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..... (Signed)

February 2010

..... (Date)

Strategic Planning in Ireland's Institutes of Technology

by

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Abstract

Strategic Planning in Ireland's Institutes of Technology

The adoption of new managerial philosophies within higher education is well documented and has increased significantly in the last decade. Of these adoptions, strategic planning within higher education institutes in the Republic of Ireland is particularly relevant given the legislative requirement underpinning such planning exercises. This dissertation investigates the lived experiences of academics and manager-academics with strategic planning exercises within Ireland's Institute of Technology sector, and proposes an alignment-focussed strategic planning framework for consideration. The design, measurement and analysis issues which informed the research instrument sought to measure the degree of alignment across academics and manager-academics with their institute's strategic plans. A central consideration was whether or not the managerial practices and processes adopted in the preparation of strategic plans impacted negatively or positively on the lived experiences of both groups. Consequently the research methodology was hermeneutically phenomenological.

Academic organisations as workplaces have not always proved amenable to either the adoption of new managerial practices or the re-orientation of education to commodity status. The introduction of new managerialism in the Institute of Technology sector has been characterised by legislative change and market forces. Simultaneously this sector has also become more exposed to a growing accountability and transparency agenda at the behest of Ireland's higher education policy makers. The academics and manager-academics surveyed in this research provide little evidence of a successful transition of new managerialism within those institutes surveyed. Additionally no evidence could be found of alignment with the published strategic plans of those institutes surveyed. The research identified numerous reasons for this non-alignment, including; an inability amongst academics to identify any real benefits from the strategic planning process; and, a perception amongst both groups that the preparation of strategic plans merely satisfied a bureaucratic requirement.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to Doctoral Study

In 1994 I returned to Galway to work as a lecturer in Strategic Management, Accountancy and Finance at the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology (formerly Regional Technical College Galway). In Spring of that year we received a deputation from an American University keen to establish bilateral agreements, accommodating staff, student and research collaboration. Our two visitors, upon arriving in Galway, were unaware of, and inevitably unprepared for, my interest in strategic planning and its introduction within Ireland's third level sector. At the first available opportunity I enquired of our American visitors as to whether or not they had a strategic planning unit on their campus. To my surprise there was a rather long silence, uneasy glances between our visitors, a look of bewilderment towards me, and then came the reply: "Indeed we do but we prefer to call that particular unit Procrastinators Incorporated!" More pertinently I was asked if I was familiar with the work of George Keller, to which I replied "no". Arrangements were then made to have a copy of Keller's (1983) "Academic Strategy" forwarded to me. Subsequent reading of that text introduced me to the successes, failures, do's and don'ts of strategic planning on American campuses. That meeting, together with the unprecedented and unanticipated changes that were about to unfold in Ireland's higher education system, became the springboard for this research. Fifteen years appears a considerably long time to wait before putting pen to paper, but I would take a contrary position; contending that those years have added immeasurably to both the perspective and knowledge brought to my research project.

The intervening years have also seen a complete *volte* face in how the Irish economy is perceived internationally. This is best encapsulated by two distinctly different editorials featuring in the Economist magazine. The first, appearing in the late 1980s and using a cover image of a young child begging on Dublin's main thoroughfare, described the then Irish economy as the poorest of the poor; a nation characterised by poverty, emigration and hopelessness. What a contrast this offers to the second Economist feature, dating from the early millennium, describing the then revitalised Irish economy as the richest of the rich. The invisible thread binding these editorials is the commitment shown by successive Irish administrations to investment in education and the creation of a well educated workforce as a vehicle for attracting direct foreign investment. My research is not concerned with the economic policies behind this dramatic transformation, but with the developments within higher education over that time and the introduction of strategic planning within Ireland's higher education institutes as a mode of co-ordination.

A recurring concept within my research is that of duality (Chelimsky 1982); wherein individuals or institutions may be seen as both actors and subjects in a particular process. This duality can also be applied to higher education in Ireland; simultaneously an object and subject in the modernisation of Irish society; influencing, and being influenced by, trends in globalisation, re-conceptualisations of the role of sovereign states and the altering relationship between states and their public services. Duality also applies to me as author of this dissertation. My various roles within my current employment; initially as an academic and latterly as a manager-academic have seen me undertake both object and subject roles, albeit with different levels of responsibility.

Developments within Ireland's higher education system have paralleled improvements in the underlying economic infrastructure. This symbiotic relationship has however attracted criticism, with the contestation that defining education purely in terms of a desirable economic model betrays the underlying philosophy of higher education's *raison d'être*. Such mechanistic views of higher education have been criticised (Lynch 2006; David 2005) with the argument that rational, top-down decision making and implementation conflicts with the traditional collegiality of academia. Exploring such dilemmas is central to the principal research question of this dissertation, because as we shall see in Chapter 3 academic self-perceptions very often conflict with the rational philosophy embedded in strategic planning.

1.2 Personal Profile

Whilst conducting this research, I was simultaneously a researcher and member of the academic community of practice being researched. Both Wertz (2005) and Finlay (2009) accept that researcher subjectivity is inevitable in phenomenological research, emphasising the interconnection between the researcher and the researched. This presence of insider status (Ajjawi and Higgs 2007) confers both advantages and disadvantage upon the phenomenological researcher; familiarity with language and jargon (Fontana and Frey 1994), ease of access (Minichello *et al.* 1995) and the risk of dogmatic assertions (Finlay 2009) displacing scholarly exploration. In this section I present a brief personal profile which contextualises my research question against my personal and professional experiences.

I am a child of the introduction of free secondary education in the Republic of Ireland; an initiative which significantly broadened access, allowing some families to experience

post-primary education for the first time. The area in which I was born, predominantly working class, was characterised by young males progressing to employment in local industries or attending the local Technical College to acquire a “trade”. Aged eleven, this too would have been my ambition, save for a prior conversation which my father had with my then national school teacher; Mr Cunningham. Constant reminders of this conversation were relayed to me by my father, recounting what had been said to him: “if Larry sticks at the books he can go all the way to university”. With great reluctance I embarked upon a secondary school education, realising that I had the talent to survive, but occasionally hell bent on doing as little as I could in the hope that I would be reunited with the “lads”. At seventeen, and with a good Leaving Certificate, I decided to emigrate to England. Ireland then was economically stagnant, and although I could have entered university, I wanted away. Fortunately I found quite a good job in England, working with a merchant bank in the City of London. After some time there I applied to the City Of London University for admission to a part-time business degree, delivered in the evenings, only to be informed that my school leaving qualification was not recognised by them. Concerned about stagnating in a job without further upside potential, I returned home. In many ways then since 1977 I have been constantly involved at some level of Ireland's education system; initially as a university student, subsequently as a secondary school teacher, then as both a university and institute of technology lecturer, and latterly as a senior manager with my current employer: the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology. Choosing a higher education research topic was therefore quite a natural adaptation for me; my personal and professional experiences to date have been predominantly formulated and developed in that domain.

My first experience as a newly appointed lecturer coincided fortunately with the decision of the then Irish Government in 1989 to grant university status to two National Institutes of Higher Education, then located in Dublin and Limerick. Subsequently, in the fledgling new university that emerged, Dublin City University, I witnessed at first hand the impact that the visionary leadership of Dr Danny O' Hare could have on the profile and success of a higher education institute. In many respects this experience would become the barometer against which other higher education institutes, in which I was subsequently employed, would be measured. Undoubtedly this experience introduced me, for the first time, to the enmeshing of corporate and social values in which higher education institutes would continue to operate; an academic twilight zone of sorts. Upon leaving Dublin City University in 1994 to transfer to the then Regional Technical College Galway, I was to experience another dimension of this twilight zone; a college hitherto effectively under the control of the local authority, attempting to establish its reputation as an independent higher education entity yet encumbered with a deeply ingrained public sector culture.

My research topic, strategic planning, has undoubtedly been influenced by these educational and career trajectories. I have prepared strategic plans for higher education institutes whilst also hearing murmurings of academic's discontent on corridors as they questioned the new found relevance of strategic planning in higher education. More pointedly perhaps, because of my current position as Head of School, is the requirement to attempt to solicit ownership and commitment from academic staff within my school, to our Institute's published plan. Navigating between the two schools of thought, academic and managerial, together with the dearth of research on strategic planning in Ireland's Institutes of Technology has influenced my decision to go beyond a purely

theoretical approach and attempt to directly access the lived experiences of both sets of actors.

1.3 The Research Question: Policy Framework and Consequences

This doctoral research will investigate whether managerial processes adopted in the preparation of strategic plans across a sample of four Institutes of Technology in the Republic of Ireland create alignment across two identified groups of actors; namely academics and manager-academics. A hermeneutic phenomenological exploration of the attitudinal and subjective experiences of the managerial practices, procedures and processes, through which the published strategic plans have emerged, will be undertaken. The policy implications of my research are relevant to: (a) institutions, legislatively tasked, with the preparation of strategic plans; (b) institutional communities tasked with the preparation and implementation of the plan; and finally, (c) the relevant governmental agency, the Department of Education and Science that formulates higher education policy. My research will also contribute to what is an under-researched area in an Irish context; strategic planning frameworks within selected Institutes of Technology. Creating awareness and addressing the issues raised by this research may challenge currently held ideological and philosophical positions. The wider relevance of academic research, to communities and practices, distant from the researcher is the subject of some debate in the literature. Starbuck (2006), for instance, contends that research very often becomes a personal journey only for the researcher, offering glimpses into the personal lives and assumptions of its authors, but not really contributing to knowledge. Leavitt (1996) also contributes to this debate, claiming the majority of research is guided by wrong reasons of approval and ambition rather than excitement and challenge. The significant contribution of my research to knowledge

will be its ability to potentially influence future policy development in the area of strategic planning as practised by higher education institutes.

Kemmis (1990) suggests educational policy is no longer defined solely by the ideals of educational theory, but also by: (1) what governments believe to be possible and expedient, and (2) the extent to which vested interest groups, such as industrial lobby groups, exert influence over this. Taylor *et al.* (1997) contend that these vested interest groups sometimes result in apparently utilitarian policy initiatives being discontinued. He cites as an example the termination of certain social democratic change initiatives (instanced as the provision of greater access to both females and minorities in Australia) and their replacement by a purely economic agenda for higher education. My research positions the restructuring of higher education in the Republic of Ireland, specifically the requirement to prepare strategic plans, as a policy change through which the Irish government has sought to articulate, re-articulate and institutionalise a New Managerial agenda. Post-modernist and traditional perspectives of higher education systems will therefore be contrasted to contextualise the current strategic planning expediency. Cox (1995), in calling for a truly civil society, offers a counter position to the post-modern perspective; a system of higher education characterised not by competition but by reciprocity and equality. Similarly, Taylor *et al.* (1997) contend that individualism, inherent in the post-modern perspective, is anti-educational because education is, at its core, a social activity with social purposes. Evaluating the effectiveness of any policy change is however fraught with danger, as the relationship between policy and change is rather ambiguous (Elmore and McLaughlin 1998). They describe policy as a blunt instrument in that change may or may not be forthcoming, there are no guarantees.

Furthermore any policy change analysis must commence from a sound philosophical footing before the progressiveness or otherwise of that policy can be assessed.

Kogan *et al.* (2006) also posit a *caveat* about ill informed policy adaptation, which informs my literature review and research approach in its scope and focus, and which frames the empirical-analytical questions that will shape the research instrument. They contend that any reconsideration of higher education, its mission, philosophy and governance with a view to subsequent re-structuring, need not necessarily lead to new improved practices, but could potentially lead to ill conceived policy adoption that does not have the full support of the academy. Therefore to fully understand the extent of, and adoption of, New Public Management instruments within higher education it is necessary to observe and challenge the conceptual framework of actual structures, behaviours and adopted policy instruments at different levels therein. My research will focus on one such policy instrument, namely strategic planning. I have chosen strategic planning because of its particular resonance to me, my experiences to date with it, and the legislative importance that it enjoys within the Institute of Technology sector. Jarzabkowski and Wilson (2002) identify two modes of scholastic research on the strategy process; that which is concerned with processes of change as a sequence of events, and that which focuses on change as the interaction between actor and context. This dissertation is accentuated in its emphasis toward the latter; examining the interaction between academics, manager-academics and higher education institutes in the context of dynamic higher education environments.

1.4 Dissertation Structure

This dissertation is presented in eight chapters, straddling two sections representing a theoretical (Chapters 2-5) and empirical divide (Chapters 6 and 7). The empirical section builds upon the concept of duality (Chelimsky 1982) and positions academics and manager-academics as being both objects and subjects within the strategic planning framework of their respective institutes. Exploration of the lived experience of both groups is accessed using a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, which builds upon Husserl's (1936-1970) *Lebenswelt*. This accepts that the world is pre-reflective and that actors therein have complex meanings informed by their day to day experiences. Chapters 6 and 7 will present the experiences of both sets of actors with the phenomena of strategic planning. In doing so both chapters are informed by Merleau-Ponty (1962: 11): "man is in the world, and only in the world does he know himself".

Chapters 2 and 3 will review the literature across a number of research relevant themes: neo-liberalism and its philosophical foundations, the introduction of new-managerialism in academic work settings, the concept of collectivism in work settings and the various cultural scenarios which contribute or detract from such collectivism, and a consideration of the adoption of strategic planning by higher education institutes. What emerges is a myriad of developments which simultaneously evoke an image not just of higher education in transition but initial evidence that the neo-liberal philosophy may not have transitioned seamlessly into higher education institutes.

Chapter 4 will consider the Institute of Technology sector in the Republic of Ireland, and selected policy and regulatory changes therein over the last two and a half decades. Understanding the macro-policy sphere of Ireland's higher education system is

necessary to understand the context against which the narrative of strategic planning in Ireland's Institutes of Technology may be considered. This chapter will consider the emergence and continuing evolution of higher education within the Republic of Ireland; the binary system of higher education that emerged therein and its composition. The chapter also highlights linkages between industrial policy and the supportive role envisaged for higher education.

