional values and mission. The values, namely integrity, social justice and excellence, are explored in the mission through creation of a climate allowing debate, maintaining high quality of staff and cultivating an institutional ethos of critical discourse, efficient use of resources and global competitiveness of the university.

In the mission statement of Unisa, open distance learning is defined as “a multi-dimensional system aimed at bridging the time, geographical and transactional distance between student and institution, student and lecturers/tutors, students and courseware, and student peers (Unisa, Unisa2008c:28). The commitment of Unisa in its role as a massive provider of higher education in the country and Africa as well, provides evidence that the constitutive meaning of shared beliefs and values in my theoretical framework features at Unisa.

### *University leadership*

In the mission statement of Unisa, leadership is reflected in the notions of comprehensiveness and being an ODL institution. The university commits itself to offering access to high-quality education not only in South Africa but in Africa and the world as well, using integrated systems, processes and infrastructure. Importantly, the university promises to offer the necessary resources that will enable successful teaching and learning, research and effective community engagement.

### *Staff and student development*

The focus of the 2004 mission was on the development of staff and students, in order to offer open and distance education responding to diverse needs of society. In most of the mission's elements, an undertaking is made to centralise student services while supporting the staff in order to deliver quality education. Cloete and Bunting (2000) and Maminza (2008) emphasise the need to focus on student and staff development, which they argue, is of utmost importance in creating an environment conducive to teaching and learning.

### *Curriculum*

In the mission statement, Unisa commits itself to offering a curriculum that is career-focused, underpinned by the principle of lifelong learning and recognition of prior learning. Communities surrounding the university are also helped to benefit because resources are used to uplift disadvantaged communities. Students learn skills and knowledge that will solve African issues, promote diversity as well as how to respond to the needs of the global market.

#### **5.4.4 Unisa's Values**

Analysis of Unisa's values is important in a study of institutional culture because ASHE (2005) and Whitt (1998) argue that values guide the behaviour of individuals and groups in an institution of higher learning and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus. Values are not the same as rules, but rather shared ideals that bind



people together. It is assumed that people generally work better if they share the same values. In its strategic plan, Unisa (2008c) articulates its values as follows:

Unisa espouse the values in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa: human dignity, the achievement of equality, and social justice. We also affirm the historic principles of academic freedom. We seek to weave these into the fabric of our institutional life and culture.

**Social justice and fairness;** Inspired by the foundational precepts of our transforming society, social justice and fairness animate our strategy, guide our efforts and influence our imagined future.

**Excellence with integrity:** Subscribing to the truth, honesty, transparency and accountability of conduct in all that we do and upholding high standards of aspiration in all our practices, with continuous attention to improvement in quality.

**Value proposition:** Accessible, flexible and globally recognised (Unisa, 2008c:6).

From the above, one gets a sense that the values that Unisa espouse are in line with those of a democratic era, where the citizens enjoy human rights. This is actually indicated in the opening statement of the institution about its values (see Unisa, 2008c): page). Below I discuss these values as part of establishing the process of reshaping post-merger institutional culture at Unisa.

### *Shared values and beliefs*

The focus of Unisa's values is grounded in the constitution of South Africa and these are universal and integral to the university's ethos of being a place of humanity. Not only is the emphasis on democracy, but the university is committed to work ethics, integrity and transformation of the university in order to achieve its goals of offering quality education to the disadvantaged throughout the country and in Africa.

### *Language*

Unisa's values do not specifically refer to language, but a conclusion can be made that if the values are based on the constitution of South Africa, which promotes equality of languages, then multilingualism is functional. Furthermore, the preamble to the Unisa language policy (Unisa,

2006:1) states that the university adheres to a policy of multilingualism in order to accommodate linguistic diversity.

### *Symbols*

This constitutive meaning of culture has not been addressed explicitly, which is an omission, but then again there is a Unisa policy that deals specifically with symbols and the renaming of buildings at all Unisa campuses. Having explored the values of Unisa, it is clear that not all that constitutes institutional culture for my study is reflected. Higgs (2007) also mention this in his grappling with institutional culture, namely that its fluidity and slipperiness sometimes make it difficult to pinpoint all its underlying principles. The strategy on transformation at Unisa after the merger is discussed to ascertain its role in the post-merger institutional culture.

## **5.5 UNISA CHARTER ON TRANSFORMATION STRATEGY 2010**

The Unisa transformation strategy is derived from the constitution of South Africa and the Higher Education Act of 1997 (No. 101 of 1977), which calls for a transformed higher education system that is non-discriminatory in terms of gender, race, class and ethnicity. The institution commits to work with all the stakeholders in transforming it and this is how it is reflected in the **Preamble** to the charter:

“We, the Council, Management, Staff and Students of the University of South Africa –

### **AFFIRM**

that the context of transformation in Unisa is unprecedented political and social change following the advent of democracy in South Africa

### **ENDORISING**

The need to:

- galvanise the university to help fulfil societal aspirations for a just, prosperous society as encapsulated in the Constitution
- provide equitable access to higher education institutions, programmes and knowledge

- redress previous injustices referred to in the Constitution and the Higher Education Act 1997, (Act 101 of 1997) based on race, gender, class and ethnicity, and
- provide scholarship and tuition aimed at social and human resource development that is socially responsive

## **ACKNOWLEDGING**

The collective efforts of higher education in South Africa thus far, towards a more equitable dispensation

## **WE DECLARE THAT**

Transformation is fundamental and purposeful advancement towards specified goals: individual, collective, cultural and institutional, aimed at high performance, effectiveness and excellence. It entails improvement and continuous renewal guided by justice and ethical action, and achievement of a state that is demonstrably beyond the original.

Individual and collective change requires regular and frequent introspection and self-critiques to examine how assumptions and practices are expressive of and resonant with transformational goals. Cultural change requires the creative disruption and rupture of entrenched ways of thinking, acting, relating and performing within the institution and a willingness to adapt.

Institutional change entails the reconfiguration of systems, processes, structures, and procedures and capabilities to be expressive of transformational intent. Transformation is monitored, milestones agreed, progress evaluated and measured, with individual and collective accountability for clearly identified responsibilities.

Transformation is sponsored, driven and led by the Vice-Chancellor. It is also articulated and advocated by the entire institutional leadership.

Transformational leaders are to be found at all levels and in all sectors of the organization, not necessarily dependent on positional power. They are distinguished from mere actors by their insight into how things are in comparison to where they need to be, with the resolve and capability to act catalytically in pursuit of institutional and societal change imperatives, in the face of opposition, resistance and limited resources.

Transformation keeps us at the frontier as pathfinders: to find ever better and innovative ways of enriching the student experience, elaborating and building upon African epistemologies and

philosophies, developing alternative knowledge canons, and advancing indigenous knowledge systems that ground us on the African continent, without averting our gaze from the global horizon.

## **WE COMMIT TO**

Constructing together a new DNA for Unisa, characterised by openness, scholarly tradition, critical thinking, self-reflection and the values of African cultures – openness, warmth, compassion, inclusiveness and community

## **THIS WE SHALL ACCOMPLISH THROUGH**

- **COMMUNICATION:** Ensuring shared meaning and promoting mutual understanding at all levels, by making explicit relevant decisions, actions, choices and events timeously and transparently
- **CONVERSATION:** Active participation in dialogue that transforms the relationship and narrows the scope of differences while enhancing understanding and empathy
- **CONSERVATION:** Preserving and utilising what is best from our legacy, making choices and decisions and taking actions in the present, which ensure a sustainable future
- **COMMUNITY:** The University staff, students and alumni cohering around our shared vision, aspirations and interests in the spirit of Ubuntu, while embracing diversity in its multiple forms
- **CONNECTION:** Reinvigorating stakeholder relations to find greater synergy, harmony and meeting of minds in pursuit of transformational goals
- **CARE:** Fostering a sense of belonging among the members of the Unisa community so that they feel accepted, understood, respected and valued
- **COLLEGIALITY:** Cultivating an ethos of professionalism, shared responsibility, mutual respect, civility and trust while understanding and acknowledging each other's competencies and roles
- **COMMITMENT:** Dedicating ourselves individually and collectively, to promoting and upholding the vision, goals and values of Unisa
- **CO-OPERATION:** Working together proactively and responsively towards the realisation of Unisa's goals and aspirations
- **CREATIVITY:** Nurturing an environment that is open and receptive to new ideas, that liberates potential and leads to imaginative and innovative thinking and action

- CONSULTATION: Taking into account, in good faith, the views, advice and contributions of appropriate stakeholders and individuals on relevant matters ... and:

**COURAGE** to act, decide and make choices with conviction and resolution in the best interests of the Institution.

**THIS PLEDGE WE MAKE**, confident that the institutional climate we seek to create will free us from the shackles of our pasts in order that we may face the future with confidence, pride and dignity (2010b).

The transformation charter confirms my theoretical framework in the following way:

### *Shared values and beliefs*

The Charter indicates that there is a common understanding that Unisa's transformation is in line with that of the constitution of the Republic, and therefore it should reflect transformation-taking place in society. The preamble starts with the word 'We', indicating inclusivity and commitment of the institution to have common values to make Unisa a transformed institution for the diverse needs of society, as indicated in the values of strategic framework. The declaration indicates the importance of transformation and its effect on the advancement of specific goals like "individual, collective, cultural and institutional goals, aimed at high performance, effectiveness and excellence" (Unisa, 2008d). This speaks volumes in terms of specifics at which the transformation process is aimed and involvement of all Unisa stakeholders. The use of the pronoun 'we' in the preamble implies affirmation, endorsement, acknowledgement, declaration, commitment and to the pledge (of warmth, openness and inclusiveness), and once more reflects the shared views of the institutions towards transformation that will obviously lead to a certain post-merger institutional culture. This also concurs with Van Wyk (2004) on the importance of a strategic framework in indicating transformation.

### *Language*

Language is not specifically referred to in the charter; however, if we take centrality of language in culture as ASHE (2005) alludes to it, the transformation charter addresses the issue of language. The approach in the charter is that "Cultural change requires the creative disruption and rupture of

entrenched ways of thinking, acting, relating and performing within the institution and a willingness to adapt” (Unisa, 2010b:1). If there is a commitment to disrupt the entrenched ways of thinking creatively, which is how Tierney (1988) also describes culture, one of the things that the institution has changed, is the language. As per in the constitution of South Africa, all languages are equal. Unisa’s policy on language adheres to functional multilingualism that accommodates the linguistic diversity of the people. Therefore, if, according to the transformation charter, the intention is to change the entrenched ways of thinking, promotion of multilingualism would be the start at Unisa as initially only Afrikaans and English were official languages.

### *Symbols*

This constitutive meaning is not prominent in the transformation charter; however, it is important to a university’s environmental setting. ASHE (2005) states that a university’s environmental setting is a potent symbol, suggesting a proud tradition. Therefore, the intention of the transformation charter at Unisa is aimed at forming a post-merger institutional culture that makes every member of Unisa community feel at home. This refers to the current symbols for example the coat of arms and the current university logo of Unisa.

### *University leadership*

A closer look at the leadership role in the transformation of the merged institutions to form Unisa has been very crucial. The first principal of the institution was Professor Pityana, who made a great contribution in strategies on transformation at Unisa and in higher education in the country generally. Pityana (2010) explains a post-apartheid South African university as one where a variety of views are encouraged and engaged, where the workers, students and academics can freely express their views on any issue affecting the well-being of the university. He also defines it as a place where academics and all other members of the university community are driven by the imperatives to advance the mission of the university and ultimately the South African society.

From this, it is clear that the Unisa’s transformation charter has placed the leadership role at the forefront, and this is how it is articulated:

Transformation is sponsored, driven and led by the Vice-Chancellor. It is also articulated and advocated by the entire institutional leadership.

Transformational leaders are to be found at all levels and in all sectors of the organization, not necessarily dependent on positional power. They are distinguished from mere actors by their insight into how things are in comparison to where they need to be, with the resolve and capability to act catalytically in pursuit of institutional and societal change imperatives, in the face of opposition, resistance and limited resources (Unisa, 2010b:1).

The goal of transformation is to transform right from the top management of the institution, in fact the entire leadership. This implies the significance and the commitment the university is showing in transforming. Accountability and implementation of all the aspects mentioned in the charter are assigned to all managers at all levels. This somehow reflects the drive and the will to make Unisa reflect a transformed post-democratic society.

#### *Staff and student development*

At a first glance, one can conclude that all the transformation goals are related to everyone at Unisa. At a closer look, both students and staff members are referred to in the pledge that deals with the community of the university. Unisa Transformation Charter (2010b) states, “The University staff, students and alumni cohering around our shared vision, aspirations and interests in the spirit of Ubuntu, while embracing diversity in its multiple forms” (Unisa, 2010b:1). Staff development is also mentioned in terms of professional development in order to enhance competences and performance in different roles. For students, the aim is to increase access and goals of strategy, which is to increase student output.

#### *Curriculum*

From the strategy of the university to Africanise the curriculum of Unisa, it can also be concluded that the transformation charter drives the same agenda. The argument is taken further in transformation, committing the university “to find ever better and innovative ways of enriching the student experience, elaborating and building upon African epistemologies and philosophies, developing alternative knowledge canons, and advancing indigenous knowledge systems that

ground us on the African continent, without averting our gaze from the global horizon (Unisa, 2010b:1). The implication here is that the university is prepared and willing to change the curriculum to recognise student environments and to enable them to solve problems of the African continent, at the same time knowing that they are a part of the global community.

### *Practices*

Practices are constitutive elements of institutional culture and not explicitly referred to in the transformation charter. Because transformation at Unisa also calls for cultural change, which is the changing of entrenched ways of doing things, it can be concluded that this refers to the “disruption of some entrenched” (see Unisa, 2010b) practices and the creation of new practices. Unisa’s vision from the strategic documents is the University in service of humanity. Transformation is organised around this vision, and therefore all the university practices are expected to be in line with the agenda of a transformed institution.

In summary, the Unisa transformation charter is in line with Higher Education Act of 1997 (No. 101 of 1997) and the constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Core issues of transformation at Unisa are governance, curriculum, staff demographics, cultural change and stakeholder participation. I now proceed to discuss Unisa’s institutional operating plan (IOP) to see how it relates to my meanings of post-merger institutional culture.

## **5.6 UNISA’S INSTITUTIONAL OPERATING PLAN (IOP)**

The Ministry of Education required that institutional plans from universities be submitted and that their focus had to be on transformation targets contained in the NPHE (Ministry of Education, 2001). The plans had to detail clearly inclusive institutional culture, measures to increase students input and throughput rates, accessibility and equity. Unisa had set its target of being a university serving not only South Africa but also the region and African continent as a whole. Its sheer size after the merger required the university to take concrete steps towards establishing an effective and integrated plan to enhance its organisational effectiveness.



Since the approval of Unisa's 2015 strategic plan in 2005, attention has been focused on driving its implementation. A decisive first step was to align the University's annual operation plan with the goals, strategies and targets on the 2015 plan. Therefore, the planning initiatives have to be integrated into a coherent framework to ensure institution-wide synchrony between strategy, resource allocation, operations and performance management (Unisa, 2004). The following factors shaped IOP 2008–2010 in trying to enhance planning maturity and in turn, organisational efficacy and effectiveness were:

- A three-year planning framework aimed at having plans of the institution running over a three-year period to be on a par with national requirements in terms of Department of Education enrolments and funding cycles that are on multiple-year horizons.
- An early start and more coordinated interactive processes to allow more time for engagement, interaction and coordination to ensure timely completion of the team plans.
- A purpose and structure to provide management and council with an integrated and high-level overview of the overarching institutional operational objectives by which institution-wide progress can be measured. There was a consolidation of initially nine targets into three main actions. Specific dates were set for reaching milestones in these:
  - institutional identity;
  - academic identity and focus; and
  - enabling mechanism and resources.
- Appropriate performance measures and realistic targets to ensure consistent structure and formulation and appropriate and realistic performance measures and targets.
- Monitoring progress and evaluating outcomes and effect. This would create a system where performance measures and targets towards achievement of major milestones over a period of three years are monitored and to evaluate all the outcomes by 2010. Milestones and targets were consistently formulated in response to these questions:
  - What ultimate impact do we want to have achieved in relation to the objectives by 2010?
  - What major milestones do we need to have achieved over the three-year planning cycle to achieve the desired outcomes and impact?
- Accountability and responsibility – overall accountability to council for achieving all objectives, milestones and targets were clustered either under the vice-chancellor (VC) or

the pro-vice-chancellor (PVC). Responsibility for institution-wide initiatives remained with the VC and for the academic project, with the PVC.

- Project management approach to ensure accountability and progress building on the insights of the various reviews mentioned above, the finalisation and approval of the 2008–2010 institutional operational plan would be followed up by rigorously applying a project management approach at portfolio level to ensure consistent progress in stated objectives. Most importantly, this will allow interdependencies to be identified and addressed, thus overcoming a principal barrier to achieving outcomes (Unisa, 2004:4-8).

The plan identifies these key areas as of great importance at Unisa as organisation and, as discussed earlier in (5.5.) these are in line with the key objectives of the strategic plan. I now report on my meanings of post-merger institutional culture at Unisa in terms of the IOP. It is important to clarify that the Open-resource strategy (Unisa, 2014) among other things helps in facilitating some of Unisa's operational plan strategies.

#### *Shared values and beliefs*

Unisa's IOP is rooted in the institution's mission statement, which outlines the Unisa strategic plan 2015. The mission statement is informed by nine core values; discussed in (4.4) The IOP goes further than the strategic plan, which only lists these core values. IOP interprets the mission statement and by implication its core values:

Unisa is unique in the sense that it is the only dedicated distance education institution, and justly claims to be the only truly national university. Its size, and the aggregated resources and capacities at its disposal, place it in a position to make a vital contribution to development in Southern Africa. As such, it is ideally placed to play a leading role in increasing access to higher education for marginalized communities. Its geographical reach enables it to support high-level capacity development beyond the borders of South Africa, especially on the continent (Unisa, 2004:3)

This quotation speaks of Unisa's typology, its model of education and its role of making higher education accessible on a large scale, which is the cornerstone of the IOP 2008 to 2010.

### *Language*

The IOP 2008 to 2010 does not make a direct reference to language issues. However, it is briefly mentioned in document when it focuses on the “Distinctive culture and organisational effectiveness” (Unisa, 2004:4). There is an indication that one of the cardinal tasks for Unisa is to create a post-merger institutional culture that will not only be inclusive but which will also make the organisation function to its optimum level. Given the link between culture and language, for the institution to have a “distinctive culture” (Unisa, 2006:5) that implies that a specific language must be part of that process. This would then leave one wondering why then the issue of language is not explicitly addressed in the culture that IOP is planning. Might it be because IOP is relying on the language policy of Unisa (2006), which promotes multilingualism and English as language of all written documents. One should keep in mind Pettigrew’s (1979:575) suggestion that language associated with a university is also a reflection of other institutional elements, such as diversity.

### *Symbols*

In the IOP, symbols are not explicitly referred to, but in one of the objectives of the plan, which is “to foster institutional change and transformation in line with the institutional identity” (Unisa, 2004:10), there is a need to create an organisational culture and climate conducive to Unisa’s institutional vision and mission. Diversity is the main target of the plan, and it includes advanced employment equity, culture of service and empowering and advancement of women with an equitable gender-mainstreaming framework. The plan also proposes that the preferred culture be articulated, and that scheduled training in cultural diversity and change management must be completed by November of 2008 (Unisa, 2004:10). This emphasis on the articulation of institutional culture gives the impression that it means change in terms of symbols for the institution. Of course, by the time of writing this dissertation, Unisa had a policy (Unisa Council, 2005:1-3) dealing with changing symbols like names of buildings, the university logo, the coat of arms and other brand images. The old Unisa logo, for instance, was changed to a new one depicting Unisa’s vision of being an African university in service of humanity. The changing of names of buildings included the administration block at main Campus (Mucleneuk in Pretoria) was named after Oliver Tambo, a hall was named after Merriam Makeba, the Kgorong Building for Unisa’s

history and TR Maluleke Building for transport services (the new names belong to freedom fighters against apartheid regime in South Africa). These are all signs of Unisa acknowledging diversity of the merged institution. The question however is why there is no explicit reference to symbols in the IOP. Could it be because the process of drafting a policy of use of the university coat of arms and other brand images had already begun or is nearing completion? These questions are a reminder of what Van Wyk (2009) refers to as complexities of transformation indicators in policies for institutional culture in higher education.