Chapter 5 outlines the principal considerations and approaches in the research methodology employed. By examining the research design literature, and contrasting the 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' paradigms (Easterby-Smith *et-al.*1995), a justification for the adoption of a hermeneutic phenomenological approach is proposed. Central to this justification is a desire to access the life world of both sets of respondents through a data collection mechanism allowing them to explicate their own experiences in a non threatening, facilitative manner. To date, direct engagement with participants in academic strategic planning practices has been very limited, with a dearth of Republic of Ireland based empirical work. This research deficit has unquestionably influenced my subsequent choice of research instrument; semi-structured focus group interviews designed to access the lived experiences of respondents through a hermeneutic phenomenological lens. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the research undertaken from a critically reflexive position. Limitations in the research design framework and subsequent analysis are also highlighted.

Chapters 6 and 7 present detailed analyses of the empirical work undertaken and will outline the recounted experiences of the two sub-groups across the main thematic areas. Continuing with strategic planning within Ireland's Institute of Technology sector,

without a reference point of properly conducted research, could conceivably lead to the institution of bad practice. Consequently it is this aspect of my research: identification and exploration of the experiences of different individuals with their respective strategic planning processes, which will represent my contribution to knowledge. Eight semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted in total, spanning four Institutes of Technology, with a combined interview time across all interviews of ten hours and fifty seven minutes.

Chapter 8 will outline the principal conclusions and recommendations arising from this research and outlines a strategic planning framework for higher education institutes. It will summarise the general conclusions deducible from the research undertaken, considering their implications for both the theory and practice of strategic planning in higher education institutes. This chapter will also outline the additionality arising from my research, by identifying policy and practical implications of the conclusions drawn earlier. Further post doctoral research opportunities within the field of higher education are then signposted. Notwithstanding the limitations specified I remain confident that my research can provoke meaningful dialogues across all actors on the future strategic planning framework of Ireland's Institute of Technology sector. I am hopeful that by opening up this debate on strategic planning within higher education that respective policy makers, and other higher education actors, may draw upon my research with the objective of improving or altering future policy in this area of higher education.

Chapter 2

Collegialism and Managerialism: Higher Education's Incompatible Twins?

CHAPTER 2: COLLEGIALISM AND MANAGERIALISM: HIGHER EDUCATION'S INCOMPATIBLE TWINs?

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will review and compare literature across a number of subject areas including: neo-liberalism and its philosophical foundations, the introduction of new-managerialism in academic work settings, and the resultant altering emphasis on governance occurring globally. In this chapter my primary objective is to contextualise contemporary change within higher education by viewing it against the social, cultural, economic and political phenomena in which higher education systems are embedded. This chapter will initially consider globalisation and its implications for the future role of nation states and systems of higher education. Neo-liberal perspectives of higher education are then considered, with a particular emphasis on New Public Management as an instrument of intervention. The chapter concludes by locating these developments in the site of academic practice that is higher education; considering *inter-alia* the historically received view of higher education governance, international developments in governance and current perceptions within academia to these governance shifts.

2.2 Globalisation, Nation States and Higher Education: Whither Higher Education Institutes?

Globally, higher education and academic identities confront multiple challenges; the commercialisation of knowledge (Gibbons *et al.* 1994), demands from funding authorities for greater accountability (Ziman 2000), and the pervasive influence of globalisation on higher education (Brown *et al.* 2008). Tracing the linkage between globalisation and higher education, Brown *et al.* (op. cit.) identify the starting point as

the formulation of human capital theory (Schultz 1963: x) when higher education came to be viewed as a bedrock for competitiveness. Brown *et al.* (op. cit.) contend that globalisation is inextricably linked with the increasing importance of human capital theory and suggests higher education systems are premised on the political imperative of equating high skills with high wages. They hypothesise that investment in higher education, formulated along a high skills/high wages axiom, engenders knowledge wars between nation states. Similar thinking also appears in the recently published Cutler Report (Australian Ministry for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research 2008) which ultimately sees innovation as the key driver for the future growth of the Australian economy; positioning that higher education system as the primary catalyst of innovation.

The term “globalisation” is not however uniquely defined. Globalization, contend Held *et al.* (1999), impacts upon most sectors of the global economy, by widening, deepening and speeding up world wide interconnectedness. Mustapha *et al.* (2008:503) suggest that the precise meaning of globalisation is always heavily contextualised and offer a simple definition: “the expansion of economic activities across political boundaries of nation states”. Govinden (2000) adopts a more expansive definition, depicting a flow of ideas, technology, services, information and people across national boundaries. Ohmae (2000) contends that globalisation has a reductionist dimension and eliminates geographical and philosophical boundaries between nation states. Antunes (2006:38) criticises top down globalisation, whereby local conditions lose out to more powerful actors; creating conflicts, winners and losers. A recurring theme in the literature on the influence of globalisation on higher education is the heightened importance of both information technology and the necessity to produce knowledge workers in the

emerging higher education landscape (See for example: Douglass 2005, Scott 1998, Bloom 2002). Wilson *et al.* (2005) in an interesting subtext, and often overlooked provision of the Dearing Report (1994) in recommending the provision of sub-degree awards (Foundation Degrees) highlight such awards as further evidence of governmental intervention to enforce a globalisation agenda, by more closely integrating the worlds of academia and work.

Enders (2002) suggests that the term globalisation as applied to higher education is often misused, contending that what is mistakenly described as globalisation are really variants of regionalisation and Europeanization. Antunes (2006:38) disputes this differentiation and instead suggests that the Europeanization of educational policies, through the regional organisation of the European Union, is evidence of both the demise of the nation state and a process for filtering, creating and conveying globalisation processes. Both Scholte (2004) and Haynal (2007) view globalization through the lens of governmental decision making and its scope. Scholte (*op. cit.*), equating globalization with supra-territoriality, contends that because of the accelerated growth of trans-world connectivity; 'statism' – where governance is equivalent to the regulatory operations of territorial natural governments, has effectively become unviable. This impact of globalization on civil society is also noted by Haynal (2007), who broadens the debate by considering accountability issues, for both elected and non elected decision makers. Haynal's (*op. cit.*) central thesis is that because the Group of Eight (G8) as a collective entity has no direct authority there are major accountability gaps which both civil society and elected representatives should be mindful of. Accountability he contends is now more market driven than electorally driven; with electoral responsibilities replaced

by diluted moral boundaries of accountability. Haynal (2007:132) defines accountability thus:

“That those who exercise power, whether as governments, elected representatives or as appointed officials, are in a sense stewards and must be able to show that they have exercised their power and discharged their duties properly.”

Goetz and Jenkins (2001, in Haynal 2007) further distinguishes between two types of accountability: vertical (where the citizens hold elected representatives to account), and horizontal (referring to inter-institutional checks and balances). Scholte (2004:4) hypothesises that former statist decision making models, defined and limited by geographical jurisdiction, have now been replaced by “polycentrism”: a multi layered and diffuse form of governance, which Reinicke (1999) describes as a model of networked governance.

Emerging supra-national conglomerates and their attendant consequences for the marginalisation and de-politicisation of the state are also commented upon by Hardt and Negri (2000:37):

“Government and politics have become completely integrated into the system of trans-national command controls and are articulated through the means of inter-national bodies and functions.”

Burnham (1999) does not *per se* see a diminution in the role of the state over the past 25 years, but accepts that the state's role has been re-stated and re-formulated. Citing the UK government's attempts to control inflation, he welcomes the government's decision to off-load responsibility to an independent central bank (Bank of England), not as a

capitulation to market emergencies but rather as a new set of rules – allowing greater manoeuvrability and discretion to the state.

Scholte (2004:6) portrays the transfer of decision making roles to trans-national bodies as an inevitable consequence of the demise of 'Westphalian Sovereignty' – where each state exercises supreme, comprehensive, unqualified and exclusive rule over its territorial jurisdiction. Large scale globality and supra-territorial connectivity mean such "Westphalian" type states can no longer exist. The outcome, Scholte (op. cit.) states, is a reconstruction of the role of the state and its future. Rainnie and Fairbrother (2006) also attest to the altered nature of the state, recognising a loss of control by nation states over the global economy. They focus on the resultant restructuring and re-organisation of the public sector and suggest that as the boundaries of the state are re-defined, with a resultant re-organisation and restructuring of the public service, the adoption of marketisation and commercialisation practices within the public sector is done without due consideration of the social relations of the work environment. They hypothesise therefore that the New Public Management debate is consequently flawed, with undue consideration afforded to the management levels of the state apparatus and insufficient consideration given to labour-management relations.

Kwiek (2000:78) sees the decline of the nation state carrying with it: 'huge human, social, economic and political consequence', and then addresses the implications of this decline for the dynamics of social life. The future role of the nation state he contends is merely as one source of power, amongst competing and more powerful sources. Kwiek's (op. cit.:81) hypothesises that following the decline of the project of modernity and the nation state, there is also an inevitability about the decline of the university:

“If behind the university there are no longer the ideas of nation, reason, and national culture, then either new ideas have to be discovered, or the university is doomed to surrender to the all-encompassing logic of consumerism. Within this logic the university, free from its associations with power, devoid of modern national and state missions, is able to sell its educational product as a bureaucratic educational corporation.”

Douglass (2005), considering the future for higher education, identifies globalisation as a force more powerful than industrialisation, urbanisation and secularisation combined. Whilst accepting that globalisation presents major problems, he contends that the consequences for higher education will be neither uniform, nor evenly spread. Institutions that are simply too conservative in their internal cultures to change and compete, he pinpoints as those most likely to experience difficulties. Higher education, observes Scholte (2004), because of its key role in the production, immersion and distribution of knowledge must inevitably be transformed by globalisation. Scott (1998) however notes an idiosyncrasy about higher education institutes; their reluctance to see themselves as both objects and actors in the globalization process. Bryman (2007) and Barrett and Barrett (2007) similarly suggest that inertia within academia, reflects unflatteringly on the academic profession and its underlying identity.

Higher education's unwillingness, or inability, to change is also commented upon by Coaldrake (2000) and Drucker (1994:67):

“The most important area for developing new concepts, methods, and practices will be in the management of society's knowledge resources - specifically, education and health care, both of which are today over administered and under-managed.”

Teichler (1988) however suggests that historically higher education systems have demonstrated a capacity to develop and evolve, and instances these responses under three broad categories:

- (A) Expansion/Diversification: Essentially this viewpoint contends that higher education systems expand and diversify to meet the needs of the economic and social system. Teichler (op. cit.) points to the adoption of binary systems in the United Kingdom (1967) and Australia (1965) as these respective systems developing in that manner to meet economic growth and development needs.
- (B) Drift Theories: This viewpoint suggests that educational institutes continually strive to emulate those that have greater prestige and status. The outcomes in such a system are twofold, professionally oriented and practical based institutions will drift towards university status whereas universities will experience professional drift, adopting more vocational and applied emphasis in their programmes.
- (C) Flexibilisation Theories: This viewpoint merely emphasises the ability of a higher education system to adopt softer models as the system dictates.
- (D) Cyclical Theories: These suggest that expansion or contraction in any system is of a cyclical nature and is primarily driven by economic demands.

Bleiklie and Kogan (2007:478) correlate this emerging landscape of higher education with transformational shifts in how higher education institutes are becoming more centrally administered and locally managed:

1. Central authorities are now exercising a far stronger role in the determination of university objectives and modes of working. Such control is sought via central funding systems, evaluation and accreditation regimes, and specific legislative requirements outlining governance requirements and reporting relationships.
2. The replacement of former collegiate based decision-making with more formal managerial infra-structures.
3. The introduction, as effective replacements for academically dominated senates, of councils, boards or trustees incorporating representation from the world of business, politics and public services.
4. A consolidation of power such that institutional leaders, rectors, presidents or vice presidents, now more closely parallel the role of chief executive officers. This terminates the former *prime inter pares* role of the academic leader and devolves more responsibility and accountability to that post.

Consequently, Bleiklie and Kogan (op. cit.:478) assert universities can no longer be perceived as a republic of scholars but are gravitating more towards a stakeholder organisation. They suggest the modern university is more correctly viewed as an instrument of economic development rather than some set of institutional values, with attendant consequences for academics and academic work. Coaldrake (2000) instances

the growth pattern of English and Australian universities from the mid 1960's – mid 1970's as evidence of tertiary education being employed as a key instrument in nation building. He contends that the increasingly greater demands placed on universities over the last decade emanate from two sources. First, the requirement in knowledge based economies and national innovation systems for the creation of multiple linkages within the economy, which universities hitherto had not been provided. Second, recognition by educational policy makers that the winding back of funding actively encourages engagement with the real world.

Other researchers (see for example: Henkel 2000, Deem 2003) follow the trajectory of these changes by examining their implications for academic work, particularly the extent to which massification of higher education, reduced public funding, and a requirement to do “more with less” may negatively impact on the professional status of the academic. Henkel (op. cit.), as a response to these changes, emphasises the requirement for higher education institutes to ‘reprofessionalise’ the work of the academic around the core activities of teaching and research. Clegg (2008) disputes whether in fact a homogeneous professionalisation and socialisation process actually occurs within academia. She contends that what emerges is a community of academic practitioners characterised more by heterogeneity than homogeneity with the principal distinguishing variables being discipline, department or social class. David (2007), adopting a sociological perspective, is less sceptical about the cited malign effects of globalisation on higher education and contends that the resulting changes do in fact improve societies by allowing for a more diverse and inclusive form of higher education. Contrasting the current policy in the United Kingdom of widening access

with the policy of stratified schools in the early post war period, she suggests social mobility can only be enhanced by the latter.

Gillen (2007:7) also queries the oft implied homogeneity of higher education systems, stating: “given the range of views and practices on offer under the heading of higher education, is there anything that they have in common by virtue of which they can claim the same description?” The received conceptualisation of what a university is, its underlying rationale and its place within society is constantly being challenged by structural changes within higher education and the post-modern, neo-liberal meta-narrative of the changing nature of knowledge. The pursuit of knowledge for its own sake has long typified the central idea of the university. Academia accordingly has always valued that kind of objectivity that demonstrates a commitment to universalism in criticism and analysis rather than a commitment to very narrow ends defined by the state and corporate imperatives (Editor: Journal of the Public University 2007). Rhode's (2001) definition of a university, reiterates this viewpoint.