### *University leadership*

Leadership role has been alluded to at the beginning of this section; IOP draws a number of its leadership roles from the Strategic Plan of the university. The implications of leadership in these documents have been dealt with extensively. As the IOP, plans are meant to be stretched over a three-year period for effective operations of Unisa, the role of leadership, which is accountable and responsible, is crucial and this is how it is illustrated:

Responsibility has been assigned in the Plan at the Vice-Principal (VP) level, as progress will be driven, as indicated, through the detailed portfolio plans on a project management basis. The only exception is the Executive Director: Corporate Affairs who reports directly to the VC. Owing to greater planning and operational integration, more than one Vice-Principal is usually responsible for a particular area. In each case, however, primary and co-responsibility are identified. These accountabilities and responsibilities will be incorporated into the individual performance agreements of the VC, PVC and VPs. In this way, corporate and individual performance management will be strongly aligned (Unisa, 2004:7).

This undoubtedly indicates the manner in which the role of the leadership is envisaged in the IOP.

### *Staff and student development*

The IOP explicitly states that for Unisa staff members there is a need to develop an academic identity and focusing on the following areas:

Developing a culture of scholarship and enhancing activities in line with the institutional identity;

Aligning a relevant formal and non-formal product range, delivery model and learner support framework with the institutional identity to ensure appropriate graduateness; and  
Promoting participation, incorporating social responsibility programmes, academic citizenship and academic community engagement (Unisa, 2004:5).

Interestingly, in the plan, there is realisation that these focus areas do not just happen in a vacuum; resources must be made available to support the staff according to the plan. In terms of student development, the emphasis is on improvement of the delivery model, suggesting migration towards semester modules where appropriate, and adaptation is towards the ODL model and academic product range. The emphasis on graduateness of students means that Unisa realises that its graduates must be equipped with future skills that are relevant to their future lives. These specific attributes are critical/democratic citizenship, social, cultural and environmental awareness, tolerance and responsibility in the African context, self-management, lifelong learning and employability. It is envisaged that these would be developed through relevant curriculum (Unisa, 2004:5).

### *Curriculum*

This aspect of my theoretical framework relates to the objective that seeks to have a curriculum that is aligned to Unisa's strategic plan in terms of social responsibility and research. Through the IOP 2008 to 2010, the university seeks to achieve this goal by doing the following:

Re-assess and implement the PQM (programme qualification mix) in terms of the broad national interest, the current regulatory framework, and Unisa's social mandate, for example with regard to HIV and AIDS.

Develop curricula to support the new PQM and selected learning programmes (SLPs).

Develop integrated courseware to facilitate effective open distance teaching and learning.

Assure quality in the curriculum and learning development process of all qualifications/programmes/modules/SLPs (Unisa, 2004:12).

### *Practice*

Practices refer to activities such as rites, ceremonials and rituals (Toma *et al.*, 2005:70-74), intended to convey important cultural messages. In the Unisa IOP, one of the rituals mentioned is aiming at “fostering critical debate on strategic matters” (Unisa, 2004:8). There is a realisation that for the university to move with all the stakeholders in all that are planned there must be a platform like discussion forums conducted throughout the year, with increased participation. While Unisa (2004) aims to build on the strategic plan outlined in Unisa’s documents, its focus is on integration of implementation, alignment and prioritisation of the strategic and operational objectives.

## **5.7 UNISA’S SELF-EVALUATION PORTFOLIO FOR THE HEQC (2008)**

The process of ensuring greater public accountability at HEIs was ensured in the Education White Paper 3 (DoE, 1997) in terms of provision for establishment of a national quality assurance system for higher education. The HEQC was established for audit purpose and institutional evaluation formed a part. The merger of three institutions offering distance learning led to the creation of Unisa as a large ODL university, with a critical mandate of providing access to all its students – whether they are working, poor, rural or under-prepared students. This would happen in a changed environment of offering education through correspondence to a full online learning environment. Unisa then had to come up with an approach based on the facilitation of the transactional process of learning, supported by print and appropriate Information and Communication Technology (ICT) solutions, to make interaction between the student and the institution more effective. The support function had to be envisioned to be more responsive to the requirements of such a transactional approach. The implications therefore were that an open and flexible approach to service delivery with a student-centred orientation is suitable. The self-evaluation report at Unisa had to report on this context.

The theme of Unisa self-evaluation report was “Transforming academic and institutional identity in an ODL university” (SER, 2008b:3). This meant that the Unisa self-evaluation report’s focus areas were:

- How transformed was Unisa since the merger in 2004?

- What were the roles of the 2015 strategic plan, vision and mission in the transformation process?
- If the 2008-2010 institutional operational plan focuses on establishing the academic identity of Unisa, then IOP fulfils its social mandate and as an ODL institution

In addition to these, the self-evaluation report (SER) also focused on vision, mission and goals, governance, typology, staffing, quality management of planning, resourcing, and quality assurance. Badat (2009) refers to the comprehensive process of self-evaluation as institutional consolidation. Unisa (see DoE, 2002) headed the Ministry of Education's call for systematic and institutional stability through increased planning and quality assurance activities.

Following is the discussion on how the Unisa self-evaluation report (SER, 2008b) relates to the meanings of my theoretical framework, which were shared values and beliefs, symbols, language, practices, curriculum, leadership, and staff and student development.

#### *Shared values and beliefs*

It can be argued that a self-evaluation process enables an institution to do introspection in terms of what it would like to achieve in teaching and learning, management and research output. Beyond the replication of values and missions of Unisa, the Unisa SER offers concrete examples of how it seeks to provide higher education in its context as open distance learning, through what is referred to as "institutional uniqueness" (SER, 2008:27). Although there is an understanding that Unisa has to offer university education on a large scale, there is also a common understanding that the ODL model requires infrastructure like technology, human and financial resources. This indicates the way in which the institutional culture of Unisa can be influenced in terms of how education is offered.

#### *Symbols*

Unisa's SER does not make specific reference to the symbols at Unisa; however, as interim measures while waiting for the final structures and policies, the senate was entrusted with focusing

on the creation of committees that would focus, among other things, on symbols of Unisa. The development of new buildings at Unisa's different sites after the merger could be seen as symbolic of the university's new institutional environment where various cultures will feel welcomed. For example, at the main campus at Mucleneuk, Kgorong Building was built to house the historical artefacts of Unisa; a state-of-the-art library was built at Florida Campus and a student hub at Sunnyside Campus. There is a common understanding that symbols such as names of the buildings, the coat of arms, the university logo and any other brand images should reflect the merged institutional culture, which is part of transformed higher education.

### *Language*

The SER implies language as one of the meanings of my theory by affirming Unisa's mission statement in terms of the language policy. The mission statement states that Unisa is striving "towards the African university in the service of Humanity" (2008c:15) and in order to achieve this, functional multilingualism had to be employed to accommodate all the official languages of the country (2008c:10). In line with the constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the mission further states that all national languages and cultures are to be on a par (Unisa, 2008c:36). There is a clear indication of the reliance of the SER on the mission statement of the university, as these two were developed at the same time.

### *Practices*

These are cardinal activities that reflect a specific culture of an institution and in the SER, practices are implied among others in research and planning and graduation ceremonies. Under the vice-principal's supervision, research at Unisa has to be relevant to the community that surrounds the university and intended to address African challenges. A practice devised therefore was that every month, the university must invite an African academic or scholar to present their research at what is called 'an African debate' (Unisa, 2008b:57). This practice is also rooted in the Unisa mission for research, and it is in line with the university's mission of its research rooted in the African continent for African solutions. The practices of graduation had to be harmonised as, before the 1994 elections, graduation ceremonies were held along racial lines. In the post-merger Unisa, they



are racially inclusive and the university management has to make sure that they attend at least one in all the centres (Unisa, 2008b:62).

### *Curriculum*

A curriculum that is relevant to the student's environment and that will enable the student to achieve skills and knowledge is central to Unisa's purpose as a higher education in South Africa, Southern Africa and the African continent. The mission statement articulates that the critical outcome of the curriculum at Unisa must "contribute to the full personal development of each student and the social and economic development of society at large," (SER, 2008:120). As an institution of higher education in a post-democratic South Africa, Unisa sees an effective curriculum including the key aspects such as:

- Content – what is to be learnt?
- Rationale and underlying philosophy
- Process – how should it be learnt?
- Structure of the learning process – when should it be learnt?
- How will the learning be demonstrated in creative ways and how will achievement similarly be assessed (SER, 2008:132)?

The curriculum structure speaks to the goal of Unisa in offering open distance learning on a large scale to poor, rural or urban and previously disadvantaged students; hence, the curriculum has to have a meaning and means of survival for the students.

### *University leadership*

In the SER, the role of the university leadership features very prominently and it is referred to as the "management structure" (2008a:7). It is important to highlight that the Unisa management structure created management positions for TSA and VUDEC in its post-merger structure. The structure comprises:

- the Vice-Chancellor (VC);
- the Vice-Principal (VP): Academic and Research;

- the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (PVC): Strategy, Planning and Partnership;
- the DVC and Vice-Principal: Student Affairs and Learner Support;
- the Assistant Principal (AP): Operations, Finance and the University Estates; and
- The Registrar.

The management structure reports to the council of Unisa for all teaching, learning and other academic activities. The responsibility of the team is to lead Unisa in making sure that its goals as stipulated in the strategies and approved by the council, are realised. A statutory body is responsible for monitoring and achieving its strategic objectives. There is also a senate, which is the highest academic decision-making body of the university. It may appoint any number of committees to assist it to fulfil its functions.

The institutional forum (IF) is a body worth mentioning as its mandate is relevant to the meaning of this study. It is a statutory body that grew out of the transformation forums of the historical institutions, and retains much of its earlier culture and traditions (SER, 2008:139). Its membership includes unions (staff and workers') council, academic and non-academic representation, Senate members, members of the SRC and executive management. It is responsible for monitoring the university's progress towards achieving its transformation objectives. These have been discussed in 5.4, which presented the university's transformation, social cohesion and transformation charter.

#### *Staff and student development*

In the SER, a number of issues pertaining to staff and student development are mentioned, but those only relevant to this study will be focused on. These include the academic staff complement, recruitment and selection and development procedures, redress and equity staff turnover. The HR department at Unisa is responsible for appointment and recruitment of staff, which is monitored by the Employment Equity Office (EEO). The EEO is in the principal's office, to make sure that the policies of non-sexist and non-discrimination are adhered to as per Unisa strategies.

The SER at Unisa reflected on recruitment, selection, development, and procedures of making sure that the university has a suitably qualified and experienced academic staff. The SER acknowledges

the challenges that Unisa is facing in terms of the academic staff structure. For example, in 2004-2006, Africans were 37,5%, coloureds 4,7%, Indian 2,9% and whites 54,9% across all the permanent staff at Unisa. In that very same period, white females were 34, 8% to African females 15,6%, coloured 2,6% and Indian 1,6% (Tables 21 and 22, Unisa, 2008b:143). The HR department acknowledges that, despite their attempts to apply the equity policy vigorously, the equity profile of academic staff in terms of African staff members has not increased significantly.

The above relates to equity and redress targets that Unisa have struggled to meet so far, mostly because highly qualified people are often headhunted by other institutions. A further difficulty is making the right appointments in terms of race classifications, disability and gender equity, while at the same time appointing quality personnel (Unisa, 2008b:178).

Permanent staff by race at Unisa also merits observation. Unisa (2008b) concludes:

- among permanent staff, the distribution by gender across the race groups was less balanced among Africans;
- African males constituted 7% or more of the total than African females. This suggests that African females formed a proportionately large component of temporary staff, again not a good equity indicator;
- As in the case of total staff, white permanent women constituted the largest single race/gender group (1 430 or 54% of the total); and
- Among permanent staff, white males constituted the third largest group, after white women and African men. Compared to the total staff distribution, this once again indicates greater gender inequities among permanent staff. The SER has since effected performance and change management initiatives (SER, 2008:187).

It is, however, important to indicate that in the recent revised strategic document from 2016-2020 (Unisa, 2016e:16) the focus has been more on improving the qualifications of staff member in order to increase research capacity. The document is silent on whether Unisa has achieved its goal in terms of staff equity, gender and race.

By its nature, as a distance education institution, Unisa has a multiplicity of sites of learning where students learn everywhere and anytime. Student support at Unisa is in line with the changing student profile (more students seeking admission straight after school); however, the university is increasingly under pressure to provide study facilities and even opportunities for additional face-to-face contact. Although these expectations put strain on the physical facilities, especially at Mucleneuk (Unisa's main campus), the university has responded to these challenges in various ways, such as providing students with additional study venues, finding new buildings at regional hubs, increasing access to technology, and promoting clear communication to the students and parents in terms of what the ODL system is about.

When it comes to student governance, at Unisa a student body, the Central Student Representative Council (CSRC), which is provided for in the statute of Unisa, represents students. This student body negotiates with stakeholders in pursuit of student governance and reserves the right to challenge decisions within policies and procedures and the Student Code of Conduct (SER, 2008:201). The CSRC has student representatives on statutory committees such as council, senate and other governance structures. The aims and objectives of the CSRS are to support student governance and development that focuses on equity and access, and which works in an education system that contributes to broader socio-economic development, democracy and nation building.

In summing up, the Unisa SER emphasises the values of the Unisa 2015 Strategic Plan. There are implications in terms of the aspects of the post-merger institutional culture, although some are not explicit.

## **5.8 AUDIT REPORT**

In terms of the Higher Education Amendment Act, of 2008, the HEQC of CHE was constituted and has a statutory responsibility of conducting institutional audits of HEIs (Unisa, 2008a:1). Auditing at Unisa was conducted by the HEQC in terms of this mandate. Background of Unisa for the audit report is that Higher Education South Africa (HESA), a body that represents all HEIs in the country, recognises the importance of Unisa's contribution to higher education for many years and the fact that a third of HE students in South Africa are registered at Unisa (Letseka & Pitsoe,

2013). Given this and other initiatives in post-apartheid South Africa, institutional audit seeks in part to establish the extent to which the transformation policy imperative is being achieved in higher education (Stensaker & Harvey, 2001:62; Jacobs, 2012).

The objectives of the HEQC (CHE, 2002:5) audits are to:

- encourage and support HE providers to maintain a culture of continuous improvement by means of institutional quality processes that build on HEQC and institutionally set requirements;
- validate the self-evaluation reports of institutions on their quality arrangements for teaching and learning, research and community engagement;
- enable HEIs to develop reliable indicators that will assure institutional stakeholders and the HEQC that their policies, systems, strategies and resources for assuring and enhancing quality teaching and learning, research and community engagement are effective;
- provide information and evidence that will enable HEIs and the HEQC to identify areas of strength and excellence as well as areas in need of focused attention for planned improvement in the short, medium and long term; and
- enable the HEQC to obtain baseline information on the targeted areas through the use of a common set of audit criteria for all institutions.

In its audit, the HEQC commended Unisa on the complete picture of a merged institution, on being financially sound and on the way in which an integrated approach to strategic and operational planning seeks to provide coherence and sustainability (Unisa, 2008a:36). On the other hand, the following four open-ended questions were set by the HEQC in its audit, some conclusions were drawn from the self-evaluation, and issues that needed to be addressed were discussed. The questions were (Unisa, 2008a:36)

- What are the unique and distinctive ways in which the institution enriches and adds excellence to the HE sector and society?
- What does the institution do to produce a vibrant intellectual culture within the institution and society?
- In what ways does the institution act as incubator of new ideas and cutting-edge knowledge and technologies within the national system of innovation?

- What are some of the notable examples in the last three years of institutional success in promoting and enhancing quality?

Following is the examination and analysis of the responses to the questions in relation to the meanings of post-merger institutional culture.

### *Shared values and beliefs*

The Audit Report alludes (Unisa, 2008a) to shared values and beliefs through Unisa's mission and value statements, which originated from the strategic plan. For example, in the strategic overview it is stated that the new Unisa after the merger has tried to stick to its social mandate as a single dedicated distance education in South Africa creating a new identity. Focus on the merger process somehow led to quality assurance not receiving the kind of attention it deserves. However, there is a strategic commitment to revive quality assurance structures, adhere to Unisa's values of integrity and humanity in making sure that the entire institution functions in a coordinated, seamless and efficient manner (Unisa, 2008a:324).

On the issue of access to higher education (as per the mandate of the Ministry of Education), Unisa has continued to provide access to those who are marginalised by limited resources, the high cost of higher education, the absence of geographical proximity to the majority of HEIs, and selection procedures at some universities.

### *Language*

The report is silent on the issue of language, understandably because it is an Audit Report. The possible explanation might be that the focus of the institution is on its arrangement for quality assurance of core areas like community engagement, research and teaching and learning.

### *Symbols*

In relation to the symbols, the audit report states that Unisa has applied a consultative approach since the merger in dealing with issue of new symbols. Basic to this, was the university's vision of striving "Towards the African university in the service of humanity" (Unisa, 2008c:15). Structures were set up to deal with branding images, the coat of arms, the institutional logo and renaming of buildings and property. Considerable progress was made in this regard as a drive to transform Unisa as a post-apartheid institution. The management of the university has played an active role, for example, the principal and vice-chancellor are the custodians of the university's coat of arms, approve its usage, specify conditions for the use of coat of arms and with an executive dean, sign certificates for formal qualifications bearing the coat of arms of the university. The principal and the vice-chancellor are also responsible for advising the university community of the decision of the council on the naming and renaming of university buildings and properties (Unisa, 2008c:325).

### *University leadership*

A number of observations are reported in the audit report in terms of the leadership at Unisa. Cardinal is the university's governing structure after the merger, which changed and the Minister of Education approved amendments in 2006. The institutional forum that was entrusted with drafting the institutional statute comprised the management committee, the senate, SRC, and the legal services.

The approved institutional statute lists the following structures, although more may be added:

- council
- senate
- college boards
- inter-college boards
- management committee
- extended management committee (Unisa, 2008c:6).

The university management is very involved in many spheres of running the university. A number of departments that form part of management are Strategy, Planning and Partnerships, Finance and University Estates, Academic and Research, University Operations to Student Affairs, and Learner Support and Registrations. A position for ODL special advisor was created for two years to develop a plan that would situate Unisa firmly as an efficient and effective ODL institution. The Office of the Principal also oversees transformation, employment equity and diversity programmes. The size, complexity, and diversity of Unisa, required a Department of Information and Strategic Analysis. The department had to make the organisation intelligible to itself so that sound and informed planning and management decisions could be made (Unisa, 2008c:339). This indicates management's eagerness in carrying forward the mandate of transforming one of the largest providers of higher education in the country. Therefore, a comprehensive framework development was recommended for communication, planning, monitoring and improvement, equipment and physical facilities. This issue will be reflected upon on (section 6.13).

#### *Staff and student development*

Regarding the issues of staff development, there is focus on staffing at Unisa and support given to staff to be able to operate well in an ODL context. Despite the vigorous attempt to apply the employment equity policy, the number of black academics at Unisa has not increased significantly. Staff demographics are in inverse proportion to student demographics when it comes to race. This poses a challenge because it means that the culture of the majority of the staff members becomes a hegemonic culture of the institution. Although there has been an increase in the number of women employees, most senior positions are still occupied by men (Audit Report, 2008:20). Regarding support and development of staff, once they are appointed, there are mentoring and funding of additional training and studying. Unisa has developed core processes for staff to make sure that systems are in place for teaching, research, community engagement and quality assurance. Challenges to these core areas are student numbers per lecturer, aligning research and teaching to the vision of Unisa, a lack of supervisory skills and a lack of IT skills among academics.

Interestingly, regarding the student, the audit report does not say much other than mentioning that Unisa students are getting younger as they enrol with Unisa after matriculating, no longer the old



and working student group it used to be. As information technology has brought new ways of learning and interaction (like social media) between them the lecturers and students, Unisa has moved to that direction as well. This has compelled Unisa to be innovative and to be at par with other open distance learning institutions in making sure that the facilities in all the learning centres support learning. This happens despite the fact that most Unisa students are in rural, poor and sometimes-underdeveloped areas (Unisa, 2008a, and 2008:176). Regarding governance, students have the SRC, which is part of the university council and that enables them to have a voice in the decisions of the university. Each campus has a representative and elections for a new SRC executive are held every five years.

### *Curriculum*

According to the report, what students learn at Unisa, prepares them to serve the community and their surroundings. This is reflected in the university's quest to provide solutions for the African continent through education. In both undergraduate and postgraduate courses, there are the tuition policy, the assessment policy and the work-integrated learning policy. All these make sure that Unisa students are employable. The approach to the curriculum and to learning is student-oriented and assisted by the development of ICT centres and mobile ones, and the report commended the university on this initiative. A major recommendation was on student governance, where Unisa needs to encourage greater participation in SRC elections. There is also a need to provide support systems and insistence on project plans and accountability, as well as exploring a greater use of ICT (Audit Report, 2008:179). There are debate forums at the institution towards Africanisation of the curriculum as this issue is discussed nationally.

### *Practices*

Practices are set to be cardinal actions that become symbolic of an institution (Sporn, 1996). The audit report indicates that at Unisa, practices are aiming to produce a vibrant and intellectual culture within the institution and in society. One of the practices is that almost on a daily basis, there is a seminar or lecture or other intellectual event that is advertised on Unisa's Intcom with

local and international speakers. There are posters and advertisements for events like that on university walls, and these are open to Unisa and outside participants.

Different departments and units contribute to the university according to their own strengths. The College of Human Sciences (CHS) holds no fewer than fifteen seminars a month, which has a high impact value. For example, within the CHS, the Institute for Gender studies runs a monthly High Noon series (these are seminars that focus on gender related issues) (Unisa, 2008c). The Department of Taxation in CEMS provides opinions for the university on tax problems and benefited the Unisa community by providing an analysis of the budget speech annually on Intcom (Unisa, 2008c:386).

Another practice that has become post-merger institutional culture is the principal's address of all Unisa staff members at least twice a term. At these gatherings, staff members are encouraged to interact with the university principal across a variety of issues from teaching and learning to research and employee wellness issues. One can conclude that these practices at Unisa are an indication of a commitment to a particular institutional culture that characterises Unisa as a university in a democratic South Africa.

## **5.9 INTERVIEWS WITH UNISA STAFF MEMBERS**

In this section, interviews regarding the perceptions of the post-merger institutional culture by the various staff members across centres, departments and institutions at Unisa are presented. These personal interviews were conducted between June and September 2015. Proper research ethics were followed and permission was sought and granted from both Stellenbosch University and Unisa (see appendices A and B). Participants were selected according to the number of years at Unisa, and according to Unisa institutions that they were at before the merger. These interviews were then analysed in order to establish to which extent they related to the meanings of the institutional culture, reflected in 3.4 namely shared values and beliefs, language, symbols, university leadership, staff and student development, curriculum and practices. In order to limit the scope of the study, I only focused on those areas that corresponded with the interest of my

study. Where the interviews created a new constitutive meaning of culture, I also focused on that, as Wildschut (2016) mention this as useful when analysing qualitative interviews.

### *Shared values and beliefs*

Merger effects on people involved vary from a sense of upheaval and insecurity to uncertainty, and this characterises the way in which staff is affected at a personal level (Bajjnath *et al.*, 2010:131). Ten years of the merger process, staff at Unisa reflected on what Unisa stands for in terms of its vision and mission and how this is translated into reality and a way of informing the post-merger culture of the university. This was reflected in the accounts of Unisa staff members on their perceptions of shared values and beliefs at Unisa. In this section, all quotes are provided verbatim and unedited.

This is how a staff member from CEMS thought about shared values and beliefs at Unisa:

Look, our vision talks about the African university of choice almost. Therefore, we want to be number one on the continent so to speak. Therefore, we need to be relevant to what is happening on the continent and how we influence the contents so to speak and take the continent to another level on different levels. Very often, we do not even think that we belong to Africa, you know. Like South Africa is on another continent all together. We need to consciously acknowledge that we are on this continent, that we are part of this continent, there are so many beautiful and wonderful things happening on the Africa continent, and sometime we feel a little bit arrogant that we are at the cutting edge. We need to invite academics elsewhere on the African continent to become part of our structure and I know in our context how difficult it is for a variety of reasons. That is the only way that we will be able to become this Africa University of choice, which we are talking about. We need to open; we need to learn from others as well.

Although Unisa aspires to play this critical role in higher education – not only in South Africa but also in the African continent – there seems to be contentions in terms of values. This is how staff member B expressed his perception:

In relation to clarity, who are we? Remember we were declared a comprehensive university, right? Some staff members said we were not clear on that. Yes, Africanisation, an African university, what is the meaning of the social justice and fairness, which is critical to what we do ... who is

admitted at Unisa, either as an employee, or as a student, which is the meaning of social justice. How many black students are there, white students, females, how many of them are graduating, how many of them are participating in research, how many of them are ... and that is what social justice and fairness is about. Are we opening up the gates, are we ensuring that everybody, so that ultimately we can say, oh we have such a percentage of our students are Africans, whatever percentage. Are they participating equally, meaning are they succeeding? They are not.

It is still debatable ten years after the merger as to the comprehensiveness of Unisa in an ODL context. I have come across various contestations during the interviews among staff members at Unisa, especially on issues around policies of Africanising the university and whether Unisa does play the role required by its vision.

### *Language*

As indicated in section (1.8) Gadamer states that, language is a cultural vehicle that allows a particular campus community to speak the same language, which can be used metaphorically as well. At Unisa, a senior staff member at management level indicated that language is part of the university's strategy in its business model with the students:

So at first identity and character develops, and then it affects the culture.

All of these, the language that we use, the diversity of all the students, all of these are contributory factors to the culture of the institution.

The above statement concurs with the fact that the language policy promotes functional multilingualism, acknowledging the diversity of Unisa students that are spread all over the world (Unisa, 2006). From the interviews, I could ascertain that, although the university policy promotes functional multilingualism in terms of the language of communication with the stakeholders, it is still difficult to put multilingualism language policy in practice, because English and Afrikaans are still having an upper hand. This is how a senior academic at the Bureau of Research and Marketing summed it up:

You know certainly Afrikaans was a, an official language at Unisa together with English and it has always been the two languages, never just, so Unisa, in terms of language, and the ... the cultural aspects and there are very many that are related to language. Therefore, I think that is why I have

always maintained that there is no one Unisa culture, there has never been a Unisa culture. And language is one issue that, at Unisa it has always been English and Afrikaans.

It's always been a place for the marginalised, for the political different, different political ideologies, it is ... it's been a place for that, it's also been a place for serious academics, and it's always been a place where the qualifications have been accredited by various professional bodies and internationally.

I find it interesting that my source here acknowledged that Afrikaans and English were still dominating at the time of the research because most of the tutorial letters and question papers were still in both languages. In the same breath though, the interviewee still argues that Unisa has been always a place for 'marginalised and different political ideologies'. The utterances here confirm Gadamer's (1975) on history and interpretation. It is the interviewee's historical background and his interpretation that Unisa was always a place for "marginalised and different political ideologies. I would differ with his background due to my historical background because Unisa Annual Report (2014) states that although all races were allowed to register at Unisa, graduation ceremonies were held separately according to races. Therefore, Unisa could not have been a place for "marginalised and different political idea" before the merger.

### *Symbols*

Initially, there was consensus that after the merger there would be a need to have new symbols. A former VC of Unisa, for instance, stated that the first principal after the merger initiated the change in terms of old symbols that only represented Afrikaner culture at Unisa. These included names of the buildings in various centres across the country, the university coat of arms and the university logo. The former VC further expresses it in this way:

Well I think if you use iconography as part of culture, because that's what symbols are you know, collectively the iconography, those are the icons, the symbolic representation of who we are and what we aspire to be. So you see, the first thing is that the symbols of the university were changed, you know the flame and then the new emblem and so on. Moreover, those have explanations, which you can read about on the website of the university. It explains exactly what was intended and it covers all of the symbolic meanings. In addition, that is very important, because you have to change

that in terms of the aspirations, because those are all representative of the aspirations of the university. It's self-representative and it is self-understanding, it's part of the cultural change. Therefore, we wanted to change to a more progressive outlook and a future orientated outlook, a more visionary outlook, and then you have to deliberately disrupt what is there and replace it. In addition, that is what we did. Therefore, buildings are very symbolic.

However, following is an indication that there was a variation on perceptions in terms of the approach and cultural meanings of the symbols that Unisa adopted after the merger. Importantly the speaker above indicated that the change of the old symbols was not just done for the sake of change, but it was an indication of what Unisa aspired to be in the future, including having a desired institutional culture.

A senior staff member from Unisa argued differently that the renaming of buildings at Unisa after the merger was too politicised, unlike in the 'old Unisa' where buildings were named only after the university principals:

I think, although the old Unisa did not have Rhodes statues, you know it never had that, and it never, the old Unisa, the buildings for example, there was Theo van Wyk Building, which was named after a principal of the university. Other buildings on this campus named after principals of the university, but never after any politician, never after any government, or minister for any such, all the facilities, the names were, were associated with Unisa symbols, people, it was Unisa. This campus, prior to the merger, there was the OR Tambo Building used to be the admin building, the R. Maluleke whatever, Maluleke Building used to be the Technical Building and then you had a few principals, you had AJH van der Walt, you had Theo van Wyk, you had Samuel Pauw, all ex-principals of the university. At least I think AJH van der Walt I think he was a dean, it is possible I do not know. However, I do know that they were all Unisa staff members. The regions never, they the buildings that Unisa own in the regions they, they just have the regional names. You know, that's all prior to the merger. Therefore, I think in terms of symbolism, you find fewer symbols expressing a particular culture and this is more at a macro-culture, but expressing a particular community culture, call it that.

These varying ideas validate the argument that (Henning, 2013:47) institutional culture components, like symbols representing a particular cultural change are controversial because they imply a move from a particular culture to an 'unknown' or 'undesired' one.

### *University leadership*

The leadership Unisa had after the merger was one that had to ensure that Unisa is indeed an African university in the service of humanity. This kind of leadership, according to Kezar, Carducci and Contreras-McGavin (2006:34) and Manning (2013:104), is transformational leadership, which is typically defined as a power and influence theory in which the leader acts in mutual ways with the followers, appeals to their higher needs, and inspires and motivates them, to move towards a particular purpose. A former management member indicated that:

Therefore, we had an immensely transformative leader in the form of, the vice-chancellor. In addition, he made a huge impact. He was a visionary, he was a superb intellectual, he came with a political strategy, and he was a very fine leader and for ten years, he led the institution. Therefore, I think that those are the glory days of the university. He had the strength of character and the strength of personality to drive that transformational agenda, which he did very well. So he ... and that meant cultural change, it meant systemic change. It meant change in the vision of the institution, change in how the resources are deployed, how students are taught, and a whole lot of things.

Of course, the principal was not working alone; the two assistant principals from the other two institutions that merged to form Unisa assisted him. There was also a council, which consisted of members also from the three institutions and they appointed Dr Phosa as the head. The management of the university then had a social mandate of –

Taking or extending our educational opportunities to the widest possible numbers, especially the marginalised poor, rural women and so on. That is underscored by commitment to social justice. What it means is that inequality on our society ... we see unevenness in distribution of opportunities. We see many people who live far away, from where higher educational opportunities are.

From the interviews, though, leadership in terms of facilitating a post-merger institutional culture at Unisa, views were different. This is how a member from College of Education at Unisa (CEDU) views it:

When you look at the thinking of people, because institutional culture also has to do with the perceptions of the people, the behaviours of the people, many people think that there is favouritism within the institution. They take it that there is nepotism within the institution, and they take it that

promotion is not based on merit, but on whom you know, you see. In addition, the case in point, it's the appointment of people in top management currently; people take it that do you mean that Unisa does not have quality people within who can serve at the top management.

A member of staff also alluded to the notion above from CEMS stating:

So as I said, I think after the merger, we were, Unisa moved a little bit more to the autocratic leadership style, more telling people what to do, and I think it's very typical for me at the moment. Many things just ... top management will just say, "This is the way we're going to do it." Oh, a very top-down approach, ja, ja. I was a member of senate for also a very long time, and experienced it at senate.

Another view of the leadership role of a post-merger institutional culture at Unisa is that:

The university management came with the new policies, you know, particular working hours, and changing from 13:00 to 17:00, to ... from 8.00 to 16:00. Now we must work between 8.00 and 16:00. You know, it was very restrictive, we found that the culture has changed more, to become a very achievement-orientated culture. So now, people-orientated is all about pushing people to achieve, without taking care of their needs, and taking into consideration. And I think that's the main challenging that most academics feel that way, that the university's all about what they want academics to do, what they want the staff to do, not necessarily taking into consideration what is it that you're supposed to need.

Although there are different views about leadership, Baijnath (2010) suggest that leadership is critical in giving direction, especially in a merger, as was the case at Unisa.

### *Staff and student development*

From the interviews with academics at Unisa about balancing of the demographics in terms of staffing this is how a senior staff member from Diversity Management, Equity and Transformation (DMET) perceived staff demographics and its influence on the post-merger institutional culture at Unisa:

For me, it is around leadership, leadership, and leadership for me, leadership that is very transparent, that is caring. Because we have different, we talk about diversity, and diversity means we have to care about my difference. That is why I am calling for a new type of leadership. I hope



that Prof Makhanya will then unpack the whole philosophy around several leaders. It cannot be right, my brother, that over the years we are struggling really to change the profile of the professors at Unisa. Something is not right, that is why I am saying, we need to do something. I do not understand how then we can begin to ethically share our privilege, if we are unable to change the profile of the professors at Unisa. I do not know how we can really sit down and sleep nicely when we see that, despite the fact that we are putting in, we have the resources, but we are still struggling to change the access, success to portray where it is still determined according to race and agenda.

There is a feeling that there is a slow progress in this regard, as the above extract suggests, but in the extract below, a staff member from the Bureau of Market Research (BMR) indicates commitment to the staffing equity:

In addition, it has always been a ... a focus on staff equity where now it is unpacked in many other pillars, supporting one that is what we mean by transformation. And I think there were people in the past that saw the word 'transformation' as totally excluding them and then if you are in a position of power there would be a resistance, it could be in a position of privilege, you will resist something obviously that you know will tend to exclude. So it is still there but I think we are really doing well if ... if I look at the interviews and the people who are being interview, whose has applied for the position. Who is getting the position, I think there is a real move towards different races employed, and there is progress.

The staffing equity issues were also a strategy of Unisa after the merger, in transforming Unisa from only being a white institution to be a diversified university, changing its culture. A staff member from the Department of Tuition and Facilitation of Learning (DTFL) explains his input in creating a post-merger institutional culture:

Yes, you see as the head of department, that was my mandate. I had a dean, who was understanding, you know she is the champion in this university, I can tell anyone who cares to listen, who championed the cause for young, black, female academics. She was passionate about that, and supportive. Therefore, with a dean like that, and a mandate to go and transform, I literally had a blank cheque to say for as long as it is towards transformation, she would support it. Appoint black personnel, young personnel, but make white people feel wanted. That's what I had to do, to say appointing black people doesn't mean you are no longer significant, you will run your tenure, we still value you, you are here, we will assign significant responsibilities to you, we will work

together. You see that was that, to just change the culture by changing staff. Ja, you see, change the staff proper, and provide them with support.

The other focus on staffing at Unisa was not only to diversify it as per institutional policies, but also to develop them so that they can be able to deliver to the students and have research outputs. In order to make sense of this as an issue of institutional culture, a staff member from BMR confirmed that:

We granted staff permission internally to go and advance their academic pursuits, subject to them coming up with outputs. Whether it is finishing reports or dissertations for another university or finalising a paper, all those things were done away with. All these things were done away with, we did that and we explained to the dean, we said we granted permission to do this, and she said, have you formalised that, that needs to be formalised. In addition, we started then to formalise. It actually replaced the research leave, although people do not necessarily go on research. Therefore, you see it is rated for using part of the old culture in the new form. In addition, well, we are saying for instance, people should not take a Monday and a Friday for logical reasons, while we had a populist dean who came and said, ja, people can take a research day off on a Monday.

On the side of the students, there is commitment, emphasis and acknowledgement of challenges on the culture in terms of how Unisa interacts with students in an ODL context:

Ever since I came to this department, we have been talking about service, why service was important, and particularly because after the merger I think there were problems. There were floods of students coming into the university. The university was unable to deliver, based on lack of capacity. For us it was service, but service not only in terms of being able to deliver service, loyalty and all that, but service in terms of – because service is determined by students, at that point of contact with the university. Moreover, it was more transformational, how you deliver services, how you talk to students, because students do not evaluate service based on your capacity in terms of ICT. When they want to talk to you, at that point of contact with you, that is when they determine the quality of service. I am bringing this because as I say, we are for services as a human issue, as a human interaction between clients and – we have struggled. I mean ever since interest in Unisa, ever since the merger, we have been doing students at section surveys, even up to now, but the results are not good. It is clear that we are struggling to deliver that.

Another perception is that of a culture of supporting students in training for research outputs. This is how a staff member from Psychology approached the matter:

Therefore, there are many opportunities for students and since we are in Psychology, we have two full-time programmes here in this department and I coordinate the End Research Psychology programme next door. Therefore, we have full-time students here and it contributes to a sense of, people often ask me, you at Unisa you all sit behind your computers and just answer emails? My reply is that we do lot of things. We have students, we host conferences, we have an inside in-house journal, we have at the moment many community engagement projects; we have many things happening on all sorts of levels.

Among other things, academics expressed their views in terms of institutional culture when it comes to student funding and the role that Unisa management can and should play in this. A senior member from CDU said:

NSFAS [National Student Financial Aid Scheme] sometimes fall short when it comes to funding Unisa students, and that creates a problem when fees are increased, because you can increase your tuition fees, you can exclude majority of students, and how then do you balance between that? NSFAS is coming with resources in, subsidising, the problem with NSFAS, is that the minister is now saying, show me the number of students you have registered and I will give you money. Unlike previously when they give us money and then we dish out the money, I think now we register students first and then they give us the money, which led to what happened. At first, they accepted more students and then the department was unable to provide them. I think it is for the leadership of universities to really begin to use the money that is available prudently, and I think to deliver which is making sure that you provide service to those students who are really in need of higher education. I am not sure, not only at Unisa; do not think the battles are all over. I do not think leadership in higher education are conscious of that.

From these accounts of staff members at Unisa, it can clearly be ascertained that there are varying perceptions of what institutional culture is at Unisa on the issues around staff equity and student issues. The above complexities reflect the complexity of universities as organisations and the shift in the role of academics due to global changes that influence the culture of institution, (Manning, 2013).

### *Curriculum*

Perceptions on a post-merger culture of what is taught at Unisa are based on the strategy, which advocates that the curriculum of the university must be Africanised. A senior staff member from the African Centre for Arts, Culture and Heritage Studies (ACACHS) said:

I think from our vision, we are supposed to impart various skills to our students, depending on the fields that they are in. The knowledge that we give to the student must be of assistance to them, the country and their daily lives. Nevertheless, for me I feel that the frameworks and theories of viewing African challenges are still foreign. Look at indigenous languages and tell me how many do we teach our students with here at Unisa? In addition, we have most of our students from rural areas where we are still falling short of imparting necessary IT skills as the ODL system requires these days.

A professor at the College of Education (CEDU) also confirmed the challenge of the curriculum in contributing towards post-merger institutional culture. Her views were:

In addition, when we speak of Africanisation, decolonisation, obviously it means we have been operating within a specific culture, which excludes Africans. If we decolonise, it means now we no longer operate within the coloniser's culture, we want to embrace other people within the institution. Moreover, particularly the indigenisation of curriculum, Africanisation of curriculum tells you that you have been excluding other people within the curriculum. In itself, by implication, you have been excluding the thinking and the thoughts of other people. Now let us say for example, and many people would say, why speak of Africanisation? Africanisation or indigenisation simply means, bring into the curriculum the thinking of Africans, the thoughts of Africans, the philosophies of Africans, the approaches of Africans, the epistemologies of African people, into the curriculum. In order to solve African problems, we have our own folklore that actually explains who we are, how we think. In the riddles, in the idioms, in the proverbs, and in the narratives, it does not necessarily mean that we do not actually have folklore, although it is not necessarily written.

Although the general feeling and commitment are to equip a Unisa graduate with skills and knowledge that will be vital to his/her surroundings, there is still a challenge of eurocentrism of the current curriculum, and that is a challenge towards the institutional culture of the institution.