“The university is the most significant creation of the second millennium. From modest beginnings over nine hundred years ago, it has become the quiet but decisive catalyst in modern society, the factor essential to its effective functioning and well-being.”

(Rhodes, 2001:256)

Minnogue (2005) also endorses the independence of the university, claiming that the university was never meant to be a functional institution; society's handmaiden. The characteristics of a university and its underlying *raison d'être*, are outlined clearly in the Bologna Declaration (1999):

- (A) The university is an autonomous institution at the heart of societies, differently organised because of geography and historical heritage; it produces, examines, appraises and hands down culture by research and teaching. To meet the needs of the world around it, its research and teaching must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority and economic power.
- (B) Teaching and research in universities must be inseparable if their tuition is not to lag behind changing needs, the demands of society and advances in scientific knowledge.
- (C) Freedom in research and training is the fundamental principle of university life, and government and universities, each as far as in them lies, must ensure respect for this fundamental requirement.

These characteristics embody the traditional or ivy-league universities, which have been augmented in recent years by further variations of the genre, including technological universities, universities of applied sciences and other higher education institutes. Shapiro (2005:4) argues that: “the university as we know it has displayed both longevity and consistency throughout numerous societal phases”. Underpinning this longevity, he states, is a philosophy that sees the university as central to, yet independent of, the society it serves.

Maintaining the university's *status quo ante* is not however universally endorsed. Lynch (2006) challenges the claims of universities of being guardians and creators of knowledge produced for the greater good of humanity. She suggests such claims are not evidenced by either enlightened organisational or operational practices. Other writers

(see for example: Reay 2004, Saunderson 2002) characterise universities over the centuries as both patriarchal and hierarchical. Reay (op. cit.) criticises universities for their anachronistic attachment to the Platonic view of education; one which effectively reinforced elitism and socially defined patterns of participation. Chait (1995:22) investigated the perceived reduction in academic freedom amongst American academics and the perceived reduction in economic security arising from the absence of tenure. In both areas he is in fact rather unsympathetic to the academic community, arguing that academics have no sacrosanct entitlement to more economic security than other sectors of the economy, dismissing their claims as being “anachronistic”. More controversially, he contends that the absence of academic freedom would in fact create a profession that is both more intellectually rigorous and professionally responsible!

Other researchers, such as David (2007), Evans (2004), Slaughter and Rhoades (2004), and Shavit *et al.* (2007) also attest to the changing conceptualisations and understandings of higher education institutes emanating from wider global, social and economic changes. A recurring theme in some writings, notably: David (2007), Evans (2004), and Maher and Treteault (2007) is the discourse between the sociology of higher education, massification and widening access. Shavit *et al.* (2007) refute the traditional perspective that the net impact of massification and widening of access has been a corrosion of excellence. They hypothesise that educational expansion reduces inequality by providing more opportunities for persons from disadvantaged strata. Similarly Maher and Treteault (2007:4), also using a utilitarian-sociological lens, lament the unwarranted criticism of diversity as a challenge to excellence, thus:

“However, to us the use of the term excellence is employed not so much as a mark of quality as a mark of privilege - that is, the power of elites to control the norms of the scholarly enterprise in such a way as to keep new people, new topics, and new methodologies at bay.”

Slaughter and Rhoades (2004) suggest the traditional boundaries between markets, states and higher education are now, because of globalisation, becoming increasingly blurred. They also contend that the traditional perspective of the university, part of society, yet detached from it, is becoming increasingly untenable. They hypothesise that in the ‘new economy’, one characterised by knowledge creation, dissemination and transfer, universities become inseparable from the economy in which they operate. Rather than perceiving this as a threat or encroachment they welcome the role of the university in creating global work forces. Clark (2001) however cautions that factory work and higher education are not analogous, identifying the primary differentiator as the nature of academic work. Rejecting the rational purposive model - one in which commonly established organisational goals can be determined and pursued, he asserts that academics are subject to multiple authorities and incentives which cut across institutional, regional and national boundaries. He further states that unlike their factory counterparts, academic workers are not characterised by codified knowledge but rather by knowledge rooted authority, such that the least common variable across and amongst academics is, in fact, common knowledge. Other writers (see for example: Lam 2000, Ellstrom 1992) suggest a further decomposition of professional knowledge into explicit knowledge (capable of verbalisation and hence communication to others), tacit knowledge (the ability to recognise something, judge something or see patterns) and competence (an individual's ability in relation to work). Mintzberg (1989) also recognises the idiosyncrasies of universities as places of work, because of this asymmetric distribution of knowledge, when labelling them professional bureaucracies.

Freidson (2001) further describes such bureaucracies as characterised by units of working life, which have a large proportion of highly educated people who work relatively independently, in connection with clients or customers, with strong collegial control, and with a quest for professionalism. Frenkel *et al.* (1999) suggest that the principal administration and management difficulties in such organisations have as their source a strong individualistic culture and a commensurately strong desire for autonomy amongst practising professionals. Brunson and Sahlin-Anderson (2000) also characterise public administration and bureaucracies as typically lacking collective identity, describing them as arenas rather than organisations, where members enjoy considerable autonomy to local managers.

In academic settings, an additional pillar: academic freedom, “the right of scholars to freely research, publish and teach on their field subjects” (Abowd *et al.* 2006), is seen as crucial to both higher education institutes and academic actors. The depiction therefore of academics as mere *professionals* (emphasis added), requires more detailed conceptualisation, one that is situated in and cognisant of the site of academic practice. James (2007), using narrative enquiry to investigate the construction of professional identity amongst senior academic psychologists, identifies a struggle between the academic's own professional identity and the new professional identity being sought in a more structured and regulated higher education environment. Similarly both Deem (2002) and Henkel (2000) highlight the non-alignment of audit/planning cultures with academic organisations, observing that academic loyalty tends to be directed toward the academic unit or knowledge-base in the first instance and not to the interests of the university as a whole.

The increasing importance attaching to administration within universities is also commented upon considerably in the literature. Gale (2002) refers to this development as the tail wagging the dog analogy, where the relative importance of academic work is usurped by administrative work. Campbell and Slaughter (1999) similarly highlight administration-academic tensions in 86 Carnegie institutions, whilst Fearn (2008), as a counterbalance, advocates an administration which is organic to, rather than imposed upon, the academy. Stew (1983) also highlights that in eras of devolved budgetary control administrators move away from the role of facilitators towards the role of an enforcer of priorities. The infusion of commercial values also permeate higher education policy documentation, with ever increasing references appearing of the need for universities to be world class to compete on the global stage (White Paper: The Future of Higher Education, 2003). King (2003) describes this as the language of globalisation, but highlights that globalisation is often misunderstood, incorporating social, economic and cultural phenomena. King (op. cit.) ponders the ability of universities to remain truly independent; debating whether universities will become mere instruments of nation states adhering slavishly to the globalisation agenda or can they remain truly independent in the pursuit of their own academic and research interests?

Johnstone (1998) accepts the marketisation of higher education is an inevitable corollary of the ascendancy of market capitalism and neo-liberal economics. He suggests that at the heart of marketisation lies a critical policy, philosophical and funding shift, one which sees decision making power being transferred from central governments and higher educational institutes to the consumer. Elaborating further, Johnstone (op. cit.:26) suggests that marketisation is merely the vanguard for the

privatisation of higher education: the unconditional adoption by higher education institutes of standards consistent with private business practice and supportive of a globalisation agenda:

“Privatisation connotes a greater orientation to the student as a consumer, including the concept of college education as a “product”, attention to image, competitor institutions and market niches, pricing and the enhancement of net earned revenue, and aggressive marketing.”

Doring (2002) and Rutherford (2005) also express misgivings about universities' future role in society, citing their transformation from being centres of learning to being business organisations with productivity targets. Lynch (2006) suggests that in doing this the university is in fact transferring its allegiance from the academic to the operational.

2.3 The Neo-Liberal Agenda: Implications for Governance

Accompanying this influence of globalisation on higher education is a concurrent emphasis on governance, one which is moving from its 1980s pre-occupation with the identity and inclusion of governors to a focus on efficiency in an administrative, teaching and research context. Kezar and Eckel (2004) position governance at the macro level of policy decision making, differentiating it from internal management. Sporn (2002:14) attributes this governance policy shift to the influence of the market with an increasing adoption of neo-liberal economic thinking, but counsel's policy makers to continue to “pay close attention to the role of faculty and shared governance”. The ideological logic influencing governance changes in higher education is often described as neo-liberalism. Lynch (2006) suggests that neo-liberalism advocates that the market can replace the democratic state as the primary producer of cultural logic and value. The

outcome, she contends, is a consumer led citizenry reared on a culture of insecurity that induces competition and indifference to those more vulnerable than themselves. Hursh (2005) contrasts the implications of this market pre-occupation with our received conceptualisation of what education actually means. He contends that when employability and economic productivity become central, education therefore becomes less concerned with developing well rounded liberally educated people. Noddings (2003) concurs, suggesting that neo-liberal educational values disregard the role emotions play in human learning, whilst over emphasising the rationality of the individual. Dill (2001) describes the adoption of a neo-liberal agenda by governments as the adoption of quasi-market approaches to allocating resources, including incentives and performance related funding. Central to these approaches is a de-coupling effect, where accountability for performance and outputs has increased at the individual institutional level, whilst authority over inputs and resources, at least those allocated centrally, has decreased. Therefore higher education institutes are witnessing the devolution of authority at a price; an unrelenting drive away from their perception as state agencies to one where they are viewed as moving toward becoming public corporations. Giroux (2002) however argues that in the context of higher education, neo-liberalism merely attempts to treat education as another service to be delivered by the market. Further criticism of the 'homo economicus' (Hursh 2005) output as envisaged by neo-liberalists is also offered by Ball (2003) for its unashamed promotion of competitive individualism.

Olssen (2002:2), in a New Zealand context, cites evidence of a shift from the state's grandmotherly role of "guidance and governance" to one of neo-liberal policy formulations emphasising, *inter-alia*, initiatives in funding, research, teaching, quality

assurance and governance. Gerwitz (2002) and Hursh (2005) both characterise the increasing neo-liberal shifts in the United Kingdom and the United States as a response to the corporate and social agendas that emerged after the Second World War. More specifically, Bowles and Gintis (1986) attribute the advent of neo-liberalism to a desire to rebalance the interests of the private sector against the encroaching interests of the workforce, whom over the intervening post-war years had gained significant improvements in welfare. Tabb (2002:7) describes the allure of the pure market as both a democratic and efficient solution, thus:

“The aim of Neo-Liberalism is to put into question all collective structures capable of obstructing the logic of the pure market.”

De Angelis and Harvie (2007) suggest that neo-liberal demands on higher education are analogous to the scientific management revolution in American factories in the early twentieth century. They suggest academics are now evaluated along what's measured is managed axiom; where all academic work is being monitored, assessed and valued. Central to the neo-liberal agenda is the reformist agendas of the elected administrations which have pursued market reforms so vigorously, together with the neo-liberal, economic and managerial oriented goals prioritised by those administrations (Ferlie *et al.* 1996).

Marginson (1993) suggests neo-liberalism in an academic-governance perspective, entails fundamentally different values from the traditionally received Keynesian demand model of government-university interaction. He states neo-liberalism promotes economic-maximiser type behaviour amongst individuals and organisations, such as:

1. The view of individuals as economically self-interested subjects or rational optimisers.
2. The view that the uncoordinated self interest of individuals correlates with the interests of society as a whole. (Invisible Hand Theory).
3. An acceptance that the best way to allocate resources is through the market. (Free market Economics)
4. A commitment to “laissez-faire”, which views the market as the optimal self regulator and displays an innate suspicion or distrust of governmental power or intervention.
5. A commitment to free trade and the abolition of tariffs or subsidies.

This infusion of neo-liberal thinking within higher education is mediated by the adoption of New Public Management rhetoric therein (see for example: Leisyte 2006; Pollitt and Bouckaerts 2000). Leisyte (2006), investigating New Public Management practices in the Netherlands and England, notes increasing emphasis on cost cutting, changing governance structures and increasing competitiveness across the two jurisdictions, yet highlights distinctly different policy instruments in achieving these goals in the areas of funding and quality control. Ferlie *et al.* (1996) describe New Public Management as being directed at a restructuring of the public service in order to make it more efficient and effective. Concurrent with this quest for efficiency is a desire to reduce state spending and a transformation of organisations in areas such as health care, education and social services. This accords with Pollitt and Bouckaert's (op. cit.) depiction of New Public Management as a structure altering and policy development process in public sector organisations. Taylor and Miroiu (2002) suggest that New Public Management imports certain characteristics to universities, including; priority

setting within institutions and the use of performance indicators, strengthening of the administrative and leadership functions within universities, a client orientation and a value for money emphasis. Sporn (2002:32) also identifies the New Public Management rationale as twofold; the attainment of efficiency and effectiveness across the public sector and a reduction in state spending. She also credits New Public Management with a gradual erosion of the power of unions and professionals and gains in the importance of managers, non-elected directors etc. Kogan et al. (2000) suggests however that despite the introduction of New Public Management approaches subsequent behaviour at the departmental and faculty level remains relatively unchanged.

Hood (2000) describes New Public Management as a policy imperative for correcting the perceived failings of traditional bureaucracies in efficiency, quality, customer responsiveness and effective leadership. Lyotard (1984) links New Public Management initiatives with the changing nature of knowledge in late capitalist societies, which he describes as the post-modern condition; one in which performativity and commoditization of knowledge become dominant characteristics of the university. Lyotard (op. cit.) hypothesises that as societies progress from industrial to post-industrial phases the status of knowledge also becomes altered; such that knowledge and pedagogy are now no longer inextricably linked; effectively therefore knowledge has become commoditised. Marshall (1995) further develops Lyotard's assertion, and suggests that in such a world view, where knowledge is the new dominant factor of production; human beings are rational, autonomous and utility maximising, then the marketisation of education becomes inevitable. Meek (2003) accepts that the advent of a knowledge economy always held transformational consequences for universities, contending universities must now find a new legitimacy, whilst retaining traditional

values. Education, he concludes, has now become a commodity; something to be produced, packaged, sold, traded, outsourced, franchised and consumed.

Articulating governance structures however provides little guidance on the actual process of governance. Lazaretti and Tavoletti (2005) characterise the governance process as comprising all the processes and institutions that rule the division and management of power inside universities and national university systems. Clark (1983) presented the seminal theoretical representation of university governance through his triangle of co-ordination. Therein he depicts three forces: the market, the state authority and the academic oligarchy as the primary co-ordinators in any higher education system. Clark's model depicts very precise path dependencies, from an internal co-ordinating perspective, between the state, market and the university system.

Using these three forces Clark (1983) suggests it is possible to distinguish between co-ordination based upon market mechanisms (the market model characterised by the Anglo Saxon model and the United States), the state induction model (characterised by Sweden and France) and the academic oligarchy model (characterised by Germany). Elaborating upon Clark's model, Van Vught (1989) proffers two possible co-ordinating processes; the state control model and the state supervising model. Essentially the state control model, which Van Vught (1989) equates with the European continental model, involves the state regulating access, degree requirements and academic remuneration, with responsibility for internal university affairs, namely teaching and research, remaining the responsibility of academic staff. Conversely the state supervising model sees the state 'steering at a distance' (Van Vught 1989:333) with power being shared between the academic community and internal management.

Braun and Merrien (1999), have also modified Clark's (1983) earlier work, and propose university governance can be viewed along four dimensions:

1. State Substantial Control.
2. Procedural Control.
3. Cultural Belief Systems.
4. Service Belief Systems.

Braun and Merrien's (1999) typology envisions different roles for national administrations and academic staff. State substantial control is exercised by national administrators through financial incentives, goals and ranking systems. State procedural control, exercised again by national administrators, is achieved through detailed regulation of the higher education system. Cultural belief systems prioritise a system of governance that emphasises the role of knowledge transfer and creation; where academics self-govern without outside interference. Finally the service belief system of governance prioritises the contribution of the academy to the development of society and the economy, both local and national. Universities under the service beliefs systems are very much regarded as change agents and catalysts for economic growth.

The White Paper on Education (United Kingdom 2003) cites governance developments in the United Kingdom and Netherlands as evidence that national states now view higher education institutes as policy tools to encourage innovation and labour market linkages. Pritchard (2006) laments this excessive market orientation in emergent governance trends. Analysing changes occurring in German higher education, he identifies the erosion of the philosophical ideal of "*Bildung*", which emphasised the

inculcation of a nation state consciousness and national aspirations, and produced citizens of the future, rather than appeasing demands of market forces. He expresses concern at this emphasis on market forces for the preservation of higher education's role as a servant to society. He identifies a university's societal role as threefold: (1) the socialisation of students to their role in society, (2) the provision of social mobility opportunities to students, and (3) upholding the university as the home of disinterested scholarship and unfettered debate. Kwiek (2000) similarly contends that emerging governance structures no longer reflect the aspirations of idealists and romanticists, as the influence of the market strengthens, and the universities' social and cultural missions becoming increasingly blurred. Weiler (2001:335) supports Kwiek's hypothesis thus:

“...there is a new game being played in European higher education. Wherever the new game is played there are the same three players involved; the university, the state and the market.”

Shore (2007) offers New Zealand as a case-study for studying the consequences of neo-liberal governance reform processes in higher education. Central to these reforms was the transformation of governing councils, from a system based on representative groups to one based upon government appointment of council members. Olssen (2002) identifies this proposal as the start of a vigorous debate in New Zealand on the concept of academic freedom, leading ultimately to the appointment of Dr Donald Savage (2000:2), a Canadian higher education consultant, to prepare a report on the subject:

“...in the thirteen years from 1987 to 2000 New Zealand saw an unprecedented invasion of university autonomy and attack on academic freedom by the central government. Although the university community resisted these attacks with varying degrees of success, the consequent warfare has been debilitating, has eroded morale, and has undermined academic freedom and institutional autonomy.”

Resistance to governance reforms in the United Kingdom is also apparent. Welch and Wright (2004) philosophically resist the re-designation of Vice-Chancellors as chief executives and cite the Lambert Report (2003) as introducing a governance philosophy that over emphasises market values. Haddad (1999) also decries this emerging governance paradigm suggesting it is damaging to the intrinsic values and ideals that education represents and categorises the market model as presenting a new and unnatural model for higher education. Enders (2002) highlights that whilst traditionally the university views itself as a social institution, its inherited modes of governance are inappropriate in the current environment. Gumport and Sporn (1999) suggest the governance problem facing universities is one of institutional adaptation. Reflecting on several dimensions of institutional adaptation; such as retrenchment, restructuring, redefined missions, reorganisation, mandate change, governmental reform and targeted funding, they emphasise a recurring theme; administrators rather than academics are increasingly in the vanguard of this adaptation. Gumport and Sporn (1999:15) suggest this entails a shift of prevailing authority, structure and decision making within the university, with administrators now being given more authority to decide upon changes, distribute resources and implement decisions:

“In our view administration is inclusive of upper as well as middle management; i.e. we incorporate leadership in our definition of administration.”

Meek (2003) hypothesises that modern day higher education governance is best understood in an institutional-organisational context. He suggests that as the broader social environment of colleges change, so too will the requirements of this institution-organisation relationship. Meyer and Evans (2005) suggest that these altered relationships could potentially pose risks for the attraction of new academic staff and

counsel's policy makers to remain conscious of the collateral consequences of ill considered regulatory change. Tabatoni *et al.* (2002:17) provide a typology of these altered relationships, driven and formulated at the policy level, which are presently evident across higher education institutes:

An emphasis on a culture of compliance that is characterised by a requirement to report directly to, or operate, or conform to externally designed quality processes for assessing teaching and research.

A requirement to develop internal processes which are intended to satisfy broad external criteria and benchmarks; a culture of introspection.

A requirement to set standards for accreditation; a culture of normalisation.

A requirement to establish linkages between quality reviews and resource allocation, directly or indirectly; culture retroactive strategies.

A requirement to benchmark university performance in domains such as teaching, research, cost effectiveness, value for money and income generation; a culture of transparency

European Universities, Sporn (2002) argues, have responded to these governance demands in different ways: strengthened university leadership, new governing boards, new decision making structures, accountability measures, quality control of core processes of teaching and research, performance contracts and professional staff development. Sporn (op. cit.) describes these changes as an attempt to turn the university into an entrepreneurial and competitive organisation characterised by quick and accountable management decisions.

Santiago and Carvalho (2004) recognises that globally universities are moving from an individual centric approach to a more utilitarian approach, responding to the needs of the knowledge economy. Vilas (1996) suggest such changes will fundamentally alter perceptions of what public services entails, leading ultimately to: the deregulation of the economy, trade liberalisation, the dismantling of the public sector (such as education, health and social welfare) and the predominance of the financial sector of the economy over production and commerce. Levidow (2002) is unsurprised by these changes given the position that higher education enjoys in capitalist societies. Because universities define and deliver the skills of professional workers for labour markets, he contends, they are not immune to change and must also challenge or re-enforce their own prevailing ideologies.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the extant literature on changes in higher education and identified reactions within academia to these changes. Principle amongst these changes are: globalisation and what it entails for higher education; the changing role of nation states in the provision of public services, especially higher education; the underlying philosophy and increasing adoption of new managerial approaches in the public sector and its attendant consequences for higher education institutes. These changes have been initially considered at the institute level, and subsequently at the individual level - that of the academic. The requirement on higher education institutes to adopt governance systems which take greater cognisance of market forces, and higher education's role as agent in national innovation systems, has also been outlined. Unsurprisingly, the reaction within academic organisations has been one of resistance and concern: traditional academic values of collegiality and academic freedom are being threatened.

Chapter 3 will consider the incursion of another emergent institutional requirement; strategic planning, within higher education institutes. Chapter 3 will also consider the origins of strategic planning requirements in North America in the early 1980's to its current adoption in both Ireland and England, positioning it specifically against the unique workplace and culture that is academia.

Chapter 3

The New University Challenge: Strategic Planning

CHAPTER 3: THE NEW UNIVERSITY CHALLENGE: STRATEGIC PLANNING

3.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 has contextualised the unprecedented changes, demographic, economic and technological, occurring in higher education throughout the 1970's and 1980's. Chapter 2 has also outlined the new managerial paradigm of public sector reform, currently underway, which radically questions and challenges how public sector organisations are organised, run and function in a quasi business like manner. There is a considerable body of literature exploring how this ideology, focussing on performance-cost-efficiency and audit-orientation, transfers to higher education institutes (see for example: Deem and Brehony 2005, Deem 2003, Shattock 2003). Newton (2003) and Yijoki (2003) summarise the implications of the adoption of this new managerial perspective as the renegotiation of shared meanings across organisational stakeholders about what is to be valued, the institutionalisation of change and the shaping of organisational culture. Keller (1983), examining the strategic planning phenomenon in 1980s America, characterised these early attempts at planning as emphasising a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organisation is, what it does, and why it does it.

Strategic plans are now a ubiquitous feature of higher education; demanded by accreditation and funding agencies, and representing the principal means by which higher education institutes articulate their proposed pathway to organisational success. This chapter therefore will review the literature across a number of subject areas including strategic planning, an investigation of the increasing importance being attached to strategic planning by higher education institutes, and consideration of the

unique challenges presented by higher education and its cultural constructs to the adoption of strategic planning. The debate focussing on strategic planning typically emphasise two dimensions; whether or not it is an essential management tool or a counterproductive management fad (Mintzberg 1989, Dooris 2003). In the haste of higher education institutes to undertake strategic planning, Ferren *et al.* (2001) identify a frequently overlooked collision between managerial and academic cultures on their own campuses. Both cultures are laden with very different philosophical constructs; one favours competition, strategy and outcomes, and the other prizes independence and reflection. This chapter will consider the relevance and appropriateness of strategic planning to academic institutes characterised by Mintzberg (1989) as “professional bureaucracies”, together with the difficulties of aligning academic staff members with the published plan.

3.2 Strategic Planning in Higher Education

The strategic planning literature (see for example: Powell 1992; Mantere and Sillince 2007) recognises strategic plans as one of the principal differentiating features amongst competitors. Grundy (1993) describes strategic planning as creating a sense of long term direction in order to anticipate and shape the future environment, allocating resources for competitive advantage and steering change. Peach (2005:73) cautions against viewing strategic planning as only delivering desirable organisational outcomes and better financial performance. He contends that when properly embedded in an appropriately aligned strategic management framework the inherited strategic logic of any organisation can be disputed, altered or replaced. Leavy (2004) attributes proper organisational learning with broadly participative planning frameworks. Campling *et al.* (2005) highlight the contribution strategic planning can make to any organisation's self-

concept of sustainability; allowing them to reinvent themselves by envisioning a future beyond today's *status quo*. Allen and Fifield (1999) suggest that successful strategic change is unlikely to occur in the absence of organisational culture change.

Peterson (1980:114) defines strategic planning in higher education institutes as "...a conscious process by which 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". Enders (2002) more succinctly describes strategic planning by higher education institutes as an underlying mode of both co-ordination and rationalisation. Numerous writers (see for example: Slaughter and Rhoades 2004, Denman 2005, Bartlett 2007) attribute the immediacy attaching to strategic planning to developments in the new public management approach to state services (Slaughter and Rhoades 2004), the greater autonomy and degrees of self regulation being afforded to higher education institutes (Askling and Christensen 2000), and the rapidly changing demands of the knowledge economy (Denman 2005, Bartlett 2007). Bartlett (2007) identifies the need for Ireland's tertiary education institutes to prioritise the provision of undergraduate and postgraduate students for knowledge intensive industries, as key elements in their research strategy. Slaughter and Rhoades (2004), commenting on the transition from mass manufacturing to a knowledge based economy, emphasise the strategic considerations arising for higher education institutes in areas such as; the management of faculty, the unbundling of professorial work into diverse areas such as on line instruction and a change in the nature of the undergraduate curricula.

James (2007) counsel's academic administrators to recognise the core values of academic identity as a necessary first step in the planning process. Advocating that academic identity is socially, culturally and professionally constructed, she instances the paradox facing academic planners; how can one assume the homogeneity of academic culture and its alignment with a strategic plan if, within academic institutions, promotion is in fact often perceived as a threat to academic identity? Enders (2002) offers perhaps a solution to this dilemma; suggesting that academics must be seen as both objects and subjects in any strategic planning process. He adds however that in the current regulatory focussed environment, academics perceive themselves solely as objects.

In a less effusive perspective on strategic planning, Peach (2005:19) warns that strategic planning processes can become self perpetuating bureaucratic mechanisms that are stilted, ritualistic and orchestrated. Lynch (2006) and Mintzberg (1989) also highlight inherent difficulties with strategic planning; excessive politicisation and its dysfunctional consequences, the oft overlooked mismatch between corporate culture and the adopted planning system, and poor direction from senior management.

Morphew *et al.* (2006: 85) suggest that all of the paraphernalia which accompanies strategic planning: the articulation of mission, the definition of vision and the resultant publication of the plan itself, is predicated upon "threadbare anecdotal evidence". Delucchi (1997:417), similarly sceptical, describes strategic planning as a normative necessity: processes which organisations engage in to illustrate that they understand the rules of the game, and which confer certain legitimacy upon the organisation. The principles, practice and vocabulary of strategic planning in higher education is further

contested in the literature as mere rule adherence and lacking real meaning (see for example: Prichard 2000, Knight and Trowler 2001). Deem and Brehony (2005:223), identifying language as an instrument of cultural change, position strategic planning requirements as: "being the principal mediating influence through which new managerialism becomes mainstreamed in higher education institutes". Conversely, Morpew and Hartley (2006) attach more significance to both mission statements and strategic plans, suggesting that the absence of a mission statement or strategic plan begets the very legitimacy of a college or university. Gonzalez-Perez *et al.* (2007) concur with Delucchi (1997), suggesting that Ireland's higher education institutes have become normatively adept at speaking the language of new managerialism - ostensibly to attain good favour and to satisfy a legislative requirement, without necessarily embracing such philosophies.