### *Practices*

The staff members at Unisa mentioned various practices that were reflective of a certain culture at departmental level mostly. As Toma *et al.* (2005:70-74) indicate, activities such as rites, ceremonials and rituals are intended to convey important cultural messages. From the interviews, differences were drawn between practices that took place at the former institutions before the merger, and those that are still practiced or not after the merger at Unisa. For an example, a senior staff member from VUDEC at the CEDU indicated:

The culture of VUDEC was amongst the other things that we used to do; we had tea on the passage. Therefore, they will bring in tea and leave for the whole floor. So we will all meet at 10 o'clock during tea break and we will have our tea together. We have tea at 10 o'clock we had our tea again at one, and the last tea actually at half past three. So you really didn't feel isolated, you came to know the people who were sharing the corridor with, which really was sort of ... That is one of the things that I missed when I came to Unisa because we never closed our office, because we knew each other, we met each other during break.

In the very same interview, the staff member reflected on the practices at Unisa after the merger by saying:

However, here at Unisa things were different, and still are. There was a tearoom but people would barely use it, in terms of sitting there and have their coffee. They rather make it and go back to their offices. That was a culture shock and I have not gotten used to it until today.

Practices have rituals that become a part of a particular department even beyond working hours. This is how a staff member from DTFL illustrated this point:

On the more social, it was a bit more like fellow units. People would interact even beyond office hours, where you take over your associations beyond the office. Ja, you relate, so you would find people who associate at work, somehow also associate after work, drinking buddies.

Referring to the current practices at Unisa, the member conceded that:

As I said, emphasis on teaching and learning, the ritual of discussion classes, that was a no miss those, you had to have discussion classes too, move around the country for discussion classes. Rituals like your graduations, you would attend graduations wherever they were held, and all you had to do was to apply.

A member of staff at Unisa from the CEMS in his account of cultural practices experienced at first at his department indicated that:

So that part of the culture did not fit well with me, and also where I come from we had a communal tearoom and a kitchen and at 10 o'clock, lunchtime, and afternoon tea, people will gravitate towards the tearoom and people would make tea for themselves and eat their sandwiches and you would have conversations with different people.

However, the very same member in the latter part of the conversation admitted that:

Here it was different, there was a tearoom but people just dash in there to get hot water and then they ran out again, so that was difficult for me to adjust. I am still struggling with that now.

There is an indication that the perceptions of Unisa staff members vary in terms of the role practices and rituals in interpreting a post-merger institutional culture of the institution. It is important to note that some of the practices that are common, such as attending graduation ceremonies at various campuses, discussion classes and year-end function parties are still held in most departments. Further discussion on these issues will be extensively dealt with in Chapter 6, which focuses on the findings of the study and the relationship between the literature used in and for the study, the documents analysed and the perceptions of Unisa staff on their articulation of the post-merger institutional culture.

## **5.10 SUMMARY**

This chapter has closely examined the following institutional documents from Unisa:

- the vision, mission and strategic plan of Unisa (2008);
- Unisa transformation charter (2010);
- Unisa institutional operating plan (2008–2010);
- Unisa's Self-Evaluation Report (2008);
- Audit report for the Unisa (2008a); and

Interviews on the perceptions of Unisa staff members about what constitutes institutional culture at Unisa after the merger.

The discussion of the above-mentioned documents was in relation to the meanings of institutional culture alluded to in Chapter 3 of this study (see 3.4). The meanings of institutional culture were shared values and beliefs, language, symbols, university leadership, staff and student development, curriculum and practices. In discussing the documents, I have also understood what is referred to as the most serious challenge facing analysers of documentary sources concerning the *representivity* and meaning of the documents (Scott, 1990). He implores the researcher to make sure that the documents consulted are representative of the totality of relevant documents, which I did because the documents I analysed were drafted after the merger. Regarding analysis and interpretation of documents, I was guided by Burnham (2008) who says that there may be difficulty in establishing the literal *meaning* of documents with regard to meaning. However, all users of documents face problems of interpretive understanding of individual concepts, appreciation of the social and cultural context through which the various concepts are related in a particular discourse, and a judgment of the meaning and significance of the text as a whole. Scott (1990) recommends that the researcher discover as much as possible about the conditions under which the text was produced and, on that basis, make sense of the author's situation and intentions.

After interviews analyses, I fully concur with Seidman (2006:117), it is impossible for any interview to enter to the study of an interview as a clean slate. The way reader responses to the text is an interaction between him/her and the text. It is therefore suggested that I identify my interest in the subject and examine it to make sure that my interest is not confused with anger, bias and prejudice. I also noticed that there was a lot that I could analyse in this chapter, especially from the interviews, but for the purpose of the study, I had to limit myself to the meanings, as these will be discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER 6

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONTRIBUTIONS, AND CONCLUSION

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

Discussion of findings in this chapter will relate to Chapter 3, where the meanings of institutional culture were indicated. These will be discussed in relation to my findings on documents and interviews in Chapter 5, employing Jansen's contingency theory (see Jansen, 2002) for my analysis. Throughout my analysis I have found that the meanings of institutional culture are not all reflected in the institutional documents as well as the interviews. Ball (2006:47) concurs with this by saying:

Policies as texts themselves are not necessarily clear, closed, or complete. The texts are the product of compromises at various stages (at point of initial influence, in the micro-politics of legislative formulation, in the parliamentary process and in the politics and micro-politics of interest group articulation).

As per the main research question of this study (see 1.5.2), it was cardinal to conclude on how institutional culture is articulated at Unisa after the merger. In this section, I also reflect on the limitations of the study, contribution of this study to the field of institutional culture in higher education, current and recent developments in higher education and recommendations for possible future research.

A number of complex issues have brought to my attention the discourses on institutional culture and mergers. The intricate issue of merging three institutions of long distance learning, with different historical backgrounds and cultures, was not only the challenge but it was also necessary to respond to the multi-campus arrangement of the new university as well. This would involve, as we have seen in the institutional documents and interviews, the consolidation and relocation of programmes and faculties. It also required that the new institutions respond to the transformational needs of South Africa as mapped out in the Education White Paper 3 (DoE, 1997). A reshaped institutional culture would, among other benefits of this model, be an indicator of success for the



transformation of HEIs. The literature review as well as the analysis of institutional documents and interviews has led me to conclude that the meanings of institutional culture as derived from my discourses are to varying degrees present in the merger of Unisa. I start by analysing Jansen's contingency theory.

## 6.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK IN ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

Jansen's (2002) contingency theory and the reasons why it is relevant to the study is explained in Chapter 3. In this section, I report on the analysis of its relevance to the study. Jansen's contingency theory (Jansen, 2002:157) proposes that:

the origins, forms and outcomes of mergers are conditioned by, and contingent on, the specific forms of interaction between institutional micro-politics, on the one hand, and governmental macro-politics, on the other, especially in turbulent or transitional contexts.

The theory is constituted by five interrelated concepts, which I discussed in Chapter 2 under section (2.8.1.) namely the transitional context, the macro-political environment, the micro-political environment, merger formations and merger outcomes.

### *The transitional context*

The discussion of the transitional context in this section relates to the macro-environment because macro-environment has been responsible for both national and systematic changes in higher education in South Africa. The concepts correspond with the challenges faced by the government and its response to these. The transition from apartheid to a post-apartheid society was not an easy one, as the democratic government had to deal with an education system that was marred by racial inequities with white and black institutions bearing the markings (material, cultural and social) of their separate histories (Jansen, 2002:157). For example, Vista University, which was mainly offering education to blacks in townships, was more under-resourced than Unisa and TSA who had large numbers.

When I reviewed literature focusing on the pre-merger phase of the three institutions that offered distance learning in South Africa, the above-mentioned injustices were indicated (see Unisa,

2008c; Fourie, 2008; Letseka & Pitsoe, 2013). In varying degrees, each of the HEIs in South Africa had challenges along the lines as explained by Jansen (2002). Government in its response to the challenges (see Badat, 2009) employed a much more one-size-fits-all approach. The process of merger was characterised by government's imposition of a prescription regardless of the challenges faced by each institution. In the context of this study, three institutions offering distance learning merged, although they differed in most aspects, and yet two universities in Gauteng (Wits and UP) did not merge. This somehow defeats the whole rationale of mergers aiming at equity, redress and reshaping of the culture of higher education (Bajjnath, 2010).

### *Macro-political environment*

In Chapter 2 of this study, it was explained extensively how the macro-political environment led to the changes from apartheid to a democratically elected government in South Africa (see 2.8.1.3). The rationale given by Jansen (2002:159-60) for these changes, which he refers to as “twin logics of the transition”, was the logic of resolving the apartheid legacy in higher education, and the logic of incorporating the HE system within the context of a competitive, globalised economy. In Unisa (2008c), values of Jansen's first logic of eradicating the legacy of apartheid are laid out where the principles on which Unisa is run are indicated. One might ask how a certain way of doing things or behaviour will resolve the apartheid legacy. The argument could be that, as apartheid was a regulated behaviour that was systematised through practices and enforced by law (see Mawila, 2009), the same would apply in changing its behaviour. To impose behaviour using institutional values would not be an abstract practice. Unisa, through its vision (2008c), encapsulates Jansen's second logic of competitive and globalised economy by saying:

Elaborated from the perspective of an African University, it means that the University is one located and rooted in the African context, developing knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary for the development of the African continent. Critical scholarship from an African perspective becomes an authentic part of the global knowledge enterprise.

Competing with other institutions on an international level will enable Unisa to be recognised not only on the African continent, but its skills will be globally competitive.

### *Micro-political environment*

The micro-political environment refers to the internal issues of power relations, and management issues within the institution (Jansen, 2002) and it can be argued that most of this study is about Unisa's micro-political environment. The intense political contestations within institutions usually give an explanation to the merger phenomena (Jansen, 2002:161). None of the mergers in his case studies were uniformly, consistently welcomed and pursued by any two institutions. Micro-politics at Unisa manifested themselves in perceptions among staff, in leadership reactions, in processes as well as general human factors.

Merger, according to Jansen (2002) creates an environment of uncertainty and concern in all the levels of employees at an institution. The Unisa case is clearly captured in Chapter 4 and specifically in section 4.7.5, dealing with the effects of the merger on the people involved. Jansen (2002:162) narrating the SACTE-Unisa merger, notes how the real politics played out at leadership level. The Unisa rector's demonstration of not wanting the merger led him to reject it totally from the onset (see Fourie, 2008). Later he resigned, and the interim leader from the partner institution, Unisa, replaced him. Baijnath (2010:121) concurs with Jansen (2002) stating that the Unisa merger and internal politics were so bad that "the statutory structures of both Unisa and TSA felt that the Minister of Education was forcing the merger upon them and a court case was brought against the Minister". In the interviews conducted with Unisa academics, micro-politics were reflected as a former 'old' Unisa employee confirmed:

The smaller institution Technikon RSA merged with a bigger institution Unisa, but strangely enough, the most powerful and influential partner in this merger was not Unisa; it was Technikon RSA and they sort of from the outset ... how it happened I do not know, but they rather dictated the way forward. In terms of financial management, in terms of tuition modules and so on, people came from TSA and were placed in key influential positions at Unisa and started to rather disseminate the RSA Technikon way of thinking. That caused unrest and when you have unrest, trust often flies out the window, and as far, I know up to this very day, the Technikon people are on different salary scales, unlike the conventional ones.

Former TSA manager indicates micro-politics, on the other side, in terms of loss of power in the following interview extracts:

And we felt about the merger, that it would happen in any merger you know, and takeovers. Being the smaller university, I mean smaller institution compared to Unisa, insecurities become normal, to say but what do they want, we are just going to be subsumed. So there was that negativity from both sides, you know to say but these people are going to take us over. And you would feel, as I said, that sense of insecurity.

It is clear that the merger between Unisa and TSA is still arguably of 'equal partners' in terms of the size and academic profiles. Although TSA brought a large number of students to the merger, Unisa on the other hand had an established and financially sound system. This, according to Jansen (2002), became a cause of disagreement in terms of who is going to dominate in which sphere. Jansen (2002) therefore suggests that the merger of Unisa, TSA and VUDEC can be explained as asymmetrical (due to perceived equal size) other than horizontal as some literature (see Bajjnath, 2010) would suggest.

#### *Merger formation*

The literature review indicated a number of merger formations (see Linington, 2002) and sometimes there is an overlap in terms of how these merger formations are explained. Jansen (2002:163) suggests that merger formations, as part of his theory, determine the scale of power relations in the process, which is reflected in the outcomes. His merger formations are institutional obliteration, protected enclosure, subsumed integration and equal partnership.

The Unisa merger with TSA and VUDEC cannot be explained by any of these above-mentioned merger formations. For example, the kind of institutional obliteration that occurred when Giyani College of Education (GCE) and the University of Venda merged did not happen at Unisa.

However, the merger between Unisa and TSA does somehow qualify as an equal partnership but not when it comes to the third institution, VUDEC, which was just totally obliterated. The dominant role players became TSA and Unisa as 'equal partners' due to the fact that both institutions were producing graduates and postgraduates when they merged (Maminza, 2008). In

the Strategic documents (Unisa 2008c:6) on harmonising policies after merger, it is conceded, “on the whole only former TSA and Unisa policies formed part of the process of harmonisation.”

As indicated earlier (see 5.4.2), VUDEC was incorporated into the merger. Baijnath (2010:130), a former VUDEC manager, indicates that:

Let me start in the non-academic areas. I think that here we have been given a raw deal with the students. The SRC of VUDEC had been totally disregarded and side-lined and I don't know how. On the academic side, I think the problem was that students were forced to register on Unisa (old) programmes.

Significantly, this shows different forms that some mergers take as Jansen (2002) argues. The above challenges characterise mergers.

From the interviews I conducted, there were different views on Unisa policy documents in terms of the shape the merger took, especially on the perceived ‘equal partners’ of Unisa and TSA. A former TSA employee reflected on this issue by saying:

Everybody in the old TSA Campus who is moving that side – you sense that they [Unisa] do not accommodate our new management structure. Obviously, in the merged institution you are looking at revamping of structures, which is fine. However, sometimes, in various areas, there are crucial positions due to our history and now they do not consider those.

A former Unisa member in this way suggested the sentiments of the ‘old Unisa’, as being the more advanced partner in the merger:

You know, the other concern was that the modes of delivery were not a big problem, they were not a big problem and I think it was a very sound rationale for Unisa to merge with the other two you know, just education, so ... but if I said in terms of practicing the culture, for example there was an assumption that the other two institutions did not have a research culture.

In these utterances, there is a clear indication on the views of the merger formation at Unisa. The parity in terms of these perceptions between the policies and the people reflects what Ball (2009:46) refers to as “policy discourses”.

### *Merger outcomes*

Among other things, mergers are a result of strategic leadership, clear objectives and equal involvement of stakeholders. Jansen (2002:165) refers to merger outcomes as being contingent on the political forces initiating, shaping and sustaining the merger. The operation of the forces in this regard is on both micro-politics of the government and micro-politics at the level of the institutions. Jansen (2002:165-174) poses the question how these are reflected in the outcomes of the merger and listed five focal questions for judging and explaining the outcomes in relation to: equity effects, efficiency effects, curriculum effects, organisational effects, student effects, staffing effects and physical effects. However, the major focus in this study was how the merger of the three institutions influenced the post-merger institutional culture at Unisa. For that reason, Jansen's focus questions are not discussed here again as these have been discussed extensively in section 2.8.1.

## **6.3 FINDINGS ON PROPOSED MEANINGS OF INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE**

Over the years, mergers have been known to be messy, controversial, politically and economically driven and to have uncertain outcomes (Jansen, 2002; Ncayiyana, 2011). In all of these, the notion of culture in the merger is usually ignored or left to the merging institutions to sort out themselves. Bresler (2007) argues this point further by saying institutions are left to their own devices and are expected to navigate through the process of culture integration without knowledge of the process and its effects (Paul & Berry, 2013). Therefore, it becomes a challenge when one attempts to establish whether institutional culture exists, especially after the institution has been in existence for more than ten years (Prinsloo, 2015). This challenge then gives rise to a question whether, as Jansen (2002) asserts, merger discourses in higher education rely on mere detailed descriptions of specific events and localised incidents rather than generate new thinking. An answer may be found by way of the following meanings of institutional culture, from both interviews and documents.

### 6.3.1 Shared ideas and beliefs

There is a clear indication throughout the policy documents right to the interviews that the mandate was to transform higher education in South Africa to be in line with the democratic principles enshrined in the constitution of South Africa. These are non-discriminatory in terms of gender, race, language, identity, national origins and class. There is, however, still contestations about whether these principles are fully practised or whether they just appear on paper. In all the analysed Unisa documents (the strategic plan, IOP, and the audit report) it is clear that the focus was on the creation of a single dedicated distance learning higher education institution, servicing the previously disadvantaged, rural and poor for wider access to higher education (Unisa, 2008). The focus was not only on South Africa but also on the Southern African region and the African continent as a whole. The other common thread throughout the documents is the focus on creating a new cultural environment, be it a business model, research management or community engagement at Unisa.

The sense of shared values and beliefs varies from a person to person. This came to my attention from the conversations I had with staff members. It became clear that although integrity, social justice, fairness and excellence are the core values at Unisa. However, how these are being practiced and reflected culturally at Unisa is difficult to identify. On Unisa's vision of striving towards the African university in service of humanity evoked differing responses on whether the institution is managing to realise this so far or not. The assertions on this point varied from the attitude that some of Unisa staff members still reflect when dealing with students and the perceived attitude towards them. This is how a DMET member explained it:

But for us it is lack of service, not only in terms of not only being able to deliver service, loyalty and other; but service in terms of services intended for student at that point of contact with the university.

Perceptions on the concept of Unisa as a comprehensive institution also differed. Some views were that this is still not clear throughout the whole community. This is how a staff member from CEDU expressed her views:

Remember we were declared a comprehensive university; the academics were asking what does that mean because there was no clarity.

These narratives and documents point us to what Jansen (2002:161) calls the “micro-political” environment of the merger in the institution.

### 6.3.2 Language

Jacobs (2012) argues that there is a strong connection between the language of a society and its culture, and further establishes that there is a similar connection between an institution and its culture. The language of an institution reflects what is important to that institution, to its new members and those outside of the institution. This connection between language and institutional culture explains why language as an element of institutional culture plays an important role in identifying an institution’s culture. The issue of language at Unisa was and still is a critical one that has not been fully addressed to date. Despite Unisa’s language policy (Unisa, 2006:2), which is striving towards “functional multilingualism”, that is yet to be practiced. English and Afrikaans are still dominant, and English is mainly used as the language of communication by the institution. The language policy requires the university to “provide special tuition aids required by students with sensory disabilities on request and where feasible, e.g. interpreters for South African Sign Language, Braille, tapes and other functional audio and video teaching means” (Unisa, 2006:3). This sounds like an improvement in catering for students with learning challenges; however, sentiments on language as a cultural vehicle generally, are not the same. A staff member argued that:

You know certainly Afrikaans was a, an official language at Unisa together with English and it has always been the two languages, never just, so Unisa, in terms of language, and the ... the cultural aspects and there are very many that are related to language. So I think that is why I have always maintained that you ... there is no one Unisa culture, there never ... there has never been a Unisa culture. In addition, language is one issue that ... because at Unisa it has always been English and Afrikaans.

A number of academics at Unisa across the colour divide is still sharing the above sentiments. There was interestingly a general belief, especially from the white members of staff, that because both black staff and students understand English, then ‘everybody is accommodated’. The obvious implications of this are that the current language policy of the institution does not reflect the cultures of the majority of people at Unisa. Until all the African languages are on a par with the



status enjoyed by Afrikaans and English, the institutional culture reflected is still foreign to the majority. My line of argument here is driven by definitions of the role of language in institutional culture as per arguments of Toma *et al.* (2005). In my opinion, Unisa has a promising language policy whose initial aim was to address the injustices of the past in higher education, but seemingly, this had not been fully achieved at the time of this research.

### 6.3.3 Symbols

Reference to this element of the theoretical framework surfaced in Toma *et al.* (2005:60-64) where it is averred that symbols connect people with institutions; they provide a touchstone for people in the extended university community, and they are a representation of what the institution is all about. In the Unisa council document (Unisa, 2005:1-3), it is implied that the university aims to display its transformed institutional culture by proposing new names for the buildings, a new university, a new logo, a new coat of arms and other brand images. On this meaning of institutional culture after the merger at Unisa, I can concur that a lot of work has been done as per the announcement of the Education White Paper 3 (1997), which recommends these changes at the institutions. The change refers to distance education “expand access, diversify the body of learners, and enhance quality”, therefore the merger of open distance learning institutions to form Unisa contributed to the changes. Unisa has renamed a number of buildings at the main campus in Pretoria and at other sites around the country.