Rowley *et al.* (1996) suggest the term strategic planning is often incorrectly used to describe planning practices in many institutions. They contend that what is often referred to as strategic planning is nothing more than traditional planning; traditional planning considers problems and their solutions using an inside-out mind set, whereas strategic planning requires consideration and response using an outside-in mind set. Rowley *et al.* (1996) suggest the adoption of an outside-in mind set allows organisations to identify the unpredictable driving forces at work in the marketplace, rather than an inside-out mindset which assumes a more static environment amenable to prediction and quantification. Put simply, traditional planning will permit the setting of goals, either short or long term, and the development of steps to achieve these goals, while strategic planning will align an organisation with its environment. Steiner *et al.* (1982) identify another major difference between the two planning methods as the specificity

and substance of their respective goals. Traditional planning focuses on specific items, such as profit objectives, which are expected to be attained within a particular time period. Strategic planning focuses on direction setting which typically lacks the earlier level of specificity. Steiner *et al.* (op. cit.) contend that this open-endedness of strategic planning can create implementation problems, simply because its lack of focus actually creates resistance to the entire process, and consequently the results have very often been rather lacklustre strategic planning outcomes. Recent research commissioned by Ireland's Institutes of Technology (Institutes of Technology Ireland 2008) also attests to the specific disconnectedness of academic staff from strategic planning processes, and identifies the following as the most common causal factors: (1) low levels of awareness of the existence of a strategic plan or its contents, (2) apathy towards the strategic plan, (3) low levels of connectedness between the daily activities of academic staff and the long term organisational goals set out in the strategic plan, and (4) a minimal sense of ownership or belief in the strategic plan.

Rowley *et al.* (1996) also outline the unique difficulties of strategic planning within higher education institutes; offering the following reasons for its poor adoption:

(1) Locus of Control

Rowley *et al.* (op. cit.) categorises successful companies as being innovative and able to manipulate their environments. Consequently their locus of control is favourable. Colleges and universities however do not control their market so favourably. Frequently colleges can find their scope for manoeuvre limited by statute, requirements to serve a particular constituency, or political expediencies. Gumport (2001), in criticising college leaders for excessively focussing their attention outward, defends her criticism on the

basis that in externally focussed higher education institutes the locus of control for academic decision making moves out of departments, a shift that may be detrimental to staff morale.

(2) The Challenge of Niching

Creating niches, or well defined market segments which complement competences, may also prove more difficult in a higher education context. Witte (2004) suggests that the depiction of higher education systems in any homogenised manner amounts to an oversimplification. Decomposing systems of higher education into seven sub-elements; national degree structures, institutional types, curricular governance, curricula, access, transition to employment and funding, she contends that strategic planning in this context therefore takes on further variability. Hazelkorn (2005) also recognises the complexity of strategic planning in academic institutions. The model she outlines requires tertiary education institutes to take into consideration multiple variables when planning strategically, including factor conditions, demand conditions, institutional strategy and regional national relations. She also highlights, particularly in relation to research, the inherited disadvantage the newer tertiary education institutes suffer from as a result of their late developer status.

3.3 Future Policy Developments: The Planners Canvas?

Strategic planning adopts a number of axioms; one of which suggests that the past is no longer prologue. Fisher (2006:2) summarises the position facing academic strategic planners as: "what shape does our institution need to be in to meet the future needs of stakeholders and society?" Current developments, outlined earlier, may provide little or no guidance however to the future policy and direction of higher education. Marginson

and Van der Wende (2007) outline the constant requirement for educational policy makers to constantly reinvent policies and reconcile tensions that are apparent within notionally unified systems of higher education. This section will present an *ex-ante* perspective of higher education's likely development, predominantly in a trans-national context. Those developments specific to the Republic of Ireland will be outlined separately in Chapter 4.

Unlike the United Kingdom, no formal policy on higher education exists within the Republic of Ireland. The Department of Education and Skills (United Kingdom) Statement on the Purpose of Higher Education (2005) clearly specifies the main functions of higher education:

- To enable people to develop their capabilities and their full potential, both personally and at work.
- To advance knowledge and scholarship through scholarship and research.
- To contribute to an economically and culturally diverse nation.

In a trans-national context Huisman and Van der Wende (2004) highlight a dichotomy confronting the European Commission - perceived as a major policy actor, yet eliciting responses from individual member states which can be quite diverse. They suggest member states see their higher education systems as the embodiment of their national cultures, and are effectively change resistant. Marginson and Van der Wende (2007) rationalise this lethargy of national higher education policy makers together with their willingness to effect only "intra-European" integration by reference to the 1991 "Memorandum on Higher Education" - one which over emphasised the economic

rationale for higher education cohesiveness. Other commentators have highlighted the successes achieved by Brussels in its attempts at achieving greater cohesiveness across national systems. Reinalda and Kulesza (2005) highlight the development and implementation of the European Credit Transfer System and the development of a European Qualifications Framework; whilst Reichert and Tauch (2005) signal some successes in the attainment of the Bologna assigned two-cycle degree structure in most signatory states at the end of 2005. Singh (2001) also expresses concerns about this piecemeal progress towards the attainment of a European Area of Higher Education by the year 2010, and points to the migration of newer higher education market opportunities to the United States and Australia (unified systems enjoying a common language) as well as increasing public disinvestment in higher education by member states frustrated at the apparent lack of congruence.

The Centre for Higher Education Policy Studies (2005:50) in their Review of the Higher Education Policy Issues facing eleven Western European countries, identify four broad themes demanding policy initiatives over the short term: The Bologna Process and changing degree structures, the changing organisation of research, financial accountability and responsibility and interactive governance. In the area of governance, what is discernible, particularly in German, Danish and French universities is the shift of autonomy towards universities with an attendant increase in accountability. This twin axis of increased accountability and autonomy simultaneously provides more leeway - and necessity for the universities to set their strategic directions. The "stick" in such arrangements may be evidenced by the introduction of more performance based agreements between individual institutions and their respective ministries. In 2004, for example, universities in the Netherlands witnessed the introduction of "*prestatie-*

afspraken”, essentially a performance management system linked to the annual budgeting process. Further evidence of this increasing accountability being transferred to universities is evidenced in the United Kingdom Department for Education and Skills Discussion Paper (2004:5) concerning the renewal of degree awarding powers. Noteworthy about these proposals is the very deliberate linkage made between quality, market position and competitive advantage:

“In a global marketplace for higher education, where there is increasing competition for international students, the reputation of UK degrees is one of our key competitive advantages. Recent research reports on international higher education demonstrate the potential growth in this area and the importance of safeguarding our well earned reputation for high standards.”

(Department for Education and Skills Discussion Paper, 2004:5)

Trowler (2005:10), when considering the future of higher education and its implications, takes exception to what he deems to be an excessively ideological position about the inheritance of academia, and stresses the need for what he terms “reinvention”....

“...to look for changes which involve taking significant and well embedded institutions and practices and then re-organising them into something distinctly new within a relatively short time frame.”

Palmer (2001) contends that in order for strategic planning to be successful in any organisation it requires a degree of collectivism across the entire organisation which both directs and motivates all constituent parts of the organisation towards the attainment of the strategic priorities specified. However in encouraging and facilitating people to consider, and prepare for, what amounts to any altered future state the mental structure through which individuals acquire their views and behaviour needs to become externalised. Hence the challenge facing higher education's strategic planners is how

best to represent and disseminate the emerging worldview of higher education and its attendant consequences. The next section will outline the academic work environment in which these policy developments will arise, focussing on academics, academic work and academic self perceptions.

3.4 The Academic Workplace: Different or Merely Peculiar?

Higher education change transcends regulatory agencies; permeating right down to the individual unit level; academics and their accompanying work practices. Coaldrake (2000:15) identifies five major changes in academic work, arising from increasing direct external pressures for transparency:

- (1) Increasing focus on accountability and productivity
- (2) Increasing pressures on time, workload and morale
- (3) A shifting locus of control in staffing policies from local control to institutional control
- (4) The increasing specialisation of academic work, and
- (5) A blurring of distinctions between categories of staff.

McInnis's (1996) analysis of Australian universities between 1977 and 1993 supports Coaldrake's assertions, identifying more sustained work across the academic year and an increase in the amount of administrative work. The idea that higher education can be commoditised, measured, packaged, sold, outsourced and franchised, also engenders resistance from academics (see for example: Roberts 1998: Brown 2001: Trow 1996). This resistance contests the repositioning of education from a collective public good to a private investment together with the attendant organisational and cultural mutations of

this shift. Roberts (op. cit.) resists the introduction of corporate board style governance mechanisms, given its propensity for less academic staff representation. Brown (op. cit.) suggests that higher education's accountability agenda merely creates an over regulated academy displaying no real systematic benefits.

Trow (1996) highlights the basic dichotomy between the marketisation of higher education and the absence of a true market for the outcomes of higher education. Citing the absence of institutional discretion over the pricing of educational qualifications and salaries paid to academic and administrative staff, he contends that what emerges is in effect a false market. Similarly, Amaral and Magarlies (2001) contend that as long as the state continues to control these variables, then higher education reform initiatives parcelled as market regulation amount to nothing more than covert instruments of public policy. Palfreyman and Tapper (2004) similarly contend that marketisation in a UK higher education context is in fact a misnomer, because the necessary conditions or assumptions in a classical economic context do not exist. Brown (2004) states that to expect universities to embrace market type conditions ignores the fact that marketisation is not a rational choice for them, but rather one imposed by severe funding cuts over two decades. He instances the paradox of the capping of top-up fees in the UK by the Higher Education Act 2004; essentially depriving discretion to universities in establishing their own fees, yet expecting them to operate in "market conditions" as an example of such disjointed policy making.

Enders (2000:8) proposes a continuum of three conceptual frameworks along which the societal identity of academics and academic organisations has progressed:

The “profession” represented by the so-called liberal professions, i.e. lawyers and medical practitioners;

The “estate”, deeply rooted on pre-industrial and pre-professional characteristics of guild like organised vocations;

The “staff”, employees in large institutions that have to deliver an efficient service.

Webster and Moseota (2001) describe the principle distinctive feature of any university as its occupational structure; where academics view themselves as professionals rather than employees, claiming autonomy over their own work. Hoggett (1996) and Bundy (1999) suggest that the mechanisms through which policy makers have challenged this perspective has been the introduction of neo-liberal forms of organisation to replace the more traditional liberal agenda. Organisationally, this is evidenced by the creation of operationally decentralised units with increasing centralised control over strategy and policy, the introduction of performance management and development systems, and the recognition of competition as a dominant co-ordinating mechanism. Managing the employment relationship in universities has also changed substantively, particularly in the vocabulary around which this relationship is administered. Deem (2003) and Allen (2002) suggest this increased managerial focus has not actually ruptured academia into two distinct groupings; academics and manager-academics. They contend that many managers remain part, emotionally or otherwise, of the academic community. Additionally Henkel (2000) and Clegg (2008) suggest that whilst academics may be functionally homogeneous-engaged in teaching and/or research, academic differentiation further fragments across disciplines and departments. Knight and Trowler (1999:32), emphasising departmental over institutional allegiance, suggest: “it

is the nature of the department that appears to be an important-but not determining influence on the socialisation of new academics.”

A considerable literature portrays a less than seamless transition of neo-liberalism into the academic workplace. Webster and Moseota (2001), investigating the increase of academic managerialism, surveyed staff in thirty six higher education institutes in South Africa, and noted: (1) a reconfiguration in how academics defined their relationship with management, defining themselves increasingly more as employees rather than colleagues, (2) a perception amongst academics of an intensification in their work loads, with a devolution of administrative duties. Shore and Wright (1999:569), in a survey of British Universities, also highlight the emergence of an audit culture amongst British academics, such that their self-concept as professionals has been replaced by one of “units of resource whose performance and productivity must constantly be audited, to become auditable bodies”. Shelley (1999:442) suggests, as a potential barometer of when such audit and control cultures become acceptable within academia, a juncture characterised by:

“An emphasis on a managerially controlled appraisal agenda, with assessment criteria set by ‘lay’ line managers, rather than a system controlled by academics through peer review based on criteria set at the discretion of colleagues, will be a strong indicator of the shift in managerial control in universities.”

Paradoxically, Deem and Brehony (2005:219) dispute whether managerial needs in higher education are in fact well served by new managerialism. They identify the emergence of more managerial grades bringing together two incompatible forces; the academy which resents excessive managerial interference and an ideology which maintains relations of power and domination. Deem (2004:110) also articulates this

dilemma, when suggesting: “control and regulation of academic labour seems to have replaced collegiality, trust and professional discretion”. She sees the appropriate levels for managerial involvement in academic work practices as being mediated by the necessity to allow the academic maintain freedom in the design and delivery of everyday work.

McConachie (2001), citing research conducted at Central Queensland University, suggests that whilst college managers are very adept at discerning the first order change; that is why the change is required, they regularly overlook the second order change necessary to implement the change; that is the effect the culture of the organisation will play in influencing the success or failure of the new initiative. Lucas (2004) characterises the literature on the academic profession along two dimensions; that literature which is embedded in the discourse of change and crisis, and that literature lamenting a lost collegial age. Using Bourdieu's (1988) *Homo Academicus*, Lucas adapts Bourdieu's thinking tools of “*habitus*”, “symbolic capital” and “social agents” to assess the social situation that arose within academia following the introduction of the Research Assessment Exercise in 1986. The outcome, she concludes, is the interpenetration of the former old symbolic capital of the academy, namely academic research, by a new game; “the game of research submission” (op. cit.:40). This development meant that research funding would hitherto be subject to a process of peer review; ranking research outputs along a pre-determined scale of 1 to 5. My research will explore whether the interpenetration of another, relatively new social situation, strategic planning, could similarly be contextualised against Bourdieu's model.

Bundy (2003) attributes altered university management practices in the United Kingdom to three principal developments; first, the increased complexity of universities together with the requirement to perform more numerous and novel tasks: second, the reduction in funding for universities compelled the need for newer organisational structures, more efficiency focussed than hitherto, and finally, the altered regulatory relationship between universities and the state. It could be argued that similar developments have also occurred in the Republic of Ireland as evidenced by the new managerial and administrative structures introduced through the Regional Technical Colleges Act (1992), and more recently the Institute of Technology Act (2006). I will examine in greater detail the provisions of this legislation in Chapter 4.

Goffee and Jones (1998) describe academic organisations as fragmented, displaying both low sociability and low solidarity. Low sociability describes relations between individuals who see one another as friends, as opposed to members of a coherent team. Low solidarity describes the existence of very little task centred co-operation between individuals. "Academics", asserted Keller (1983:37), "tend to be in a modern society, but not really a part of it". Rather they perceive themselves as members of an Athenian democracy, wherein they share a bundle of values and aspirations unburdened by outside interference. Yanow (in Daskalaki 2007) depicts an inherent academic schizophrenia suggesting academics are in fact members of several discourse communities and their identities will therefore be shaped by the nature of their membership of these communities. Liimets (2005) contends that academic identity consists of multifaceted and plural qualities that make people unique and different and consists of the cumulative experience and meaning in one's life. Baumeister (1997) also emphasises the situational and context laden constructs underpinning professional

identity, where collective stories and grand narratives become the authoritative discourse and referential point for professional identity. Thomas (1995) also commented on the lack of 'collectivism' within colleges, whilst Becher and Trowler (2001) acknowledge the fragmented nature of academic culture through the concept of academic tribes. Barrett and Barrett (2007), in their research, highlight the tensions currently existing within higher education in the United Kingdom, between the traditional notion of academic autonomy and the negative feelings towards the tools of increasing bureaucracy and new managerialism. They recommend to higher education managers the adoption of workload allocation models for academics, which could potentially arrive at a more optimal balance between these seemingly conflicting demands.

The professional association perspective of the university (Kogan and Hanney 2000) and its accommodation of professional autonomy, is now being challenged by a regime of managerial discipline and control emphasising continuous monitoring and auditing of performance. Similarly, Nixon *et al.* (2001) emphasise how this changing higher education workplace, particularly stratification and managerialism, is creating a new paradox within higher education. The emergence of an isolation-accountability paradox, they suggest, places academics and their managers in an invidious position; whereby academics perceive themselves as becoming increasingly accountable yet increasingly isolated. Thomas (1998) also highlights the ability of an improperly focussed academic culture to seriously hinder strategic planning efforts within higher education institutes, suggesting such cultures possess a resilience which renders them virtually immune to external argument.

The critical issue facing manager-academics is where sequentially strategic planning, cultural adjustment and academic participation occur in the strategic planning framework. Gumport (2001) highlights a perception problem amongst manager-academics when considering academics, wherein academics are invariably cast as either the problem or the obstacle to the solution. She contends that because academics are socialised in the idea of shared governance, their exclusion from decision making processes only serves to widen the academic/governance divide on campuses. Rather than facilitating academics in detaching themselves entirely, she suggests educational leaders should in fact engage faculty into a “more explicitly collective enterprise” (Gumport 2001:4). Graetz (2002) also advises manager-academics to consider the unlimited capacity for strategic thinking on their campuses and the complementarity this holds for strategic planning. Academic citizenship therefore, if facilitated through academic self-governance, becomes vital if academic managers want to minimise the threat posed by ‘academic disengagement’ (McFarlane 2005). Ferren (2001:2) also highlights the necessity to create a shared community between academics and managers and suggests the creation of campus wide ‘social capital’ to achieve common and important goals and objectives.

3.5 Conclusion

Strategic planning exercises undertaken by individual tertiary education institutes should allow them to be proactive to the changing environments that they currently operate in. However, the mere idea that the philosophy of strategic planning has been borrowed from the “for profit” sector introduces a further threatening spectre for some academics, and sits rather uncomfortably alongside the traditionally received view of academic organisations. Strategic planning exercises that prioritise the expediency of a

strategic plan document at the cost of misunderstood relationships between academics and manager-academics run the very real risk of facilitating academic withdrawal from decision making. The real organisational challenge therefore may not be the generation of the plan itself but rather the supporting procedures and processes that will ensure negative responses from the academy are replaced by well intentioned efforts to make the plan an attainable future, for all stakeholders. Chapter 4 will outline the principle developments that have occurred within Ireland's higher education system over the last quarter of a century. These developments will also be reviewed against the changes and trends already identified in this chapter, instancing the adoption of neo-liberal thinking by Ireland's educational policy makers together with the reaction to these changes, both structurally and professionally, within Ireland's academe.

Chapter 4

Higher Education in the Republic of Ireland: An Altering Landscape

CHAPTER 4: HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND: AN ALTERING LANDSCAPE

4.1 Introduction

Chapter 3 has outlined the underlying logic of strategic planning and its adoption by higher education institutes. This chapter reviews the literature in relation to higher education policy developments in the Republic of Ireland which impinge on the principal research aim of this dissertation; namely the requirement of Institutes of Technology to publish strategic plans. The commencement date for the review, 1980, is entirely arbitrary, and chosen for the benefit of manageability. The period under consideration also allows me to consider, given changes in political administrations over this time period, differing educational philosophies – or indeed concealed similarities that may be inherent across political establishments. Finally, the year 1980 also marks my career decision to enter education – initially as a teacher, then as a lecturer and subsequently as a senior administrator. I have experienced the main changes over this period in a higher education context. Accordingly the usage of the first person – reflecting my own experiences, is sometimes evident throughout the chapter. As a reference point to illustrate policy developments and as evidence of how similar causal factors influence higher education policy, this chapter will also occasionally identify related higher education developments in England. In summary, the breadth of this historical and policy review of higher education in the Republic of Ireland is as follows:

- First, the chapter will only focus on Institutes of Technology who have degree awarding authority in their own names. I will be concerned only

with higher education institutes in receipt of funding from the Higher Education Authority (HEA). This conforms with the EU Erasmus Mundus definition (2008:4) of higher education institutes: “as post secondary level which are recognised by the relevant national authority as belonging to the higher education system.”

- The chapter will be restricted to developments in higher education in the Republic of Ireland over the past 20–25 years.

The Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD 2004:7) Review of Higher Education in Ireland outlines numerous higher education objectives; including, responsiveness to the needs of society and the economy, greater access, and the development of innovative modules, amongst others. Quite pointedly it suggests that these objectives differ very little across OECD countries; merely differing in the degree to which they are being successfully realised. I am struck by the similarity of specified objectives across the OECD Review of Higher Education in Ireland and a speech delivered by David Blunkett (2000 quoted in Watson 2006) at the University of Greenwich, in which he outlined his agenda of change for higher education in the United Kingdom.

Further convergence of objectives is also evidenced by the Universities UK Position Statement (1997), supporting the creation of a European Area of Higher Education as envisaged by the Bologna Declaration. The reasoning advanced is threefold; (1) enhanced mobility for students and staff, (2) the strategic imperative of ensuring UK based universities are well positioned in the international students market, and (3) access to EU Research funding. The response of the Irish Universities Association to

the Bologna Declaration displays similar logic. Lub (2002) suggests such convergence of objectives merely offer evidence of different responses in different countries to what are commonly perceived as processes impinging on higher education, namely globalisation and internationalisation. Douglass (2005) supports this position by contending that because the countervailing forces against globalisation tend to be locally, regionally and nationally based; then paradoxically all globalisation is local!

Institutes of Technology Ireland (IOTI) is a non-profit organisation, incorporated in 2005, comprising the Presidents of the Institutes of Technology, which coordinates the work of the Institute of Technology sector nationally, assists in the development of common positions on higher education policy and advises the Irish government on higher education policy issues. Its role is comparable to Universities UK and the Irish Universities Association, the representative body for Ireland's universities. A position paper released by Institutes of Technology Ireland (2008:1) describes the rather anomalous position currently facing Ireland's Institutes of Technology, thus:

“Countries have dealt with the ambiguity of institutional title by providing a mechanism that addresses the issue. In the Netherlands, Germany and Finland institutions equivalent to Institutes of Technology have been re-classified as ‘universities of applied science’. Unquestionably this change not only addressed ambiguities, but also enhanced their international reputation by removing confusion as to what they are and what they did. In Ireland the dual titling system is creating unnecessary confusion. All of the Institutes of Technology have established reputations in teaching and research. Classifying them as universities would enhance their ability to attract students, compete more effectively for research funding and trade internationally.”

From modest beginnings where their predecessors the Regional Technical Colleges provided vocational type education, the Institutes of Technology sector now finds itself engaging in university type activities, yet mindful that it aspires to remain differentiated

from the university sector. Dealing with this conundrum; the ability to remain differentiated in the presence of mission drift is undoubtedly one of the key strategic considerations facing the Institute of Technology sector and will be explored subsequently in this chapter.

4.2 Higher Education in the Republic of Ireland: Development, Administration and Funding

The Higher Education Authority is the statutory planning and development authority for higher education and research in Ireland. Established in 1971 by the Higher Education Authority Act it has been, since 1971, the principal funding authority for universities, with advisory powers throughout the entire third level education sector. The functions of the Higher Education Authority are:

- To further the development of higher education.
- To maintain a continuous review of the demand and need for higher education.
- To allocate amongst universities and delegated institutions the grants voted by Ireland's Houses of Parliament.
- To promote the attainment of equality of opportunity in higher education and the democratisation of higher education (Higher Education Authority Act 1971).

The role of the Higher Education Authority is analogous to that of the Higher Education Funding Council of England, which was established in 1992 as a legally separate non-

departmental body with a higher education policy and funding remit. Its statutory role is as follows:

- Administer the funds provided by the Secretary of State and others for education and the undertaking of research.
- Provide advice to the Secretary of State on the financial need of higher education in England.
- Ensure that provision is made for assessing the quality of education in higher education institutes and further education colleges that receive HEFCE funding (op. cit.: Section 65).

Perusal of the HEFCE Strategic Plan (2003-2008:2) reveals its commitment to the market-focussed language inherent in the ideology of New Public Management. Its mission statement reads as follows:

“Working in partnership, we provide and fund high quality, cost effective teaching and research, meeting the diverse needs of students, the economy and society.”

Higher education in Ireland is provided by Universities and Institutes of Technology who receive more than 90% of their incomes from the state. Since 1996 there have been no tuition fees for EU students attending full time undergraduate courses in state funded higher education institutes. Enrolment in full time third level courses has risen from 21,000 in 1965 to over 100,000 currently (HEA 2008). Increasing participation rates in higher education have become synonymous with the economic growth that Ireland has enjoyed over the last decade, resulting in a two and a half fold increase in material living standards and an estimated 1% per annum of additional output over the last

decade or so being attributable to the up-skilling of the workforce (OECD Review 2004). This linkage between increased productivity and improved living standards was also highlighted by Rosecrance (1999) in Chapter 2.

Increased investment in higher education has been credited with the creation of the “Celtic Tiger” economy and improved living standards. Ireland currently has 21 publicly funded tertiary education institutes, seven of which are universities as defined under the Universities Act 1997 and 14 of which are Institutes of Technology. Five of the universities: National University of Ireland, Galway, University College Cork, Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin and the National University of Ireland, Maynooth were established by royal charter. The remaining two universities, Dublin City University and University of Limerick, were re-designated as universities in 1989 having previously functioned as National Institutes for Higher Education (HEA 2008).

Walshe (1999) characterises the 1990s in Ireland as representing a period of transition from when a very small elite went to higher education to something approaching mass education. Numerous reasons are advanced for this, including; demographic trends, better retention rates at second level, and improving opportunities for graduates with third level awards. This expansion of tertiary education provision is criticised by O’Buachalla (1992:22), who described it unflatteringly thus:

“A transformation of higher education from one based upon an ideological base of social demand to one based upon “vocationalisation” and the demands of the market.”

O'Buachalla's (1992) concerns focussed on the increasing intrusion of the Irish government in higher education in an evaluative and direction setting manner. The basis for his concern was the Green Paper on Education (1992), which *inter-alia*, made provision for: the increasing executive powers of college presidents, clearer specification of the responsibilities of governing bodies, greater consideration of the role of universities in modern Ireland and most tellingly, the need for greater quality control mechanisms. The Green Paper (1992) also proposed the adoption of performance indicators and detailed quality review procedures. Additionally, a revised role for the Higher Education Authority was envisaged, one which supported a binary divide between universities and the then Regional Technical Colleges, such that the differentiated missions of applied and theoretical education be allowed to continue.

The societal backdrop to these changes mirrored that which existed in England two decades earlier; the under representation of socio-economic groups in higher education (Clancy 1995). The Green Paper (1992) also coincided with on going tensions between the then Minister for Education, Niamh Breathnach, and the Irish Universities over tuition fees and funding. The then government, a centre/left coalition, was divided on the issue of fee abolition, with Labour party deputies arguing that free fees would accentuate the social divide. Notwithstanding this, tuition fees were abolished for third level courses in 1996. The subsequent debate about university funding was not as easily resolved and would become even more embittered and divisive with the passage of time. A further measure, also addressing the under-representation of certain socio-economic groupings, was contained in the 1995 White Paper "Charting our Education Future". This contained a commitment to provide an additional 500 places for disadvantaged students over the next five years. The White Paper (1995) also provided

for positive discrimination toward women to engage in studies in which they had been hitherto under-represented and appropriate gender balance representation on selection boards for academic posts. Provision was also made for recognition of the large investment of public funds in higher education together with a re-iteration of the need for rigorous peer review and quality assurance procedures. This latter development represents the first official articulation of a value for money emphasis in the assessment of higher education outcomes.