There is a new coat of arms and a university logo that indicates the culture that the university aspires to have. Of course, there were different views from the staff members I interviewed in terms of the process of renaming the buildings. The views varied in terms of race. White respondents felt that, after the merger, most of the buildings were named after political figures and not after people who were once part of Unisa as was the case before. Toma *et al.* (2005) posit that individuals may also serve as important symbols. The president or head of the institution often represents the institutional icon. At Unisa, Pityana is praised in both documents and by staff members for the critical role that he played as the first principal of a merged institution. His non-negotiable stance and vision of a transformed Unisa (although there were pockets of resistance) made him a symbol of a transformed institution of higher learning. Dr Phosa, the then chairperson

of the university council, is also lauded for steering Unisa towards a more accessible distance learning institution. In my opinion, Unisa has really made strides in this area and Van Wyk (2009) refers to this as important aspects of institutional culture that need to be focused on because they influence institutional culture.

### **6.3.4 University Leadership**

For any merger to succeed, according to Jansen (2002), strategic leadership is critical. For the institutions that merged, it was critical to have a leadership that would steer the process to its completion. For Jansen (2004), a strategic leadership is one that knows when to co-operate and when to resist. Institutions with leaders who cannot negotiate, who have no credible academic background and no managerial capacity, do not benefit well in the merger. There is emphasis on the importance of strategic leadership in an investigation of institutional culture. While Tierney, (1998) explains it as a category to be considered in investigating culture, Lindquist (1978) argues that strategic leadership is part of the core strategies for driving culture change (Kezar & Eckel, 2002:438).

In 2.7.1 of this dissertation, a notion of strong leadership and its cardinal role in the success of a merger was introduced. Hay and Fourie (2002) ask a question about who makes decisions during the merger, and they suggest that the Institutional Forum does, but only strategic leadership convinces the forum. The other reasons for a strong leadership are that, during this critical period, some unpopular decisions need to be taken and that requires a decisive committed leadership. There is some evidence from the literature of the leadership collapsing in some instances under the pressure of the merger. Jansen (2002) gives an example of the resignation of the VC of SACTE and Baijnath (2010) gives us an example of strong leadership shown by the VC at Unisa, Prof Pityana, in the court case brought about by forces opposed to the merger. Prof Pityana clearly stated the case for Unisa to merge and a rationale for a single distance learning institution. Evidently, from the above examples about leaders. I now realise that the process of merger can be arduous; hence, strong, strategic and determined leadership is required at all times, as indicated earlier by Jansen (2002).

The role of leadership at Unisa was acknowledged and commended by the HEQC in terms of a number of achievements, including planning, creating a vibrant intellectual culture, using management information to monitor achievement of strategic planning, incubation of new ideas and cutting-edge knowledge technologies and success in promoting and enhancing quality.

However, on the other hand, the conversations with staff members reflected a variety of perceptions in terms of the current leadership at Unisa and its role towards a post-merger institutional culture. The views ranged from viewing leadership styles in terms of transformational leadership, autocratic leadership and leadership not adhering to institutional values. The transformative leadership was traced from Prof Pityana as a former VC to the current principal, Professor Makhanya. The respondents applauded them for transforming Unisa from the troubled period of the merger to the current institutional culture. Leadership was also commended for the policies that seek to change the image of Unisa to a desired HEI in a democratic society. Kezar *et al.* (2006) and Manning (2013) define this type of leadership as a power and influence theory in which the leader acts in mutual ways with the followers, appealing to their higher needs, and inspires and motivates followers to move towards a particulate purpose. I concur with the assertions of Kezar (2006) and Manning (2013) because at Unisa there are currently monthly occasions where the university principal addresses the entire staff about any issue that they want to discuss.

Some staff members as autocratic perceived the Unisa leadership. There was a feeling that communication about policies is disseminated in a top-down fashion. This is how a senior staff member of CMES expressed his view:

I think after the merger Unisa moved a little bit more to the autocratic leadership style, more telling people what to do, and I think it's very typical for me at the moment. A lot of things just ... top management will just say, "This is the way we're going to do it." Oh, a very top-down approach, ja, ja. I was a member of senate for also a very long time, and experienced it at senate.

Another staff member from CMES saying reiterated the issue of the discontent with current leadership's actions:

Therefore, I think the one thing is, they must look at the values, and they must look at the behaviour of our leaders. Moreover, one thing which I think is very important is, if you look at the creation

of culture, the people you bring into the organisation have an effect on the culture of the organisation. And unfortunately, Unisa has brought in quite a number of people, leadership level, but not the correct competencies. In addition, that has had an effect as well, because we work for them, they are our leaders, but we can see they are not on the correct level.

The above perceptions from the conversations with staff members at Unisa suggested the variety of perceptions of how staff view the leadership, in contrast to what the policy documents indicated about the leadership. There was a common feeling that sometimes the values of integrity and democracy, which are part of Unisa's strategic documents, seem not to be practiced. Ball (2006:44) (see 1.10.1.1) alludes to this variation between policies and its interpretation by leadership and staff as complexities of policy. In this case, the 'policy as a text' is subject to interpretation and reinterpretation, as text comprise representations that are coded in complex ways. Secondly, Ball (2006) refers to policy as a discourse, where policies are about what must be said by whom and on what authority. It is therefore clear that the discourse on the values of the leadership at Unisa does not attract the attention it deserves because of the lesser authority of those who are critical of it. The third point of effects of policy is that if the leadership is perceived not to be adhering to the values that are enshrined in the institutional policies, there will be no effect in any structures of the institution. The question then is what the purpose of a policy is if it is not effective and what are the ramifications of this pertaining to the institutional culture.

The Unisa Audit Report (2008a), on the other hand, suggests areas where the institutional leadership must improve and these are relevant to my study as indicated in Chapter 5 (see 5.7). Among others are communication, planning, monitoring and improvement, human resources, synergy between the ODL model and business architecture, equipment and physical facilities and the SRC. Communication is cardinal in the creation of institutional culture as mentioned on several occasions in conversation with staff at Unisa. Barnes *et al.* (2010:139) confirm merger communication:

As the primary of sound and regular communication throughout a merger process, arguing that its effect on employees through this trying time is pervasive and significantly influences the adoption of a new culture, the changes process itself, and the level of stress employees can experience.

This becomes a concern in the case of Unisa if staff members feel that communication takes place in a top-down fashion because communications detrimental to the institutional culture. This point is further illustrated by Vukuza-Linda (2014:262) where she gives the example of the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia (VA) where many contestations linked institutional culture to communication. Also Sattar and Cooke, (1978) in their analysis of Durban Institute of Technology(DIT) merger, point out that “effective communication, in particular open communication that builds trust, may be the single most important factor in overcoming resistance to change” (Barnes *et al.*, 2010:101).

There have been ongoing contestations about institutional culture at HEIs in South Africa. In an attempt to remedy the situation, the Soudien Report (2008), among other things concerning institutional culture, indicated dissatisfaction among black staff, cynicism, anxiety, loss of voice, loss of confidence among white members of the staff, self-doubt around campuses and concerns about participation of black students (DoE, HE Summit, 2010). One might question my reasoning for insisting on university leadership in institutional culture. Schien (1985:2) and Nieman (2010) emphasise a critical role of leadership by saying that the only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture. This point out the important role of leadership in the process of forging a post-merger institutional culture.

### **6.3.5 Staff and student development**

In this section, institutional culture is discussed in relation to both academic staff and students at Unisa. The discussion first focuses on the staff, both on what documents and interviews say, and later on students. When it comes to staff, as indicated in Chapter Five (see 5.5), the documents are concerned with issues like redress, staff equity, transformation and institutional culture. The idea of linking culture to the academic community and to students’ experiences is referred to by Barnett (1990) and Van Wyk (2009), as an important aspect of a culture of an institution. Reference has already been made to Harman (2004:92) who argues that academics at universities are an embodiment of a distinctive culture as they contribute to protect, manage and sustain its traditions, ideals and values, and many other expressive forms of symbolism, which are peculiar to

universities and academic life and work. Harman (2004) also indicates that mergers will always affect academics differently as some will be happy and others will not be.

The challenges of academics at Unisa are alluded to by the Unisa Audit Report (2008b:143) and HEQC reports. As quoted in HEQC (2008), the challenge of staff turnover was not at the expected level between 2004 and 2006, as the number of target groups, like Africans; it was still below that of whites. The reasons for this challenge are that highly qualified people are often head hunted by other institutions. It then becomes a challenge to make the right appointment in terms of race classification, disability and gender equity, while at the same time appointing quality personnel (Unisa Audit Report, 2008b:17). Updating the above information, currently according to the revised strategic plan (Unisa Strategic Plan, 2016:16); there is no figure indicating the exact number of staff members from the designated groups, as per strategy in Unisa HEQC (2008), the focus now is on increasing the staff's research capacity development and their NRF-ratings.

The HEQC (2008) also pointed to the challenge of staff equity as a major concern at Unisa. It was reported, for example, that there was slow progress in terms of the number of black female staff. At that stage, there was proportionately more white staff than black, which was not reflective of the demographics of Gauteng. The number of white women had significantly grown between 2004 and 2006, while black men benefited more from redress than female counterparts (HEQC, 2006:114) did. Among many reasons given for these inequities was the lack of qualified black female academics (Unisa, 2008c). The university has since come up with strategies to assist black women in academic development academically in terms of funding their studies and research. An update on the current situation according to (Unisa, 2016:16) is that no figures are mentioned in terms of gender and racial balances. The target is to ensure that 825 permanent staff must have doctorates by 2020. Bunting *et al.* (2010:186) indicated that the number permanent staff at Unisa fell slightly between 2000 and 2008, from 4185 to 3981. In the same period, 2000-2008 student enrolment grew faster rate than the research staff increase. This might have had an impact on the staff equity issues at Unisa.

In the interviews with staff members, the issue of equity, redress and transformation were raised as important and unsatisfactory at Unisa. Some academics found it inconceivable that more than ten years after the merger, the number of black senior academics was still low.

Staff members agreed that Unisa spends a lot of money in developing its academics in terms of academic leave, research leave and leave to complete master's and doctoral studies, but this does not always lead to the required results.

This issue imposes a major risk on the work that Unisa has done so far in terms of development and empowerment gains that are enshrined in the university's strategies. Equity and redress issues are intricately linked to the institutional culture; therefore, the lack of communication and failure to address these challenges mean that the institutional culture is not welcoming to everybody, even in this post-merger phase.

Supporting the above-views expressed by some academics, the SAHRC Report (2016) commented in on the issue of staff demographics at universities in general in South Africa. From the submissions by various stakeholders at the National Hearings, a popular reasoning for lack of transformation on staff equity was that there is an insufficient pool of black and coloured professors, resulting in universities having to compete for the small pool of black and coloured academic staff (SAHRC Report, 2016:32).

Below is the table indicating staff demographics at institution according to the latest study at Transformation at Public Universities in South Africa, conducted by SAHRC (2016).

**Table 6.3.5.1**

Number and percentage of permanent staff in public HEIs, by population group, gender, personnel categories and institution, in 2014

Institution	Total Permanent Staff			% of Black Staff in Total			% of Female Staff in Total		
	Instruction and Research Staff	Administrative Staff	Service Staff	Instruction and Research Staff	Administrative Staff	Service Staff	Instruction and Research Staff	Administrative Staff	Service Staff
Cape Peninsula University of Technology	774	1 015	149	61	85	99	42	60	26
University of Cape Town	1 149	2 287	63	29	72	97	45	64	62
Central University of Technology, Free State	295	383	87	45	69	98	40	57	53
Durban University of Technology	579	766	67	73	92	100	47	53	16
University of Fort hare	334	557	28	46	84	100	37	58	7
University of the Free State	986	1 240	286	22	39	98	49	67	49
University of Johannesburg	1 104	1 895	249	46	70	99	46	53	35
University of KwaZulu-Natal	1 348	1 873	388	59	85	97	47	60	50
University of Limpopo	941	752	255	86	85	100	43	58	45
Mangosuthu University of Technology	190	275	76	92	96	100	34	52	45
University of Mpumalanga	41	50	69	80	86	100	34	36	43
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University	604	1 034	72	28	59	92	45	62	32
North West University	1 342	1 966	378	28	34	95	47	66	46
University of Pretoria	1 176	1 866	364	23	48	91	50	65	34
Rhodes University	351	537	463	25	58	99	43	62	53
University of South Africa	1 718	3 158	77	52	74	99	50	59	23
University of Stellenbosch	1 035	1 921	237	22	49	100	43	64	42
Sol Plaatje University, Northern Cape	17	12	0	59	50	0	41	67	0
Tshwane University of Technology	951	1 549	141	59	75	99	42	54	38
University of Venda	372	342	136	94	99	100	35	49	57
Vaal University of Technology	378	463	217	61	76	99	43	62	61
Walter Sisulu University	591	659	152	88	96	100	44	57	52
University of the Western Cape	615	952	29	53	93	100	50	59	7
University of the Witwatersrand	1 057	1 199	277	38	73	100	47	64	30
University of Zululand	285	391	196	81	93	100	42	50	38
<b>Total</b>	<b>18 233</b>	<b>27 142</b>	<b>4 456</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>43</b>

Source: 2014 HEMIS database, extracted in August 2015

The above table indicates that out of Unisa's 1718 Instruction and Research staff members in 2014, only 52 of the whole is black. However, the table also indicates that Unisa has a large number of most staff involved in research and instruction. When compare with other historically white institutions Unisa has somewhat made tried to transform although the progress was said to be slow during interviews.

On the student side, I focused on the following issues that relate to institutional culture; targeted students, delivery model and Unisa graduates. Baijnath (2010:122) confirms that some of the NPHE aims of creating a new single dedicated distance education institution were to "expand distance education provision to African and global students and developing a national network of



learning centres, to facilitate access and coordinate learner support systems”. The merger of UNSA/TSA/VUDEC led to the creation of a different kind of a student with which higher education is not familiar, because students were no longer going to be admitted according to race. The student type would vary from students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who were less prepared for university than others, who were poor and mostly from rural parts of the country and the African continent. Cross and Carpenter (2009:95) further suggest that universities find themselves caught up between performance and competence, and these make it difficult for new students to adapt. Lecturers and students find themselves subjected to conflicting coherences, characterised by quandary and a lack of clarity about expectations and what constitutes good academic practice.

At Unisa, since the merger and because of the model of teaching (open distance learning), there are many students of the type mentioned above. The university’s task is to make sure that facilities at the centres are accessible to an adult, who is working and also recently, young students, who are likely to be rural and who are not necessarily well informed about or proficient in the use of modern technology, especially personal computers. This at times poses a challenge because the ODL system relies on the latest technology in terms of communication between the lecturer and a student. In the Strategic Plan (Unisa, 2008c:05) emphasis is placed on improvement of the delivery model, suggesting migration towards semester modules where appropriate adaptation is towards the ODL model and academic product range. In order to develop academics to teach students effectively, the university is constantly developing academics in terms of skills required for teaching in an ODL context.

From the staff accounts about students, there have been varying perceptions. Some have argued that communication with students, given Unisa’s model, is of great concern. There was also a feeling that students are not seen on the main campus in Mucleneuk (Pretoria); hence, the Student Hub had been moved to Sunnyside Campus. A staff member told me that she felt moving students to Sunnyside was a deliberate move “to be there and not to see them”. Another view was that students seem to have an entitlement towards passing even if sometimes they do not put effort into their work. The HEQC (2008), in its recommendation to Unisa, was more focused on student participation in governing structures. Students’ invisibility in these areas was found to have

weakened their voice and sometimes lead to their concerns not being addressed immediately. The SRC was categorically mentioned in HEQC (2008:398), “We need to encourage greater participation in elections. Once the SRC is elected, we need to provide support system and schedules and insist on project plans and accountability”. A greater use of IT needs to be explored. In reviewing literature for this section, I realised that there has been limited focus on student development so far. Only Higgins (2007) studied racism among white students at UCT and Cross and Carpenter (2009) focused on institutional culture and on the ‘new student’ at Wits and adaptation problems at university. It was only lately (2015), during the #Fees Must Fall campaign, that issues affecting students at higher education institutions in South Africa came to the fore again.

### 6.3.6 Practices

The literature indicates that practices play a prominent role in institutional culture because they are symbolic of what that the institution is about (Sporn, 1996). Toma *et al.* (2005:70-74) state that practices are activities like rites, ceremonies and rituals that are intended to convey important cultural messages. In the strategic documents at Unisa, there is a common acknowledgement that practices should reflect the new culture of the institution. These are related to the university’s drive of promoting a research culture under the auspices of the Vice Principal’s Research office. An African scholar is invited to a seminar every month to present his/her work. There is a seminar throughout the institution every day. Another practice that is popular at Unisa is the principal’s address of the staff community every month and the practice of attending ceremonies in March and September every year. I concur with the interviewees’ statements that these practices might not be unique to Unisa but they do reflect a culture that has been created after the merger.

From the conversation I had with staff members, it was mentioned that various practices were carried from the respective institutions like Unisa, TSA and VUDEC before the merger, and some were still being practiced, even in the post-merger period. For example, having tea, as a department at a particular time was a practice common to most staff members at the institutions where they were before the merger. The current clock-in and clock-out system for Unisa staff members was the most disliked form of practice reported by the interviewees complaining that, after the merger, they felt as if they were being treated like factory workers and not like academics. Cultural

practices that some staff members have in their departments are research weekends away, celebrating birthdays, engagements and weddings of other colleagues and financial contributions for bereavements. Briefly, there is variation in terms of perceptions as to the practices, but this is what Välimaa (1998) alludes to in the post-merger cultural sense-making period, namely that it a contentious period where the cultures that were opposed are fused together in order to create a common post-merger institutional culture.

### **6.3.7 Curriculum**

The common objective in the Unisa strategic and planning documents is to have the institution contributing in terms of HE access to the majority of poor, previously disadvantaged people wherever they are in the country or on the African continent. This idea is in line with government's proposal in the Education White Paper 3 (1997) when the merger of all distance-learning institutions was planned. For the provision of relevant education to the post-democratic South Africa, the curriculum at Unisa has to “contribute to the full personal development of each student in order for that student to contribute to the social and economic development of society at large” (Unisa, 2008b:120). There is an understanding that for the above to be realised, the curriculum must encompass how, what is to be learned, and recognition of students' prior learning. The target in the curriculum is for a Unisa graduate to be able to compete with others from other universities around the world, but especially for the institution to have centres in other parts of the world.

Some interviewed staff members concurred with the strategic documents on the importance of the curriculum towards shaping a post-merger institutional culture. However, there were some concerns about the curriculum if it has to focus, among other things on “knowledge that will lead to solve Africa's challenges”, as the strategic documents suggests (Unisa, 2008c:16). A staff member from CEDU indicated his concerns about the issue of Africanisation of the curriculum at Unisa, if it has taken place at all since the merger:

If we decolonise, it means now we no longer operate within the coloniser's culture, we want to embrace other people within the institution. And particularly the indigenisation of curriculum, Africanisation of curriculum tells you that you have been excluding other people within the curriculum. Yes, we can use African languages, but Africanisation or indigenisation simply means, bring into the curriculum the thinking of Africans, the thoughts of Africans, the philosophies of

Africans, the approaches of Africans, the epistemologies of African people into the curriculum in order to solve African problems.

The excerpt indicates the challenges that the institution face in terms of curriculum change. The issue of the curriculum at universities is not only unique to Unisa; it is a challenge for the entire higher education system in the country. As indicated in Chapter 3 (see 3.2.7), Cloete and Bunting (2000:60) say that when universities attempt curriculum reforms, they only make the curriculum more relevant to the labour market, rather than bringing gender, race and broader socio-political awareness into the curriculum. Cloete and Bunting (2000:57) further argue that even where institutions have introduced modules of gender or Africa, “these are often add-on rather marginal to the main curriculum”. Vice (2015) laments on the lack of Africanisation of the curriculum at universities and states that institutions alienate black students in this way. The recent SAHRC Report (2016) on public institutions also reflected on the need for changes in the curriculum form it’s euro-centric to a more decolonised curriculum. Once more, there is no parity in terms of how the documents envisage Unisa’s curriculum and its contribution towards post-merger institutional culture and the perceptions of some staff members. There is a concern that, if the curriculum is perceived to be contrary to the vision of the institution being a university towards African humanity, how will it be possible for the curriculum to play a critical role in shaping the institutional culture? Surely, this calls for a definitive review of the curriculum in order to strengthen it not only to be labour-related but also to reflect the African region within which university exists.

#### **6.4 STATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Towards the end of 2015, a lot has happened in higher education in South Africa, which the media referred to as ‘last seen in 1976 and how untransformed some white universities are’ (see Sowetan, 2016). The student movement called #RhodesMustFall started at the UCT campus campaigning for the removal of the statue of the British imperialist Cecil Rhodes, among other things. There was unhappiness, especially among black students, at symbols of colonialism like the statue of Cecil Rhodes, and within few weeks, the protest spread to other universities around the country. It

became clear that most black students, especially at historically white universities, complained about the lack of transformation and institutional culture that makes them not feel welcomed. Students claimed temporary victory when UCT management agreed to remove the statue of Rhodes from its position on campus, and colonial statues were vandalised on other campuses. The student protests have again brought to the fore the issues of transformation and institutional culture, which were initiated in Higher Education White Paper 3 (1997) and ostensibly only the surface was scratched.

In the few weeks of the protest against colonial symbols on campuses, #FeesMustFall started as students' protest against the cost of education, again at historically white institutions. Although the campaign started at Wits, it spread throughout the country. Eventually government placed a moratorium on fee increases by universities for the year 2016. What do all these activities indicate to me as a researcher busy with institutional culture in higher education?

I go back to the comment by Van Wyk and Higgs (2004) that institutional culture is under-explored and under-researched, especially in higher education. The mere fact that almost twenty years after transformation was supposed to have taken place, students are still subjected to an institutional culture that is unwelcoming, clearly suggests that there is a lot that needs to be done. Thaver (2006) and Vice (2015:51) suggest that institutional culture must make everyone 'feel at home' or being in one's element, being in a situation or environment that naturally fits one's fundamental type or character'. What Vice is suggesting is still a pipe dream in some institutions of higher education HEIs in South Africa if the racial incidents and tensions on campuses are anything to go by. More research can be conducted on the issues of institutional culture in higher education and on the implementation aspects of the transformation of institutional culture as Vice (2015:57) suggests that:

Transforming the culture of an institution is supposed to remove distinction, hierarchy and alienation, supposed to make everyone whether pursuing academic, support or management task, feel equally welcome, and valued in pursuit of a project that everyone can see the importance of in some way.

If there are any lessons learnt from the student protests in 2015, it must be that future research is needed to focus on students' voices on institutional culture and transformation issues in higher education because they are the ones who get affected most.

## **6.5 THESIS OF MY STUDY**

Findings of my study were discussed in this final chapter. A discussion on the theoretical framework was engaged upon, in relation to the meanings of institutional culture after merger at Unisa. After analysing both documents and interviews, applying relevant theories of both mergers and institutional culture, guided by Jansen's contingency theory on mergers, I have come to conclude that institutional culture is influenced by micro and macro politics, which eventually make it difficult to define.

I reflected upon the journey of taking up a study of this nature in several ways, and I ended up being convinced that it is a scholarly work that has been scrutinised on various platforms. There have been some limitations but I have also grown in terms of how to engage, think and write academically, and also indicated possible pathways for the future.

The initial question underlying this study was about the articulation of institutional culture at Unisa after the merger. To answer this question proved to be a challenge as I indicated at the beginning of this section. It was not easy to pinpoint the post-merger institutional culture at Unisa due to the nature of the phenomenon itself as explained in this chapter. The theoretical framework has pointed to the contribution of the merger to the current system, and documents and conversations with some staff members brought understanding of the difficulty of explaining institutional culture because of differences in terms of what policies are saying and how individuals perceive and interpret those policies. At Unisa, this is the case because mergers influenced perceptions of institutional culture and can be summarised as follows: the merger between Unisa and TSA was one of equal partners because they had almost the same number of students and resources; they offered degrees to students. Somehow, this made the process of harmonisation of policies not too difficult, although compromises had to be made.

My thesis in this study is that although institutional culture was not defined in the same way, there are common aspects that most of my respondents acknowledged as indicating a “certain institutional culture at Unisa,” The following were reflected by interviewees from selected departments and centres of the university:

**Achievement orientated culture:** this was indicated as common across the colleges, departments and centres at Unisa. The cause of it are the incentives for almost all activities from publishing, and assessment of one’s performance. In other words, one’s upward mobility is tied to what and how much one has achieved.

**Competition among colleges, departments and centres:** The incentives for research output from the department of higher education and from Unisa came out as the driver of competition. This also exerts pressure on academics to publish more and increase student’s outputs especially on postgraduate studies to increase each department’s research fund.

**Restrictive post-merger culture:** reference here was specifically made towards changes that occurred after the merger in 2004. Unisa academics before the merger used work flexi –hours, meaning that they could work from 8 until 1 in the afternoon. This changed after the merger to what was referred to as “factory hours” meaning now working hours are from 8h00 to 16h00. There is also a clocking system that most of the interviewees did not agree with, arguing that it is not suitable for an institution like Unisa.

**Loss of academic freedom:** restrictions in terms of the research focus of the institutions, performance management, fixed working hours; were all indicated as contributing to loss of academic freedom. This happened after the merger; according to members that were at Unisa as these were the measures that were put in place to manage the merged institution.

**Identity of Unisa:** challenge of whether Unisa is a comprehensive institution or not, when it comes to courses that are offered. The question around whether Unisa is exclusively an ODL institution, because of migration to urban areas, a number of students have direct access to the main campus, especially in Pretoria. Given the challenges with technology especially in rural areas, is Unisa able to keep up with changes in terms of latest technology to suit its business model? There were concerns about whether Unisa is taking advantage of its lower fees, in marketing itself so that it becomes a first choice to students.

Gaging from what I have gathered from the interviews, there is still a lot to be done by the current leadership at UNISA to ensure that the intended institutional culture is realised. The above-mentioned indicators of what I referred to as “common post-merger culture “at Unisa, are providing new knowledge to the existing body of scholarship pertaining to institutional culture. Yes, there are good policies in place, as most staff members agreed, but the issues of communication, transparency and democratic principles still need attention. By his own admission, Professor Makhanya, addressing academics on 15 April 2016 said:

The merger changes jolted some out of what was a very comfortable, well run, relatively small, professionally established academic environment, into a comprehensive, Mega University with dissonant cultures and huge numbers of very different students. That process has never really let up and when accompanied by what many perceive as disrespect for their professionalism and their disciplines in favour of the ascendancy of the support function, this has in some instance led to despondency and withdrawal on the part of academics.

## **6.6 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY**

This study contributes to the discourse of HE transformation in South Africa, specifically to the burning issue of institutional culture of an ODL, which remains an under-researched phenomenon in the country. In Chapter 2, I have introduced (building on the existing discourses on institutional culture) the importance of literature in the study, and in Chapter 3, the concepts of institutional culture (see 3.3) and a university in an ODL context (see 4.3). Estermann and Pruvot (2015) provided latest lessons from European view that; firstly, mergers increase numbers and that enables universities to increase their wealth on a certain scale, and use fairly use the resources. Secondly, mergers should never be driven my economic gains, although in many cases this is usually a rational and a driving force. On the other hand, Verhoeven and Devos (2004) in merger studies in Belgium colleges, argue that these mergers were successful because there was an agreement among the staff members and the fact that all the colleges were going to be upgraded to level of universities. The point still stressed is that mergers needs not to be politically driven, consensus among the people who are going to be affected, is important.

Among issues like HE funding, the institutional culture debate has come back to the South Africa’s discourses in the past two years (2015 and 2016), after more than a decade of HE transformation,



and my study contributes to this discourse. My analyses of national HE policy documents, institutional documents of Unisa and conversations with selected staff members on how institutional culture can be articulated in the post-merger phase have led to a better understanding of institutional culture. This study focused uniquely on institutional culture at an ODL institution, which sets it apart from other works in this arena. My study has also covered seven meanings of institutional culture.

The application of critical hermeneutics, especially in conceptual analysis, as a method of analysing mergers and institutional culture has been cardinal. The critical analysis of concepts gave me in-depth insight into how the merger process evolved and how it later influenced institutional culture. The issues of institutional culture and mergers are still being grappled with at most institutions in the country, whether they merged or not. A study such as the present one provides an arena for those involved in policymaking and discourses around this topic. It is also my belief that Unisa will, through this study, find an opportunity to revisit the issue of institutional culture in its entirety. Therefore, my study does not only contribute the body of scholarship theoretically and methodologically, but also provides information that is useful.

## **6.7 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

A limitation in this study might be the fact that I concentrated solely on one merged institution, Unisa, which I still believe was big and relevant enough to collect data that answer my research question. Documents analysed give limited information on the practicality of the policies and documents are not directly addressing institutional culture issues at Unisa.

Regarding the interviews, I comment on the limitation in terms of the small number of people who were directly involved in the merger, as many had either passed away or had left Unisa. I view the inability to have the students' voices or their perceptions of institutional culture as a limitation, although the reason was that it was difficult to find students who had been studying at Unisa for a lengthy period as in the case of staff members. Given the recent student protests at universities in South Africa in 2015 and early 2016, it would have been interesting to hear their perceptions of the culture of the institution. Although there are limitations, I also acknowledge that, in a study of

this magnitude, there will never be a full coverage of all issues especially those came up in the course of the study, due to time constrains; hence, there is always an opportunity for future research.

## **6.8 CONCLUSION**

This chapter discussed findings of the study. Discussions evolved around the theoretical framework Jansen's contingency theory (see Jansen, 2002) and its relevance to the findings in this chapter, especially to the merger at Unisa. I have discussed interviews and documents according to my meanings of institutional culture and I have found that the meanings of institutional culture are not all reflected in the institutional documents as well as the interviews. However, it has been established that there is a Unisa culture after the merger, as perceived by the staff interviewed. I conclude that my theoretical framework and analysis of concepts has enabled me to answer my research question.

Given the history and the background of institutions that merged to form Unisa, forging an institutional culture would not be easy, but the university is on the right path in terms of working towards realising this goal. There remains a lot of work to be done, but the leadership of the institution is seemingly devising future strategies for the institution like the new revised Transformation Charter at Unisa.

**REFERENCES**

- Allen, A. 1998. Rethinking power. *Hypatia*, 13(1): 21-40.
- Alvesson, M. 2012. *Understanding organizational culture*. Sage.
- Applebaum, S.H., Gandell, J., Yortis, H., Proper, S. & Jobin, F. 2000. Anatomy of a merger: Behaviour of organizational factors and processes throughout the pre-during-post-stages (Part 1). *Management Decision*, 38(9): 649-662.
- Apel, K.O. 1980. The a priori of the Communication Community and the Foundations of Ethics: The Problem of a Rational Foundation of Ethics in the Scientific Age. *Towards a transformation of philosophy*, 225-300.
- ASHE (Association for the Study of Higher Education). 2005. *Understanding Institutional Culture*. ASHE Higher Education Report, 31(2): 39-54.
- Atkinson, P. & Coffey, A. 1996. *Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies*. California: Sage.
- Babbie, E. & Mouton, J. 2001. *The practice of social science research*. Cape Town: Wardsworth.
- Badat, S. 2009. Theorising institutional change: Post-1994 South African higher education. *Studies in Higher Education*, 34(4): 455-467.
- Baldick, C. 2015. *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Ball, S.J. 2009. *Education policy and social class: The selected works of Stephen J. Ball*. London: Unisa Press.
- Ball, S.J. 2006. The necessity and violence of theory. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 27(1): 3-10.
- Barnes, T., Baijnath, N. & Sattar, K. (Eds.). 2010. *The restructuring of South African higher education: Rocky roads from policy formulation to institutional mergers, 2001-2005*. Pretoria: Unisa Press.
- Baijnath, N. 2010. *From policy to process and effects: Establishing the 'new Unisa', the single dedicated distance education institution*. In Barnes, T., Baijnath, N. & Sattar, K. (Eds.). 2010. *The restructuring of South African higher education: Rocky roads from policy formulation to institutional mergers, 2001-2005*. Pretoria: Unisa Press.
- Baumann, Z., 1999. *In search of politics*. London: Polity.

- Bellwood, P., Chambers, G., Ross, M. & Hung, H.C. 2011. Are 'cultures' inherited? Multidisciplinary perspectives on the origins and migrations of Austronesian-speaking peoples prior to 1000 BC. In *investigating archaeological cultures*. New York, NY: Springer, 321-354.
- Berger, P.L. & Luckman, T. 1966. *Modernity, pluralism and the crisis of meaning: The orientation of modern man*: Bertelsmann Foundation.
- Beukes, C.J. 2010. *A critical-hermeneutical inquiry of schools as learning organisations*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.
- Birch, A.H. 1993. *The concepts and theories of modern democracy*. London: Routledge.
- Bitzer, E. 2009. *Higher education in South Africa: A scholarly look behind the scenes*. African SUN MeDIA.
- Bitzer, E. & Botha, N. 2011. *Curriculum Inquiry: In South African higher education*. SUN MeDIA
- Bleicher, J. 1980. *Contemporary hermeneutics: Hermeneutics as method, philosophy critique*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Botha, N. 2009. Some current curriculum issues in South African higher education. *Higher Education in South Africa. A scholarly look behind the scenes*. Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA, 155-182.
- Boote, D. & Beile, P. 2005. Scholars before researchers: On the centrality of the dissertation literature review in research preparation. *Educational Researcher*, 34(6): 3-5.
- Boote, D.N. & Beile, P. 2004. The quality of dissertation literature reviews: A missing link in research preparation. In *Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association*, San Diego, CA.
- Bourdieu, P. 1998. *Practical reason: On the theory of action*. California: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. 2003. "Social Reproduction". *Culture: Critical Concepts in Sociology*. Ed. C. Jenkins. New York: Routledge Publishers.
- Bowman, R. 1999. Change in education: Connecting the dots. *The Clearing House*, 72(5): 295-298.
- Bresler, N. 2007. The challenge to reposition three divergent higher education institutions as a new comprehensive institution. *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences*, 10(2): 195-206.

- Broadbent, C. 1997. Researching education in new times. Paper presented at an Australian Association of Research in Education Conference in Brisbane from 30 November to December.
- Brzezinski, L. 1997. Reflections on the university. In J. Brzezinski & L. Nowak (Eds.). *The idea of the university*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 201-221.
- Buckley, P.J. & Ghauri, P.N., 2002. *International mergers and acquisitions: A reader*. Cengage Learning EMEA.
- Bunting, I. 2006. The higher education landscape under apartheid. In *Transformation in higher education*. Netherlands: Springer, 35-52.
- Bunting, I. & Cloete, N. 2004. *Developing performance indicators for higher education: A South African case study* (Vol. 3). Pretoria: CHET.
- Bunting, I. & Smith, M. 1993. I. Distance Universities and Technikon: Distance Universities and Technikons in South Africa 1988-1993: Education Policy Unit, UWC.
- Bunting, I., Sheppard, C., Cloete, N. & Belding, L. 2010. *Performance indicators in South African higher education 2000-2008*. African minds. Pretoria: CHET.
- Buono, A.F. & Bowditch, J.L. 1990. Ethical considerations in merger and acquisition management: A human resource perspective. *SAM Advanced Management Journal*, 55(4): 18.
- Burbules, N. & Warnick, B. 2003. *Introductory chapter: Ten methods in philosophy of education*. Unpublished paper prepared for the International Handbook on Methods in Philosophy of Education. Forthcoming.
- Burgess, P.W. 1997. Theory and methodology in executive function research. Rabbit, P (Ed) *Methodology of frontal and executive function*). Manchester: Psychology Press, 81-116.
- Burgess, W.E. 1997. The Oryx guide to distance learning. *A comprehensive listing of electronic and other media-assisted courses*. Phoenix: Oryx Press.
- Burnham, P., Gilland, K., Grant, W. & Layton-Henry, Z. 2008. *Research methods in politics*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Byrne, M.M 2001. *Hermeneutics as methodology for textual analysis-nursing applications*. Association of Operating Room Nurses. Retrieved from

- [http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_mOFS/is\\_5\\_73/ai\\_74571586](http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_mOFS/is_5_73/ai_74571586) [Accessed: 11 October 2013].
- Byrne, M.M. 1998. *Hermeneutics 101*. Atlanta: Georgia State University.
- Calhoun, C. 1995. *Critical social theory: Culture, history, and the challenge of difference*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Calhoun, C.J. 1994. *Social theory and the politics of identity*. Oxford: Oxford Publishers, 9-36.
- Caputo, J.D. 1988. *Radical hermeneutics: Repetition, deconstruction, and the hermeneutic project*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Caputo, J.D. 2002. Radical hermeneutics matters all the way down. *Global Perspectives on Science & Spirituality*, 24 May.
- CHE (Council for Higher Education). 1999. *CHE Annual Report 1998/99*. Pretoria: CHE.
- CHE (Council on Higher Education). 2000. *towards a new higher education landscape: Meeting the equity, quality and social development imperatives of South Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup>*: Pretoria: CHE.
- CHE (Council on Higher Education). 2004. *South African higher education in the first decade of democracy*. Pretoria: CHE.
- CHE (Council on Higher Education). 2007. *Review of higher education in South Africa*. Pretoria: CHE.
- CHE (Council on Higher Education). 2009. The state of higher education report. *Higher Education Monitor 8*. Pretoria: CHE.
- CHE (Council on Higher Education). 2010. Access and throughput in South African higher education: Three case studies. *Higher Education Monitor 9*. Pretoria.
- CHE (Council on Higher Education). 2016. *South African Higher Education Reviewed: Two decades of democracy*. Pretoria: CHE.
- Clark, B.R. & Neave, G.R. 1992. *The Encyclopaedia of Higher Education*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Cloete, N. & Bunting, I. 2000. *Higher education transformation: Assessing performance in South Africa*, Vol. 3. Pretoria: CHE.
- Cloete, N., Fehnel, R., Gibbon, T., Maassen, P., Moja, T., & Perolds, H. (Eds). 2002. Transformation in higher education: Global pressures and local realities in South Africa. In *Higher education and globalization*. Pretoria: Springer.

- Coffey, A. & Atkinson, P. 1996. *Making sense of qualitative data analysis: Complementary strategies*. California: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Cohen, I. & Manion, L. 1994. *Research methods in education*. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Cooke, H.P. & Tredennick, H. 1938. Aristotle: Categories. *On Interpretation*. Prior Analytics: Loeb Classic Library.
- Corbett, A. & Henkel, M. 2013. The Bologna dynamic: Strengths and weaknesses of the Europeanisation of higher education. *European Political Science*. Nature Publishing Group.
- Creswell, J.W. 2013. *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approach*. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Cross, M. & Carpenter, C. 2009. New students in South African higher education: Institutional culture, student performance and the challenge of democratisation. *Perspectives in Education*, 27(1): 6-18.
- Dallenbach, H.G., George, J.A. & Nickle, D.C. 1983. Introduction to OR techniques.
- Danner, H 1995. Hermeneutics in Educational Discourse: Foundations. In, P Higgs (Ed.), *Metatheories in Philosophy of Education*. Johannesburg: Heineman, 221-244.
- Demeterio, F.P.A. 2001. Critical hermeneutics. *Diwatao*, 1(1): 1-8.
- Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. 2005. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dilthey, W. 2010. *Wilhelm Dilthey*. Retrieved from <http://philosophyprofessor.com/philosophers/wilhelm-dilthey.php/> [Accessed: 8 May 2013].
- DoBE (Department of Basic Education). 2010. *Education statistics in South Africa 2009*. Pretoria.
- DoE (Department of Education). 1997. *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education*. Government Gazette No.18207, Pretoria.
- DoE (Department of Education). 1998. *The incorporation of colleges of education into the higher education sector: A framework for implementation*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- DoE (Department of Education). 1999. *Call to action: Mobilising citizens to build a South African education and training system for the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- DoE (Department of Education). 2002. *A new academic policy for programmes and qualifications in higher education*. Pretoria.