The university sector was decidedly unhappy at having lost the battle over tuition fees and the lack of commitment from the Irish government to provide additional resources for the sector. White (2001:224) puts their position rather succinctly, when stating:

“University presidents were understandably uncomfortable with the idea that tuition fees should be almost entirely funded by the government as there is a well-established view that he who pays the piper calls the tune.”

Clark (2001), considering the University of Warwick and its transformation over the period 1992-2000, disputes whether in fact excessive governmental control of budgetary allocations is detrimental to the growth and development of higher education. He asserts that the profit generated by Warwick's diversification of income effectively allowed that university to grow in excess of any ambitions it would have had, if dependent on governmental funding alone. Further challenges however lay ahead for the Irish university sector, particularly the period leading up to the passing of the Universities Act (1999), the first draft legislation on universities in the history of the Irish state. White (2001) describes the tone of that legislation as both authoritarian and centralist. One distinctly unpalatable provision for the universities was the increased authority the

legislation passed to both the Minister for Education and the Higher Education Authority over the financing and staffing of universities. Specifically the Universities Act (op. cit.) laid down the objectives and purposes of universities, and specific rules and reporting requirements for their governance, including planning, finance, property and reporting. The legislation also provided for statutory representation for students on all university governing bodies. The universities' reaction was trenchant, if ultimately unsuccessful, and constitutional challenges were threatened unless the views of the universities were taken seriously. I would argue that this opposition represents the first major collision between Irish academic's concept of academic freedom and the encroachment of new managerialism in Ireland's higher education system. Seminal to this dispute I believe was a perception amongst academics that an excessive level of *dirigisme* was entering the academy. The statement below, from the Governing Body of University College Galway to the then Minister for Education, crystallises the prevailing mood amongst the academic community at that time:

“There is no evidence that their (universities) stewardship of public monies have given cause for concern or serious complaints. It is all the more disappointing therefore that the Bill seems pervasively suspicious of, and frequently hostile to, the universities and that its provisions reflect a lack of trust in the universities objectives, effectiveness and sense of responsibility.”

(Statement of University College Galway, Ireland's Governing Body
Submitted to Ms Niamh Breatnach, TD, and Minister for Education.
October 1996)

Contestation over the funding of higher education would also arise subsequently in the United Kingdom, where the traditional policy framework had focussed on the chartered universities. Central to the budgetary administration of these universities was the University Grants Committee (UGC), established in 1919, the primary function of

which was the administration of funds. Adopting criteria, which remained unspecified, the UGC continued in this role until 1974; the period of the first great oil crisis. Freed economically to taper back funds from the universities, the UGC then assumed a more central steering role, implementing cutbacks along a more rationalisation approach twinned with directing resources towards more favoured academic programmes. The Education Reform Act of 1988 replaced the UGC with the Universities Funding Council. However the UFC did not fund institutions, but rather provided funds in exchange for the provision of specific academic services. Subsequently, we witness the UFC being replaced by other regionally oriented funding authorities, the so-called Higher Education Funding Councils for England, Scotland and Wales. Theisens (2003) identifies these changes as evidence of the United Kingdom government centralising its role over higher education. Here once again we see similarities across both jurisdictions in the approaches of the respective administrations to funding higher education. Theisens (op. cit.) suggests that in the United Kingdom such change was achieved through a continuum of developments, instancing:

- The introduction of a hierarchical 3 level system of higher education, where at Level 1 the parameters of the system are laid out by the Government and the Department of Education and Science. Consequently the predominant direction of the policy process becomes “top down”.
- Concurrent with this was the marginalisation and silencing of once powerful actors, most notably the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Presidents (CVCP), which became a mere interest group with no institutionalised role in the policy process.

- Finally, post 1992, the influx of additional Vice Chancellors from the former polytechnics serving only to further weaken and fragment the voice and resultant influence of the CVCP.

4.3 Ireland's Institute of Technology Sector

The Institute of Technology sector was established in 1969 (when colleges were referred to as Regional Technical Colleges) following the earlier recommendations of the "Mulcahy Report" (1967). Under the terms of reference established for this report; consideration of how Ireland's education system could meet the increasing needs of emerging industry, the primary mission envisioned for these new colleges was education for trade and industry. Because of their legal status as public organisations, Regional Technical Colleges (now Institutes of Technology) are governed by Acts of Parliament. Since their establishment in the 1970's the economic and legislative environment under which these operate has changed radically. Chronologically, the principal enabling legislation governing the establishment, administration and funding of these colleges is as follows: Vocational Education Act 1930, The Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992, the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 and the Institutes of Technology Act 2006. Prior to the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992, these colleges had limited autonomy and were controlled by the local education authority, the Vocational Education Committee. Once again we see a very close parallel between the evolution of the former polytechnics in England and the former Regional Technical Colleges in the Republic of Ireland. The consolidation of the English higher education system similarly arose through legislative provision when the Education Reform Act 1988 took the former polytechnics out of local government control and repositioned them as higher education corporations. Subsequently, the Further and

Higher Education Act 1992 granted the title of “university” to those former polytechnics subject to meeting certain eligibility criteria.

The Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992 expanded the mission of the Regional Colleges permitting them for the first time to engage in research, participate in collaborative research and the commercial exploitation of research. The 1992 Act (Section 5 (1) (c)) specifically provided for Regional Colleges to:

“Subject to such conditions that the Minister for Education may determine, to engage in research, consultancy and development work and provide such services in relation to these matters as the Governing Body considers appropriate.”

Bartlett (2007:9) contends that the stated objective of increased research activity across all higher education institutes was not in fact matched by additional direct funding to the Regional Technical College sector. Consequently he contends, teaching continued to be seen as the primary mission, with research as an interesting, but ultimately costly, adjunct. I would contend that this provision for research engagement represents an initial erosion of the binary divide where historically research had been the sole preserve of the University sector. Equally important is the provision within the Regional Technical Colleges Act (1992) establishing the following bodies; Governing Body, Academic Council and the designation attaching to the principal officer of each institute, namely Director (re-designated to that of Institute President under the Institutes of Technology Act 2006). Consequently, three distinct groupings now existed in each college: (1) The Governing Body, which oversees the work of the College Director, (2) the College's senior management team, headed by the College Director, which oversees the day to day management of the College, and (3) the College's

Academic Council, charged with protecting, maintaining and developing the academic standards of the courses and activities of the college.

Recruitment and selection procedures for academic staff within the Institute of Technology sector are also specified under the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992, which *inter-alia* specifies job descriptions and requirements, the composition of selection boards and the operating procedures for such boards. Appointment to an academic post requires the successful applicant to hold the relevant professional or academic qualifications, together with three years post-qualification industrial experience. This latter requirement is recognition of the applied mission of the sector; the provision of courses from craft/apprentice programmes to higher technical/technological education. Interestingly, for appointment to academic grades across the sector there is no requirement to hold a teaching qualification. Similarities appear again here between developments in Ireland and England, particularly in light of the recommendations of the Dearing Report (1997). The Dearing Report established the Quality Assurance Agency as a single body responsible for quality assurance, together with the Institute for Teaching and Learning, whereby all new academics were trained formally in their first years of holding a University Lecturers post. Hough (2005) suggests that the Dearing Report (1997) effectively heralded the commencement of more formalised recognition of teaching quality and institutional fitness for purpose. Hough (2005) also adds that from 2006 all English higher education institutions were required to undergo institutional audits on a six year cycle. Recently however, the Dublin Institute of Technology now requires appointees to successfully complete in their probationary year an in-house qualification in teaching and pedagogical skills.

There are three principal academic grades to which academics may be appointed within the Institute of Technology sector on a permanent whole-time basis; assistant lecturers, lecturers and senior lecturers. The principal distinguishing characteristic across the three posts is the contractual amount of teaching hours per week. Assistant lecturers are required to teach for eighteen hours per week, whereas lecturers and senior lecturers are required to teach for sixteen hours per week. Additionally, all contracts require appointed staff to engage in research and academic administration duties. Academic staff within the institutes are represented by the Teachers Union of Ireland, who engage nationally with the Department of Education and Science in negotiating remuneration and working conditions for their members. Comparatively speaking, the teaching loads within the Institute of Technology sector are significantly higher than those within the university sector; an oft cited reason for academics within the institutes to protest about the inherent unreasonableness of their contractual requirement to deliver effectively on the 'holy trinity' of duties: teaching, research and academic administration. Academic staff, having successfully served a probationary first year, effectively thereafter become tenured. Currently a review of recruitment and selection procedures is underway (Institutes of Technology Ireland/Public Appointments Service 2008:9) prompted by: "the lack of flexibility of the current recruitment and selection procedures and their limitations in meeting the current and future needs of the institutes".

Whilst strategic planning responsibilities may have been devolved down to the level of the individual colleges, consideration of the 1992 Act (Section 10, subsequently amended by Section 11 of the Institutes of Technology Act 2006) outlining the function and responsibilities of the Academic Council is instructive. Specifically the Act defines its function as follows:

“Each college shall have an academic council appointed by the governing body to assist it in the planning, co-ordination, development and overseeing of the educational work of the college and to protect, maintain and develop the academic standards of the courses and activities of the college.”

Gillen (2007) highlights this designation of Academic Councils as statutory bodies as recognition of the importance of retaining collegiate decision making in Ireland's tertiary education system. The 1992 Act outlines particular functions of the Academic Council, relating to courses of study, selection, retention, admission and research and development. No specific reference however is contained therein to either strategic plans or strategic development plans. Custom and practice within the Institute of Technology sector has seen responsibility for the development of these strategic planning documents residing within the Institutes' senior management team (Executive Board or Executive Council), of which the President and other senior managers comprise the membership. Typically these plans are generated in a broadly consultative manner, with representation sought from all stakeholders. The Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992 also created new posts within the colleges such as: Head of Development, Secretary/Financial Controller, together with other central services posts in Finance, Personnel etc. The 1992 Act left the Regional Technical Colleges relatively consolidated as a sector with no apparent desire amongst constituent colleges for re-designation as universities. My recollection of the sector at this time was one which was justifiably proud of its applied orientation, intent on providing degree and sub-degree awards to first generation entrants to tertiary education.

The mid 1990s saw further pressure on Ireland's higher education institutes to act as levers in helping Ireland's economy transition to a knowledge economy. The White

Paper "Charting Our Education Future" (1994) signposted a role whereby all higher education institutes were given responsibility, through research, for the development of new ideas, new knowledge and the application of existing knowledge. Here once again we see similarities between Ireland and England in terms of the increasing transparency and accountability being imposed on higher education institutes. Coaldrake (2000) likens the growth pattern of English and Australian universities from the mid 1970's as evidence of both governments' recognition of education as being an important element in nation building. He hypothesises that the increasingly greater demands placed on universities emanated from two sources. First, the requirement in national innovation systems for the creation of multiple linkages within the economy, which hitherto had not been provided. Second, a recognition that the winding back of funding actively encourages engagement by higher education institutes with the real world.

The Regional Technical Colleges were re-designated as Institutes of Technology in 1997, with the Irish government also indicating their desire to centralise all higher education funding under the Higher Education Authority. Previously a distinct separation of funding existed across the binary divide, with the university sector funded from the Higher Education Authority whilst the Institute of Technology sector received funding from the Department of Education and Science. This year also witnessed the first public instance of mission drift amongst the Institute of Technology sector, involving two Institutes of Technology, located in Waterford and Cork, seeking to be re-designated as universities. Gillen (2007) also attests to this convergence of mission and highlights the blurring of mission which has arisen between the Institute of Technology and University sectors in the Republic of Ireland. Such convergence, she

claims, has created pronounced similarities of both strategic intent and vision in published strategic planning statements.

The other Institutes of Technology felt that such re-designation would involve a serious negative signal for the Institute of Technology sector, causing potential further fragmentation. It was therefore proposed that the entire Institute of Technology sector be re-constituted under a National Technological University of Ireland umbrella, where the individual institutes became constituent colleges. My own recollection of the ensuing debate was a complete aversion to the Institutes of Technology aspiring to a “university” designation; most particularly one which could be construed as a second class version of the traditional Irish universities. The governing *fora* of the respective Institutes of Technology and their representative umbrella group, the Council of Directors (re-designated as Institutes of Technology Ireland in 2006), were therefore defending and upholding the binary divide which had been in existence since 1972, with courses from the sector being differentiated from university course offering by their applied orientation. Simultaneously they were also telling the government of the necessity to prevent further downgrading, either planned or unintentional, of the sector. The issue of re-designation of Institutes of Technology remained unresolved for the next decade. Murmurings of discontent are now once again being heard, evidenced by the position paper released by Institutes of Technology Ireland (2008) referred to at the commencement of this chapter.

The governmental response to the two Institutes of Technology seeking re-designation as universities was twofold. An Interim Review Group was established through which Institutes of Technology could make applications for what was termed “Delegated

Authority”, enabling Institutes of Technology to make awards in their own institutional names and to issue parchments. Additionally, Institutes of Technology would now also be allowed to validate their own programmes of study, thus conferring significant autonomy and academic standing upon them. Thereafter, delegated authority and its entitlements would be subject to institutional review every five years, a process which was to be conducted by the Higher Education and Training Awards Council of Ireland (HETAC 2006). Bartlett (2007) notes that HETAC’s terms of reference, in relation to awarding delegated authority, specifically identifies the strategic planning capacities of such applicants, amongst other instruments, as being a critical determinant of assessing the ability of an institute to manage their affairs to an appropriate standard. The importance of strategic planning is reaffirmed in subsequent legislation, principally the Institutes of Technology Act 2006 (Section 21 (c) (1)):

“A Governing Body ...shall require the Director to prepare a plan (in this Act referred to as Strategic Development Plan) that shall set the aims of the Governing Body for the operation and development of the college and its strategy for achieving those aims...”