- DoE (Department of Education). 2004. *The Higher Education Qualifications Framework: Draft for discussion*. Retrieved from <http://education.pwv.gov.za/content/documents/486.pdf> [Accessed: 3 February 2014].
- Du Pré, R. 2009. *The place and role of universities of technology in South Africa*. Durban: Art Printers.
- Du Toit, C.M. 1996. Transforming and Managing the Organisational Culture of a University to Meet the Challenges of a Changing Environment. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 10(1): 96-104.
- Ellen, R.F. (Ed.). 1984. *Ethnographic research: A guide to general conduct*. London: Academic Press.
- ESDS (The Economic and Social Data Service) Qualidata. 2007. *Exploring diverse interview*. Retrieved from <http://www.esds.ac.uk/qualidata/support/interview/semi.asp/> [Accessed: 13 April 2014].
- Estermann, T. & Pruvot, E.B. 2015. The Rise of University Mergers in Europe. *International Higher Education*, 82: 12-13.
- Fataar, A. 2010. *Education policy development in South Africa's democratic transition*. Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA.
- Fay, B. 1996. *Contemporary philosophy of social science: A multicultural approach*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Fontana, A. & Frey, J.H. 2000. From neutral stance to political involvement. In: N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.). *Handbook of qualitative research*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 695-723.
- Forest, J.J. & Kinser, K. 2002. *Higher education in the United States: An encyclopaedia*. Denver: Abc-clio.
- Forster, M.N. 2007. Hermeneutics. In: B. Leiter & M. Rosen (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Continental Philosophy*. London: Oxford University Press, 1-62.
- Fourie, M.E. 2008. *Mergers in higher education: Towards a survival kit for conserving the self*. Published Degree thesis. Pretoria: Unisa.
- Frey, L.R., Botan, C.H., Friedman, P.G. & Kreps, G.L. 1991. *Investigating communication: An introduction to research methods*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Gadamer, H. 1975. *Truth and method*. London: Sheed & Ward.



- Gadamer, H.G., Weinsheimer, J. & Marshall, D.G. 2004. *EPZ truth and method*. Massachusetts: Bloomsbury.
- Gallagher, S. 1992. *Hermeneutics and education*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Given, L.M. (Ed.). 2008. *The Sage Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, Vol. 1. London: Sage.
- Gibson, K.L.; Rimmington, G.M. & Landwehr-Brown, M. 2008. *Developing global awareness and responsible world citizenship with global learning*. *Roeper Review*, 30(1): 11-23.
- Goduka, I.N. 1996. Challenges to Traditionally White Universities: affirming diversity in the Curriculum. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 10(1): 27-39.
- Goedegebuure, L. 1992. *Mergers in higher education: A comparative perspective*. Utrecht: Lemma.
- Gottesman, L. 1996. *Hermeneutics: What is it? Is it critical?* Paper presented at the International Conference on Critical Thinking, 28-31 July, Sonoma, CA.
- Grondin, J. 1994. *Introduction to philosophical hermeneutics*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Guignon, C. 2002. Truth in interpretation: A hermeneutic approach. In: M. Krausz (Ed.), *Is there a single right interpretation?* University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 264-284.
- Habermas, J. 1987. *The Theory of Communicative Action*. Vol. 2. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Habermas, J. 1989. *Towards a rational society: Student protest, science and politics*. London: Heinemann.
- Hall, M.; Symes, A. & Luescher, T. 2004. *The governance of mergers in South African higher education*. Pretoria: CHE.
- Harman, G., 1988. Studying mergers in higher education. *Institution Amalgamations in Higher Education: Process and Outcome in Five Countries* Armadale: University of New England.
- Harman, G. 2000. Institutional mergers in Australian higher education since 1960. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 54(4): 343-366.
- Harman, G. 2004. New directions in internationalizing higher education: Australia's development as an exporter of higher education services. *Higher Education Policy*, 17(1): 101-120.

- Harman, G. & Harman, K. 2003. Institutional mergers in higher education: Lessons from international experience. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 9(1): 29-44.
- Harman, K. 2002. Merging divergent campus cultures into coherent educational communities: Challenges for higher education leaders. *Higher Education*, 44(1): 91-114.
- Harman, K.M. 1989. Culture and conflict in academic organisation: Symbolic aspects of university worlds. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 27(3): first-last page.
- Harman, K. & Meek, L. 2002. Merger revisited: International perspectives on mergers in higher education (Introduction to special issue). *Higher Education*, 44(1): 1-4.
- Hart, C. 1998. *Doing a literature review: Releasing the social science research imagination*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Hart, C. 2005. *Doing your master's dissertation*. London: Sage.
- Harvey, L. 1990. *Critical social research*. London: Unwin Hyman.
- Harvey, L. 2001. *Student feedback: A report to the Higher Education Funding Council for England*. Birmingham: Centre for Research and Quality, University of Central England.
- Harvey, L.J. & Myers, M.D. 1995. Scholarship and practice: The contribution of ethnographic research methods to bridging the gap. *Information Technology & People*, 8(3): 13-27.
- Hay, D. & Fourie, M. 2002. Preparing the way for mergers in South African higher and further education institutions: An investigation into staff perceptions. *Higher Education*, 44(1): 115-131.
- HEQC (Higher Education Quality Committee). 2006. *Self-review report*. Pretoria: National Commission on Higher Education.
- HEQC (Higher Education Quality Committee). 2008. *Self-review report*. Pretoria: National Commission on Higher Education.
- HESA (Higher Education South Africa). 2008. *Institutional culture: The foundation of university success*. Presentation at the Conference on Institutional Culture, 30 May, Stellenbosch University. Retrieved from <http://www.sun.ac.za/university/Diversities/docs/InstitutionalCultureUSkonferensiePresentation30May2008.ppt/> [Accessed: 16 September 2014].
- Higgins, J. 2007. Institutional culture as keyword. *Review of higher education in South Africa*. Retrieved from <http://www.che.ac.za/documents/d0001146/8-Review HE SA 2007.pdf> [Accessed: 9 March 2014].

- Higgs, P. & Van Wyk, B. 2004. Towards an African philosophy of higher education. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 18(3): 196-210.
- Higgs, P. & Van Wyk, B. 2007. The transformation of university teaching and learning: An African philosophical perspective. *Indilinga – African Journal of Indigenous Knowledge Systems*, 6(2): 177-187.
- Hirsch, E.D. Jr. 1978. *The aims of interpretation*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Hirst, P. & Carr. W. 2005. Philosophy and education: A symposium. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 39(4): 615-632.
- Hirst, P.H. & Peters, R. 1998. Education and philosophy. In P. Hirst & P. White (Eds.). *Philosophy of Education: Major themes in the analytic tradition. Volume I*: London: Routledge, 27-38.
- Hjørland, B. & Nicolaisen, J. 2005. The epistemological lifeboat. Hermeneutics. *Epistemology and philosophy of science for information scientists*. Retrieved from [http://www.iva.dk/jni/lifeboat old/Positions/Hermeneutics.htm/](http://www.iva.dk/jni/lifeboat%20old/Positions/Hermeneutics.htm/) [Accessed: 7 July 2015].
- Holder, R.W. 2008. *Dictionary of euphemisms*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Holmberg, B. 2005. *Theory and practice of distance education*. New York: Routledge.
- Holmberg, B. & Baath, J.A. 1988. *Essentials of distance education: A short handbook*. Association of European Correspondence Schools.
- Intelecon Research. 2000. *Use of ICTs for learning and distance education*. [Online] at:<http://www.col.org/colint/00inteleco.df>. Accessed 2015/07/18 Vancouver: COL International.
- Jacobs, A.H. 2012. A critical-hermeneutical inquiry of institutional culture in higher education. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.
- Jansen, J. 2002. *Mergers in higher education: Lessons learned in transitional contexts*. Pretoria: Unisa Press.
- Jansen, J. 2003. Mergers in South African higher education: Theorising change in transitional contexts. *Politikon*, 30(1): 27-50.
- Jansen, J. 2004. Changes and continuities in South Africa's higher education system, 1994–2004. In: L. Chisholm (Ed.), *Changing class: Education and social change in post-apartheid South Africa*. Pretoria: HSRC Press.

- Jansen, J., with Herman, C., Matentjie, T., Morake, R., Pillay, V., Schoole, C. & Web, E. 2007. Tracing and explaining change in higher education: The South African case. *CHE Review of higher education: Selected themes*. Pretoria: CHE, 157-188.
- Jappie, N.; Cross, M. & Johnson, B. 2003. *Establishing a space of dialogue and possibilities: Campus climate at the University of the Witwatersrand*.
- Johnson, G. & Scholes, K. 2001. *Exploring public sector strategy*: Pearson Education.
- Jones, A.C., Scanlon, E. & Clough, G. 2013. Mobile learning: Two cases studies of supporting inquiry learning in informal and semiformal settings. *Computers & Education*, 61: 21-32.
- Jones, A., Kirkup, G. & Kirkwood, A. 1992. *Personal computers for distance education: The study of educational innovation*. London: Paul Chapman.
- Kamsteeg, F. 2008. In search of a merged identity: The case of multi-campus North-West University of South Africa. *The Journal for Trans-Disciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, 4(2): 431-450.
- Keegan, D. 1993. *Theoretical principles of distance education*. NY: Routledge.
- Keegan, D.Ed., 2005. *Theoretical principles of distance learning*. NY: Routledge.
- Kezar, A.J., Carducci, R. & Contreras-McGavin, M. 2006. Rethinking the “L”. *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 31(6): 1-218.
- Kezar, A.J. & Eckel, P.D. 2002. The effect of institutional culture on change strategies in higher education. Universal principles or culturally responsive concepts: *The Journal of Higher Education*, 73(4).
- Kincheloe, J.L. & McLaren, P. 2000. Rethinking critical theory and qualitative research. In: N.K. Denzin & Y.S. Lincoln (Eds.). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 279-314.
- Kinsella, E.A. 2006. Hermeneutics and critical hermeneutics: Exploring possibilities within the art of interpretation. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 7(3).
- Kotecha, P. & Harman, G. 2001. *Exploring institutional collaboration and mergers in higher education*. Pretoria: South African Universities Vice-Chancellors Association.
- Krause-Jensen, J. 2013. *Flexible firm: The design of culture at Bang & Olufsen*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Kripke, S.A. 1972. Naming and necessity. In: D. Davidson & G. Harman (Eds.), *Semantics of natural language*. Dordrecht: Reidel, (238).

- Kuh, G.D. & Whitt, E.J. 1988. *The invisible tapestry: Culture in American colleges and universities*. ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No. 1. Washington, DC: Association for the Study of Higher Education.
- Kuhn, T.S. 1996. *The structure of scientific revolutions*. Third edition. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Laurence, S. & Margolis, E. 2003. Concepts and conceptual analysis. *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 67: 253-282.
- Le Grange, L. 2016. Decolonising the university curriculum: leading article. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 30(2): 1-12.
- Letseka, M. 2015. *Open distance learning in South Africa*. New York, NY: Nova.
- Letseka, M. & Pitsoe, V. 2013. The challenges and prospects of access to higher education at Unisa. *Studies in Higher Education*, 39(10): 1942-1954.
- Lincoln, Y.S. 1995. Emerging criteria for quality in qualitative and interpretive research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 1(3): 275-289.
- Linnington, M.J. 2002. Report on merger experiences by Vista and Vudec staff in the TSA-UNISA-VUDEEC merger. Unpublished Report, Vista University, Pretoria.
- Locke, W. 2007. Higher education mergers: Integrating organisational cultures and developing appropriate management styles. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 61(1): 83-102.
- Lyster, R. 2016. The New Yorker: *The student Protest Roiling South Africa*: October 21.
- Madison, G.B. 1990. *The hermeneutics of postmodernity: Figures and themes*: Indiana University Press.
- Maguire, S. J. 1991. Gadamer's Hermeneutics: Criticism and community. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, Canada.
- Makoe, M. 2015. *Open distance learning in South Africa*. New York, NY: Nova.
- Maminza, P.M. 2008. The role of the University of South Africa in the development of human resources in Mpumalanga province. Unpublished dissertation. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.
- Manning, K. 2013. *Organisational theory on higher education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Maringe, F. 2016. Mail and Guardian Critical Thinking Forum: *What does Institutional Culture Change mean for Transformation in Higher Education*, 18 November. Unisa: Pretoria: Unisa.

- Marks, M.L. & Mirvis, P.H. 1993. Rebuilding after the merger: Dealing with “survivor sickness”. *Organizational Dynamics*, 21(2): 18-32.
- Martin, J. & Samuels, J.E. 1994. *Merging colleges for mutual growth: A new strategy for academic managers*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Martins, E.C. and Terblanche, F., 2003. Building organisational culture that stimulates creativity and innovation. *European journal of innovation management*, 6(1): 64-74.
- Masland, A.T. 1985. Organizational culture in the study of higher education. *Review of Higher Education*, 8(2): 157-168.
- Mawila, F.N.K. 2009. *Manifestations of race and gender equity post-merger: A case study of a merger in South African higher education*. Unpublished PhD dissertation: Michigan State University.
- Mayers, M. & Field, J.C. 2004. Hermeneutics for the classroom. In: J.L. Kincheloe & D. Weil (Eds.). *Critical thinking and learning: An encyclopaedia for parents and teachers*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 235-238.
- Mbabane, L.M. 2010. *The comprehensive university challenge and opportunity*. Retrieved from [http://www.cepd.org.za/files/pictures/The%20comprehensive%20universitychallenge%20and%20percentage%20opportunity.pdf [19 May 2014].
- McBain, L. 2009. College and university mergers: Recent trends. *Policy matters: A higher education policy brief*. American Association of State Colleges and Universities. Retrieved from: [http://www.cepd.org/uploadedFiles/AASCU/Content/Root/PolicyAndAdvocacy/PolicyPublications/PM-CollegeUniversityMergers.pdf: 27 February 2015].
- McDonough, P.M. 1997. *Choosing colleges: How social class and schools structure opportunity*. New York: Suny Press.
- Mfusi, X.M. 2004. The effects of higher education mergers on the resultant curricula of the combined institutions. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 18(1): 98-108.
- Ministerial Committee on Higher Education Transformation. 2008. *Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions: Final report*. Pretoria.
- Ministry of Education. 2001. *National Plan for Higher Education*. Pretoria: Government Printers.

- Ministry of Education. 2002. *Transformation and restructuring: A new institutional landscape for higher education*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- Ministry of Education. 2004. *A new funding framework: How government grants are allocated to public higher education institutions*. Retrieved from [http://education.pwv.gov.za/content/documents/405.pdf\\*\\*\\*\\*\\*/](http://education.pwv.gov.za/content/documents/405.pdf*****/) [Accessed: 3 February 2015].
- Mnguni, N. 2007. The influence of leadership on institutional culture at a changing South African university through the lens of institutional documents: A case study of the University of Cape Town. Unpublished master's mini-thesis. Bellville: University of the Western Cape.
- Moeng, S.F. 2009. Constructing an organizational identity. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Port Elizabeth: Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University.
- Morgan, G. 1997. *Images of organization*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Mouton, J. 2001. *How to succeed in your master's and doctoral studies*. Pretoria: Van Schaik.
- Naidoo, M. 2006. *Managing mergers in higher education*. University of Limpopo. South Africa
- Naidoo, R. 2008. Building or eroding intellectual capital? Student consumerism as a cultural force in the context of knowledge economy. In: J. Välimaa & O-H. Ylijoki (Eds.), *Cultural perspectives on higher education*. Breinigsville: Springer, first-last page.
- Ncayiyana, D.J. 2011. Independent assessor report. *Government Gazette*, No. 34641.
- NCHE (National Commission on Higher Education). 1996. *Report: A framework for transformation*. Pretoria.
- NEPI (National Education Policy Investigation). 1993. *The framework report and final report summaries: A project of the National Education Co-ordinating Committee*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press/NECC.
- Niemann, R. 2010. Transforming institutional culture: An appreciative inquiry. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 24(5): 1003-1022.
- Niemann, R. & Kotze, T. 2006. *The relationship between leadership practices and organisational culture: an educational management perspective*. *South African Journal of Education*, 26(4): 606-24.
- Nkosi, A.E. 2008. *The role of the Further Education and Training colleges in skills development in Mpumalanga province as perceived by the local industries*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.

- Nkomo, M.O. 1984. *Student culture and activism in black South African universities: the roots of resistance* (No: 78). Praeger, Pub text.
- Nuyen, A.T. 1994. *Critique of ideology: Hermeneutics as critical theory?* Netherlands: Kluwer Academic.
- Odora-Hoppers, C. & Richards, H. 2011. *Rethinking thinking. Modernity's 'other' and the transformation of the university*. Pretoria: Unisa Press.
- Olie, R. 1994. Shades of culture and institutions-in international mergers. *Organization Studies*, 15(3): 381-405.
- Ouchi, W.G. 1983. Theory Z: An elaboration of methodology and findings. *Journal of Contemporary Business*, 11: 27-41.
- Ouchi, W.G. & Wilkins, A.L. 1985. Organizational culture. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 457-483.
- Padayachee, A., van der Lans, N., and Hoebink, P., 2003, September. South Africa-Netherlands Research Programme on Alternatives in Development (SANPAD): A response to the internationalisation of higher education and human resource development in South Africa. *In International Education Association of South (IESA) 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference, Potchefstroom University of Christian Higher Education, South Africa*
- Parekh, A. 2008. *Comprehensive university reality 'fraught and complicated'*. Retrieved from [www.universityworldnews.com](http://www.universityworldnews.com) [Accessed: 20 May 2009].
- Parker, M. 2000. *Organisational culture and identity*. London: Sage.
- Patton, M.Q. 1990. *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. CA: Sage.
- Patton, M.Q. 2002. Qualitative interviewing. *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Paul, G. & Berry, D. 2013. The importance of executive leadership in creating a post-merged organisational culture conducive to effective performance management. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management/SA Tydskrif vir Menslikehulpbronbestuur*, 11(1), Art. #446. doi: 10.4102/sajhrm.v11i1.446
- Pepa, R.F. 2004. *Nurturing the imagination of resistance: Some important views from contemporary philosophers*. Paper delivered at the Martin Heidegger Memorial Lecture, 28 July, Philippines. Retrieved from [http://www.philosophos.com/philosophy\\_article\\_85.html](http://www.philosophos.com/philosophy_article_85.html) [Accessed: 11 June 2015].



- Perraton, H. 2000. Choosing technologies for education. *Journal of Educational Media*, 25(1): 31-38.
- Perraton, H. 2005. *Open and distance learning in the developing world*. New York: Routledge.
- Perraton, H. & Hulsman, T. 2003. *Planning and evaluating systems of open distance learning*. Report to the DFID by the IRFOL. Cambridge: International Research Foundation for Open Learning.
- Perraton, H., Robinson, B. & Creed, C. 2001. Teacher education through distance learning: Technology, curriculum. *Evaluation, Cost*. Summary of case studies, Brazil, Burkina Faso, Unisco, Higher Education Division, Teacher Education Section
- Pettigrew, A.M. 1979. On studying organisational cultures. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 24(4): 570-581.
- Peters, R.S. 1998. The Justification of Education. In: P. Hirst & P. White (Eds). *Philosophy of Education: Major Themes in the Analytic Tradition, Volume I, Philosophy and Education*. London and New York: Routledge, 217-230.
- Phipps, R. & Merisotis, J. 1999. *What is the difference? A review of contemporary research on the effectiveness of distance learning in higher education*. 12.
- Pityana, N.B. 2010. Principal's address to mark the official opening of the academic year Insight. *Higher Education South Africa*, 02, April.
- Prasad, A. 2002. The contest over meaning: Hermeneutics as an interpretive methodology for understanding texts. *Organisational Research Methods*, 5(12): 12-33.
- Prinsloo, P. 2015. Participation in open distance learning. *Open distance learning (ODL) in South Africa*, Letseka, M(Ed) N.Y. Nova Publishers, 21-38.
- Pritchard, R.M. 1993. Mergers and linkages in British higher education. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 47(2): 79-102.
- Pritchard, R.M. & Williamson, A. 2008. Long-term human outcomes of a "shotgun" marriage in higher education. *Higher Education Management and Policy*, 20(1): 1-23.
- Putnam, H. 1979. *Mind, language and reality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rafaelli, A. & Worline, M. 1999. Symbols in organizational culture. *Ann Arbor*, 1001(48105), 48105.
- Raju, J. 2004. The historical evolution of university and technikon education and training in South Africa: Implications for articulation of LIS programs. *Innovation*, 29: 1-12.

- Rasmussen, J. 2002. Textual interpretation and complexity: Radical hermeneutics. Unpublished paper presented at the American Educational Research Conference, 1-5 April, New Orleans, LA.
- Rasmussen, J. 2004. Textual interpretation and complexity-radical hermeneutics. *Nordisk Pedagogik*, 24 (3).
- Reddy, T. 2004. Staff perceptions of the merger between two South African regional technikons. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 21(3): 485-502.
- Rick, T. 2011. *10 elements in creating a high performance culture*. Retrieved from [www.torbenrick.eu](http://www.torbenrick.eu) [Accessed: 8 August 2013].
- Ricoeur, P. 1981. *Hermeneutics and the human sciences*. New York, NY: University of Cambridge.
- Ricoeur, P. & D. Savage. 2008. *Freud and Philosophy: An essay on interpretation*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers.
- Robbins. S.P. 1999. Layoff-survivor sickness: a missing topic in organisational behaviour: *Journal of Management Education* 23(1): 31-44.
- Robertson, M.; Scarborough, H. & Swan, J., 2003. Knowledge creation in professional service firms: Institutional effects. *Organization Studies*, 24(6): 831-857.
- RSA (Republic of South Africa). 1996. *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996*. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- RSA (Republic of South Africa). 1997a. Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education. *Government Gazette*, Notice 1196 of 1997. Pretoria: Ministry of Education.
- RSA (Republic of South Africa). 1997b. Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997. *Government Gazette*, 390(18515). Pretoria: Government Printers.
- Ruth, D. 2000. *The story we tell and the way we tell them: An investigation of institutional culture of the University of the North, South Africa*. Research paper of the Association of African Universities, Accra-North, Ghana.
- SAHRC Report (South African Human Rights Commission). 2016. *Transformation at Public Universities in South Africa*: Johannesburg.
- SAIDE (South African Institute for Distance Education). 1995. *Open learning and distance education in South Africa*. Manzini: Macmillan.

- Schein, E. 2006. Organisational culture and leadership. In: J. Shafritz & J.S. Ott (Eds.), *Classic of organisational theory*. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt College.
- Schein, E.H. 1992. How can organizations learn faster? The problem of entering the Green Room., Alfred Sloan, Mass.
- Sedgwick, R. 2004. Institutions of higher education in South Africa after the mergers. *World Education News and Reviews*, 17(3). [Accessed: 10 July 2013].
- Schoole, C.2016. Mail and Guardian Critical Thinking Forum: *What does Institutional Culture Change mean for Transformation in Higher Education?* 18 November, Unisa: Pretoria.
- Seepe, S. 2003. Message from the Acting Vice Chancellor at the 21<sup>st</sup> institutional celebration of Vista University. In: T. Maimane (Ed.), *21<sup>st</sup> Institutional celebrations: Reflection on 21 years of service to disadvantaged communities*. Pretoria: Vista University.
- Seidman, I. 2013. *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. New York. Teacher's College Press.
- Self-Evaluation. 2008. Audit Portfolio for the Commonwealth of Learning trial audit: Towards a leading edge ODL institution: integration, quality and service. Pretoria: Unisa.
- Siaciwena, R. & Lubinda, F. 2008. The role of open and distance learning in the implementation of the right to education in Zambia. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning*, 9(1): 1-14.
- Sinclair, J.M., Wilkes, G.A. & Krebs, W.A. (Eds.). 2001. *Collins Concise Dictionary*. London: HarperCollins.
- Size and shape of higher education: position paper of the dedicated distance education institutions TSA, UNISA and VISTA/submitted by the Conference of Open Learning Institutions in South Africa (2000).
- Shukla, V. 2011. *Key elements of organisational culture*. Retrieved from <http://www.brighthub.com/office/human-resources/articles/112151.aspx> [Accessed: 5 March 2014].
- Simpson, J. & Weiner, E.S. 1989. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*. Oxford: Clarendon Press. [Accessed: 6 March 2008].
- Sirower, M.L. 2003. Becoming a prepared acquirer. *Eur Bus Forum*, 16: 55-59.
- Skodvin, O.J. 1999. Mergers in higher education: Success or failure? *Tertiary Education and Management*, 5(1): 63-78.

- Smit, A. 1995. The role of leadership in the formation of congregational spirituality. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Stellenbosch: Stellenbosch University.
- Smith, D. 1993. Culture and organisation: Fit or misfit? *Educational reform and policy shifts in Southern Africa*. Proceedings of the Third Annual SACHES Conference, 28-29 October, Scottsburg.
- Sociology Central. 2008. *Sociological research skills-focused (semi-structured interviews)*. Retrieved from [http://www.sociology.org.uk/methfi.pdf/](http://www.sociology.org.uk/methfi.pdf) [Accessed: 2 February 2013].
- Soko, M. 1995. Institutional culture at the historically white English-speaking universities: Future challenges. *South African Outlook*, 125(3): 17-18.
- Soobryan, V. 2002. The Incorporation of the South Africa College for Teacher Education into the University of South Africa. In: Jansen, D. (Ed.), *Mergers in Higher Education: Lessons Learned in Transition Context*. Pretoria: Unisa.
- South Africa: Tertiary Education Sector Assessment. 1992. Agency for International Development. Pretoria.
- South African Institute of Distance Education. Conference. 1992. World Trade Centre, Kempton Park. The parts that distance education can play in addressing educational needs in the New South Africa: launching conference of the South African Institute for Distance Education, 7-9 September 1992, World Trade Centre.
- Soudien Report. 2008. *Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and social Cohesion and the elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions*. Pretoria: Ministry of Education. 30 Nov 2008.
- Sowetan. 2016. 'Our black professionals are apologists of white supremacy'.
- Sporn, B. 1996. Managing university culture: An analysis of the relationship between institutional culture and management approaches. *Higher Education*, 32(1): 41-61.
- Stensaker, B. & Harvey, L. 2006. Old wine in new bottles? A comparison of public and private accreditation schemes in higher education. *Higher Education Policy*, 19(1): 65-85.
- Stensaker, B.; Välimaa, J. & Sarrico, C. 2012. *Managing reform in universities: The dynamics of culture, identity and organisational change*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Steyn, M. & Van Zyl, M., 2011. "Like that statue at Jammie stairs": some student perceptions and experiences of institutional culture at the University of Cape Town in 1999.

- Straits, J. 2012. God's being toward fellowship: the meaning of "God is love" in dialogue with the theologies of Friedrich Schleiermacher and Karl Barth. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Aberdeen: University of Aberdeen.
- Streubert, H & Carpenter, D. 1999. *Qualitative research in nursing: Advancing the humanistic imperative*. Philadelphia: Lippincott.
- Strydom, A.H. 1999. Report on the National Conference on co-operation in higher education. *Bloemfontein: University of the Free State*.
- Subotzky, G. & Prinsloo, P. 2011. Turning the tide: A socio-critical model and framework for improving student success in open distance learning at the University of South Africa. *Distance Education*, 32(2): 177-193.
- Sunday Times. 2014. 'Higher education in tatters'. 25 May.
- Tabensky, P. & Matthews, S. 2015. *Being at home: Race, institutional culture and transformation in South African higher education institutions*. Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
- Tahir, F. 2001. Distance education, environmental education and sustainability: An overview of universities in Commonwealth Asia. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education*, 2(1): 21-37.
- Taylor, C. 1985. *Philosophy and the human sciences*. Philosophical Papers 2. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Technikon SA. 2000. *Financial and Related Statements*. The Goldfields Library and Information Centre. Florida.
- Thaver, L. 2006. "At home", institutional culture and higher education. Some methodological considerations. *Perspective in Education*, 24(1): 15-26.
- Thesaurus.com. 2011. *Method*. Retrieved from <http://thesaurus.com/browse/method> [Accessed: 19 May 2013].
- Tierney, W.G. 1988. Organizational culture in higher education: Defining the essentials. *Journal of Higher Education*, 59(1): 2-21.
- Tlale, C. 1999. *The impact of mergers and acquisitions on people and organisations*. Degree thesis. Johannesburg: University of Witwatersrand.
- Torrington, D. & Weighman, J. 1993. The culture and ethos of the school. In: M. Preedy (Ed.), *Managing the effective school*. London: Paul Chapman, 44-55.

- Toma, J. D., Dubrow, G., & Hartley, M. 2005. The Uses of Institutional Culture: Strengthening Identification and Building Brand Equity in Higher Education. *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 31(2), 1-105.
- Tyobeka, E.M. & Schoeman, G. 2007. Making sense of the merger. *Discourse*, 35(1): 19-26.
- Unit, E.P., 1997. Interim Report: *The Enhancement of Graduate Programmes and Research Capacity at the Historically Black Universities*; Vista University: University of the Western Cape.
- Unisa (University of South Africa). 2004. *Institutional operating plan 2008-2010*. Pretoria.
- Unisa (University of South Africa). 2005. *Council document*. Pretoria.
- Unisa (University of South Africa). 2006a. *Unisa Language Policy*. Pretoria.
- Unisa (University of South Africa). 2006b. *Unisa Open Distance Learning Policy*. Pretoria: Unisa Press.
- Unisa (University of South Africa). 2008a. *Audit Report on the University of South Africa*. Pretoria.
- Unisa (University of South Africa). 2008b. *Self-evaluation Report*. Pretoria
- Unisa (University of South Africa). 2008c. *The vision, mission and strategic plan of University of South Africa*. Pretoria.
- Unisa (University of South Africa). 2008d. *Transformation Charter*. Pretoria.
- Unisa (University of South Africa). 2008e. *Unisa Open Distance Learning Policy*. Pretoria: Unisa Press.
- Unisa (University of South Africa). 2010a. *11 C's*. Pretoria.
- Unisa (University of South Africa). 2010b. *Transformation charter*. Pretoria.
- Unisa (University of South Africa). 2014. *Annual Report*. Pretoria.
- Unisa (University of South Africa). 2014. *Open resource strategy*. Pretoria
- Unisa (University of South Africa). 2016. *Strategic Plan*. Pretoria
- Uys, F. 1996. Guidelines for compiling a research proposal. Pretoria: University of South Africa
- Vaara, E. 2000. Constructions of cultural differences in post-merger change processes: A sense making perspective on Finnish-Swedish cases. *Management*, 3(3): 81-110.
- Vaara, E. 2002. On the discursive construction of success/failure in narratives of post-merger integration. *Organization Studies*, 23(2): 211-248.

- Välilmaa, J. 1998. Culture and identity in higher education research. *Higher Education*, 36(2): 119-138.
- Välilmaa, J. & Ylijoki, O.H. 2008. *Cultural perspectives on higher education*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Van Dalen, R., Vree, T.B. & Gimbrère, J.S.F. 1979. Determination of plasma and renal clearance of cefuroxime and its pharmacokinetics in renal insufficiency. *Journal of Antimicrobial Chemotherapy*, 5(3): 281-292.
- Van der Merwe, H.M., 2007. The Vudec merger: a recording of what was and a reflection on gains and losses. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 21(3): 537-551.
- Van Wyk, B. 2004. *A conceptual analysis of transformation at three South African universities in relation to the National Plan for Higher Education*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch.
- Van Wyk, B. 2008. Exploring constitutive meanings of institutional culture: A South African case study. Unpublished paper prepared for the American Research Association Annual Meeting, 24-28 March, New York, NY.
- Van Wyk, B. 2009. Universities as organisations or institutions? The culture debate and one institution. In: E. Bitzer (Ed.). *Higher education in South Africa: A scholarly look behind the scenes*. Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA, 329-347.
- Van Wyk, B. & Higgs, P. 2004. Towards an African philosophy of higher education. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 18(3): 196-210.
- Van Wyk, B. & Higgs, P. 2007. The call for an African university: A critical reflection. *Higher Education Policy*, 20: 61-71.
- Van Wyk de Vries Commission. 1972. *Commission of Inquiry into Universities*. Pretoria.
- Verhoeven, J. and Devos, G., 2004. A study on merger of colleges in the Dutch region of Belgium: understandings of the school leaders. *Journal of Shanghai Jiao Tong University. Philosophy and social science edition*, 12(3), pp.76-80.
- Vice, S. 2015. Feeling at home: An institutional culture of and the idea of a university. In: Tabensky, P and Matthews. (Ed). *Being at Home; Race Institutional Culture and Transformation at South African Higher Education Institutions*. University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 45-71.

- Vukuza-Linda, N.Y. 2014. *Higher education mergers and the reshaping of institutional culture: A case study of a South African university of technology*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Stellenbosch University.
- Waghid, Y. 2002. *Democratic education: Policy and praxis*. Stellenbosch: Department of Education Policy Studies, Stellenbosch University.
- Waghid, Y. 2004. *BEd Hons Philosophy of Education study guide*. Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA.
- Waghid, Y. 2005. Action as an educational virtue: Towards a different understanding of democratic citizenship. *Educational Theory*, 55(3): 323-342.
- Waghid, Y. 2010. *Education, democracy and citizenship revisited pedagogical encounters*. Stellenbosch: Sun Press.
- WASCS (Western Association of Schools and Colleges). 2001. *Institutional culture: Self-study for an acceleration review prepared by the WASCS Committee*. Pomona, CA: Department of Academic Affairs, California State University.
- Whitt, L.A. 1998. Biocolonialism and the commodification of knowledge. *Science as Culture*, 7(1): 33-67.
- Wildschut, L. 2016. *African Doctoral Academy: Introduction to qualitative data analysis with Atlas.ti*. Stellenbosch: SUN MeDIA.
- Wright, S. 1998. The politicisation of culture. *Anthropology Today*, 14(1): 715.
- Wright, S. 2003. Ways of knowing in the arts. *Children, meaning making and the arts*. Australia: Pearson, 1-33.
- Yehezkel, G. 2005. *A model of conceptual analysis*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Yin, R. 1984. *Case study research*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Ylijoki, O.H., 2008. A clash of academic cultures: The case of Dr. X. In *Cultural perspectives on higher education* (pp. 75-89). Springer Netherlands.
- Yin, R. 1994. *Case study research: Design and methods*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Yongmei, H. & Wenyan, L. 2008. Malmquist index analysis of the dynamic changes in scientific research productivity of some Chinese universities before and after merger. *Frontiers of Education in China*, 3(3): 429-447.
- Zainal, Z. 2007. Case study as a research method. *Jurnal Kemanusiaan*, 9:1-6. Retrieved from [http://eprints.utm.my/8221/1/ZZainal2007-Case\\_study\\_as\\_a\\_Research.pdf](http://eprints.utm.my/8221/1/ZZainal2007-Case_study_as_a_Research.pdf) [Accessed: 14 January 2013].



## APPENDIX A



UNIVERSITEIT•STELLENBOSCH•UNIVERSITY  
jou kennisvennoot • your knowledge partner

**Approved with Stipulations**  
**New Application**

13-Jun-2014

LUVALO, Loyiso Mennon

**Proposal #: HSI059/2014**

**Title: The institutional culture of a post-merger institution: a case study of a South African university.**

Dear Mr Loyiso LUVALO,

Your **New Application** received on 08-May-2014, was reviewed by the Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities) via Committee Review procedures on 29-May-2014.

Please note the following information about your approved research proposal:

Proposal Approval Period: 29-May-2014 -28-May-2015

**Present Committee Members:**

De Villiers, Mare MRH

Theron, Carl CC

Fouche, Magdalena MG

Van Wyk, Berte B

Horn, Lynette LM

Nell, Theodore TA

Leonard, Basil BC

De Villiers-Botha, Tanya T

Prozesky, Heidi HE

GRAHAM, Clarissa Jane

Mmanuel, Ashwin AS

The following stipulations are relevant to the approval of your project and must be adhered to:

**Please make all changes on the ORIGINAL proposal using TRACK CHANGES. Furthermore, it is required that a letter be sent to the REC, responding to each of the REC's concerns and comments in BULLET FORMAT.**

**1. Institutional permission**

The REC requests that the researcher obtains institutional permission from UNISA before the commencement of the study. Data collection cannot begin unless the institutional permission letter from UNISA has been forwarded to the REC.

**2. DESC application**

Regarding the protection of data, the researcher indicates that recording devices will be in his possession at all times and that copies, if made, will be locked safely "at my place". The researcher must indicate where "my place" is – the researcher's home or office? Furthermore, there is no indication whether someone else, e.g. the supervisor will have access to the data and no mention is made of the disposal of data and information after completion of the research. Please respond to these concerns in a note to the REC.

**3. Questionnaire**

3.1) There are some typing and language errors that should be rectified.

3.2) The REC perceives that a time frame of 30 to 45 minutes may be required for participants to complete the questionnaires and not 20 minutes.

**4. Research proposal**

The researcher should edit the document for language errors.

Please provide a letter of response to all the points raised IN ADDITION to HIGHLIGHTING or using the TRACK CHANGES function to indicate

ALL the corrections/amendments of ALL DOCUMENTS clearly in order to allow rapid scrutiny and appraisal.

Please take note of the general Investigator Responsibilities attached to this letter. You may commence with your research after complying fully with these guidelines.

Please remember to use your **proposal number (HS1059/2014)** on any documents or correspondence with the REC concerning your research proposal.

Please note that the REC has the prerogative and authority to ask further questions, seek additional information, require further modifications, or monitor the conduct of your research and the consent process.

Also note that a progress report should be submitted to the Committee before the approval period has expired if a continuation is required. The Committee will then consider the continuation of the project for a further year (if necessary).

This committee abides by the ethical norms and principles for research, established by the Declaration of Helsinki and the Guidelines for Ethical Research: Principles Structures and Processes 2004 (Department of Health). Annually a number of projects may be selected randomly for an external audit.

National Health Research Ethics Committee (NHREC) registration number REC-050411-032.

We wish you the best as you conduct your research.

If you have any questions or need further help, please contact the REC office at 0218089183.

**Included Documents:**

Questionnaire  
DESC application  
REC application form  
Research proposal  
Informed consent form

Sincerely,

Clarissa GRAHAM  
REC Coordinator  
Research Ethics Committee: Human Research (Humanities)

## APPENDIX B

**RESEARCH PERMISSION SUB-COMMITTEE OF SRIHDC**

22 May 2015

Ref #: 2015\_RPSC\_042

Mr Loyiso Luvalo

Student #:

Staff #: 90167111

Dear Mr Loyiso Luvalo,

**Decision: Research Permission**  
**Approval** for the period **June 2015 to**  
**30 September 2015**

**Principal Investigator:**

**Mr Loyiso Luvalo**  
Department of Educational Foundations  
School of Educational Studies  
College of Education  
UNISA  
luvalm@unisa.ac.za  
(012) 429-2541/073 803 5736

Supervisor: Prof Berte van Wyk  
University of Stellenbosch  
(021) 808-2283/083 715 7476

**A study titled: "The Institutional Culture of a Post-Merger institution: A case-study of a South African University."**

Your application regarding permission to conduct research involving UNISA staff and data in respect of the above study has been received and was considered by the Research Permission Subcommittee (RPSC) of the UNISA Senate Research and Innovation and Higher Degrees Committee (SRIHDC) on 15 May 2015.

It is my pleasure to inform you that permission has been granted for the study to:

1. Access UNISA documents as stipulated in the application. However, the committee is unclear about the requested Self-Evaluating Report (2011). The committee would like to request you to give more clarification on this report, and it must be obtained through the



University of South Africa  
Preller Street, Muckleneuk Ridge, City of Tshwane  
PO Box 392 UNISA 0003 South Africa  
Telephone: +27 12 429 3111 Facsimile: +27 12 429 4150  
[www.unisa.ac.za](http://www.unisa.ac.za)

---

owner of this report.

2. Approach the 21 purposively selected UNISA staff members and conduct semi-structured interviews with them.

You are requested to submit a report of the study to the Research Permission Subcommittee (RPSC@unisa.ac.za) within 12 months of completion of the study.

*Note:*

*The personal (and institutional) information made available to the researcher(s)/gatekeeper(s) will only be used for the advancement of this research project as indicated and for the purpose as described in this permission letter. The researcher(s)/gatekeeper(s) must take all appropriate precautionary measures to protect the personal information given to him/her/them in good faith and it must not be passed on to third parties.*

*The reference number 2015\_RPSC\_042 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants and the Research Permission Subcommittee.*

---

We would like to wish you well in your research undertaking.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping, fluid strokes that form a stylized, somewhat abstract shape.

**PROF L LABUSCHAGNE**

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: RESEARCH**

*Tel: +27 12 429 6368 / 2446*

*Email: [llabus@unisa.ac.za](mailto:llabus@unisa.ac.za)*