Therefore 1997 signified a watershed in the formalisation of strategic planning measures and processes across the Institute of Technology sector. Most Institutes of Technology are now in the second or indeed third iteration of such strategy documents. The importance of strategic planning was further emphasised through the provisions of the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act (1999), Section 28(4), which outlines the objectives of Institutional Reviews (undertaken in five year cycles) to contribute to coherent strategic planning and governance. The legislative framework to implement these proposed changes in the management and review of the Institutes of Technology was the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999, which provided for but did

not establish, the Higher Education and Training Awards Council and the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland.

The Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 abolished the National Council for Educational Awards, which had been the standards body for the Institute of Technology sector. The statutory responsibility for this role then passed to HETAC, which was established in 2001 along with the National Qualifications Authority of Ireland. Subsequently in 2004 a National Framework of Qualifications was published, against which all education qualifications in Ireland could be articulated and which accorded with the spirit of the Bologna Declaration in its attempts to create readable and portable educational qualifications.

Unsurprisingly, the first applicants for delegated authority were the two Institutes of Technology who had earlier sought university designation. Delegated authority is not however a generic entitlement, as the National Framework of Qualifications permits Institutes of Technology to have self-validating award authority up to a maximum level of Doctoral Awards (Level 10), or alternatively at Levels 7, 8 and 9 incorporating Ordinary Degree Awards, Honours Degree Awards and Masters Degree Awards respectively. The level to which any institute holds delegated authority is therefore a differentiating mechanism amongst Institutes of Technology. Similar therefore to the pre-1992 and post-1992 universities in England, one might also suggest that a comparable 1999 divide also exists across Ireland's Institutes of Technology. Gillen (2007) suggests that the power to grant and validate awards to a certain level symbolises any institution's maturity both in academic and management terms; in effect creating a ranking hierarchy.

The period 1970-1999 in both Ireland and England therefore reveal similar higher education developments, resulting in significantly altered higher education landscapes. Douglass (2004) identifies three paradigm shifts that have occurred in higher education in England (UK) since World War II: the creation and subsequent collapse of a binary system of higher education; a decrease in funding and an increase in regulation; and the introduction of top-up fees into the previously exclusively funded higher education sector. With the exception of top-up fees, similar changes are also evident in the Republic of Ireland.

This altered higher education landscape, coupled with Ireland's economic transformation, provided the backdrop to the OECD Review of Higher Education in Ireland in 2004. Whilst lauding Ireland's success in increasing participation rates, and its growing recognition of the importance of research to sustainable economic growth, the review nonetheless highlighted that Ireland's tertiary education system is at "a significant point of departure". (OECD 2004:18). Whilst consideration of the full recommendations of the OECD Report are beyond the scope of this research, I highlight the following recommendations, given: (1) their relevance for University/Institute of Technology roles and relationships, (2) the questions that they pose for Ireland's educational policy makers and the future re-organisation of tertiary education, and (3) the re-emergence of the debate within Ireland's Institute of Technology sector of the need to be re-designated with an institutional title (possibly university, or variant thereof) which enjoys broader international recognition.

Recommendation 1: That the differentiation of mission between the university and institute of technology sectors is preserved and that for the foreseeable future there be no further institutional transfers into the university sector.

Recommendation 2: That steps be taken to coordinate better the development of the tertiary education system by bringing the universities and Institutes of Technology under a new common authority, the Tertiary Education Authority, but that machinery is established within that authority to prevent mission drift.

Recommendation 3: That greater collaboration between institutions be encouraged and incentivised through funding mechanisms in research, first degree and postgraduate degree work and in widening access and lifelong learning (OECD 2004:22).

The second recommendation proposing the establishment of a Tertiary Education Authority, and its potential to cause or accentuate funding imbalances across the University and Institute of Technology sectors, caused considerable disquiet. Ultimately however, the government decided to bring both sectors under the control of a single unified funding authority; the Higher Education Authority. This was effected through the Institutes of Technology Act 2006 (Section 1 (1)), which had as its primary purpose, to:

“Facilitate the designation of the Institutes of Technology and the Dublin Institute of Technology under the Higher Education Authority. In effect it provides for an improved strategic framework for higher education through placing the Institutes of Technology under the Higher Education Authority.”

My recollection of reaction within the Institute of Technology sector to this legislation was one of considerable angst. Central to the misgivings were very real fears of unbalanced funding and reputational damage. Academics and managers within the sector did not want a stratified system of higher education to emerge from these new arrangements; similar to that which had arisen in the United Kingdom. There are now effectively two lobby groups seeking to promote the interests of UK universities: the Russell Group representing the “ivy league” universities and the Universities 94 group. This stratification of higher education in the United Kingdom has created a ranking order for universities in terms of student choice and research activity. In 2004/5, for instance, the Russell Group accounted for 65% of all UK Universities grant and research income, 56% of all doctorates awarded and over 30% of all non EU students studying in the United Kingdom (Russell Group 2007). The concerns expressed by the Institute of Technology sector under this new funding arrangement were allayed by the creation of an Institutes of Technology Designation Unit within the Higher Education Authority. This unit will support the development of the Institute of Technology sector in a national education context, providing a fair and transparent funding mechanism, and develop the policy perspective for the sector in the context of the national objectives.

Over the next decade higher education in Ireland will develop against the framework for higher education outlined in the Programme for Government (2007-2012) and the National Development Plan (2007-2013). The policy objectives outlined for Ireland's higher education system is to be at the top rank of performance within the OECD (Higher Education Authority 2008). A common feature pervading most of these policy

documents is the increasing use of the funding whip-hand to encourage the higher education system to both agree to and implement centrally determined policy initiatives.

More specifically the following development needs are specified as key metrics in the delivery of this policy objective; (1) increased participation and improved access, (2) greater flexibility of course offerings to meet diverse student population needs in a lifelong learning context, (3) enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning, (4) significantly increase the number of PhD numbers and research activity, and (5) effective provision for technology transfer (op. cit.:8). The HEA envisions a critical role for the Institute of Technology sector, that is broadly in line with the OECD (op. cit.) recommendations, and which recognises: “that the Institutes of Technology and the Universities have developed differently and to establish greater clarity on the diverse role of Institutes of Technology and the Universities in such areas as, teaching and learning, research, regional development, links with industry, social inclusion and meeting skills needs”. (op. cit.:10)

Ireland's higher education policy initiatives will invariably seek to address the major exposures following the collapse of the “Celtic Tiger” economy, including significant losses in the manufacturing sector and a deteriorating balance of payments deficit. Increasingly therefore what we are witnessing is an attempt to reposition Ireland's economy to one characterised by “speed, flexibility, agility and innovativeness” (Costello 2007:6), with the higher education sector identified as a key component in this transformation. Rosecrance (1999) describes such policy imperatives as an inevitable consequence of globalisation, representing the desire of nations to become head nations which design products, rather than body nations, which manufacture them. The exact

structure of the Irish higher education system which will deliver this renewed competitiveness to the Irish economy nonetheless remains unclear. As already mentioned, debate is currently re-appearing within the Institutes of Technology about the current disadvantage they feel as a result of a name title which is not immediately recognisable outside the jurisdiction. Recent pronouncements from Institutes of Technology Ireland (IOTI 2008:2) suggest three possible scenarios:

1. The creation of federal university arrangements amongst existing Institutes of Technology creating 'new' institutes called Technological Universities.
2. The creation of federal arrangements between Institutes of Technology and existing universities.
3. The renaming of Institutes of Technology to include "university" in the title.

Whilst a decision is still awaited on possible reclassifications, two developments are apparent. First, the appetite amongst the Presidents of the Institutes of Technology for designation as traditional universities is not very strong; their wish quite simply is to remain true to their founding mission and ethos. Second, similarities are again evident between proposed developments in Ireland and earlier developments in the United Kingdom; creating the so called pre 1992 and post 1992 university classification.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has identified a number of structural, legislative and policy changes over the last two and a half decades in the Republic of Ireland and England, which indicate an accelerated rate of change both within and across those higher education jurisdictions. Hitherto, higher education in the Republic of Ireland had been subject to

change which was benign and manageable. Consequently the academic environment was one in which academics enjoyed self regulation, implicit trust in the peer review process and a collaborative, as opposed to a competitive, higher education environment. The massification of higher education provision in both England and the Republic of Ireland has coincided with an increased movement towards accountability and has also provided academics and administrators with additional administrative burdens. The devolution of decision making and financial responsibility to individual Institutes of Technology has also made them more quasi-corporative. Across both jurisdictions, the Republic of Ireland and England, there is now an ever increasing feeling that big-brother national administrations, or Europe, are watching. The institutional responses to these unprecedented pressures in their operating environments, in part voluntary but in the main dictated by legislative requirements, has been the imposition of strategic planning practices as a mode of co-ordination, rationalisation and adjustment. My research prioritises the actual process of strategic planning and the resultant alignment it generates across the respective institute as its primary focus. In Chapter 5 I will outline the principal research design considerations which informed my choice of research methodology and review selected relevant literature in that area.

Chapter 5

Research Design and Methodology

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this research is to investigate the lived experiences of academics and manager-academics with strategic planning practices in selected Institutes of Technology. Underpinning my research is my central research question: Do strategic planning exercises in sampled Institutes of Technology result in organisations that are aligned with the published plan? Embedded within this question there are of course, other phenomena which must be understood in order to fully explore the main research question. Central to my research methodology is a need to hear how academics and manager-academics describe their experiences with strategic planning. Additionally, my research methodology is also informed by Rist (2003) and Chelimsky (1982) who advocate the need to contextualise the research question against the policy sphere to which it is directly related. Consequently, my research methodology has been chosen to elucidate greater clarity and understanding of strategic planning to the principal actors in collegial strategic planning, namely: (1) academics, (2) manager academics, and (3) policy makers. My research methodology is constructed not with a viewpoint of decrying the importance of strategic planning at the individual institute level but rather to understand how academics and manager academics make meaning of strategic planning practices and procedures. To my knowledge this research will be the first time participants in a higher education based strategic planning exercise have been offered an opportunity to describe their experiences in their own unfettered manner/language.

This chapter will outline: (a) the design of my research methodology, and (b) the data gathering method adopted and how I sought to make meaning of this data. This chapter

will also draw parallels and inferences from relevant literature, and will contrast the two alternative research approaches available when formulating and investigating a research question: 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' (Easterby-Smith *et-al.* 1995). Additionally, attention will also be given to the ethical considerations posed by this research, and identified limitations will also be outlined.

5.2 Approaches to Empirical Research

The researchers' worldview incorporates the framework of beliefs, values and methods within which research occurs. Creswell (1994:29) distinguishes between the two broad approaches to research as follows;

"A qualitative study is defined as an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based upon building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting."

"A quantitative study is defined as an inquiry into a social or human problem, based on testing a theory composed of variables, measured with numbers, and analysed with statistical procedures, in order to determine whether the predictive generalisations of the theory hold true."

Easterby-Smith *et al.* (1995) characterise quantitative research techniques as endemic to the positivist research philosophy, contending that there are realities that can be discovered, tested and found to be true and general. Fetterman (1998) and Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) suggest positivism is rooted in the natural sciences, where the researcher enjoys independence from the researched phenomenon. In evaluating the influence of the positivist approach in social science Wood (1999:6) recognises that positivism has been the dominant approach, stating: "The main expression of the positivist approach to research is the hypothetico-deductive method. The hypothetico-

deductive method involves generating hypotheses out of ideas and testing these. The aim is to verify or reject proposed hypotheses" Taylor and Edgar (1999:28) also contend that positivism is about a search for reality, stating:

"The realist considers the social world to have an existence which is as hard and concrete as the natural world. For the positivist, knowledge is seen to reflect discovered "truths", typically taking the form of generalisations, sometimes expressed as cause and effect laws."

Conversely, qualitative research contends that human influences are much stronger; that the world is subjectively understood. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) suggest this approach is characterised by an acceptance that human researchers are not passive accumulators and analysts of social data. Qualitative researchers interpret and reconstruct the realities that they discover, interacting with their human subjects, and in doing so change the subject's view of reality. Denzin and Lincoln (1994:2) characterise qualitative methodologies as follows:

"Multi-method in focus, involving an interpretative, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them."

Lindlof (1995:8) correlates the growth of qualitative research techniques to the early twentieth century when qualitative researchers were dubbed "soft scientists". Others (see for example: Silverman 2000, Pauly 1991) attribute the growth in qualitative research techniques to its ability to move beyond mere numbers and statistical models to strive to understand their objects of interest - sometimes called *verstehen*. Smith *et al.* (1991) and Wood (1999:11) outline the key assumptions underlying qualitative research for the study of social behaviour and phenomena as follows:

Social behaviour and phenomena are the products of human action which is of a variable rather than a fixed nature (though capable of considerable patterning).

Human action and behaviour is predicated on the articulation of shared meanings.

To achieve an effective understanding of human action, the social researcher (including the management researcher) must seek to identify, understand and interpret such meanings.

Human actions are directed and rarely value neutral, in content or motivation.

Polarising the two methodological approaches has however been questioned by several researchers (see for example: Smith *et al.* 1991, Martinko and Gardner 1985, Miles and Huberman 1994, Wood 1999). Miles and Huberman (1994:4) contend that positivist and qualitative approaches should not be seen as completely separate, but approaches that can be used together in a complementary way:

“In epistemological debates it is tempting to operate at the poles. But in the actual practice of empirical research, we believe that all of us – realists, interpretivists, and critical theorists – are closer to the centre, with multiple overlaps.”

5.3 Research Methodology

My research methodology is both qualitative and phenomenological in nature, using semi-structured focus group interviews as the principal data collection mechanism. I have chosen a qualitative and phenomenological paradigm because they allow me to access the respondents' voices and experiences in both a non-threatening, yet

facilitative manner. Patton (2001:14) encapsulates the advantages accruing from qualitative research thus: “it allows the researcher to be present during the changes to record an event after and before the event occurs”. Buchanan (1992:119) similarly extols the advantages of qualitative research as: “...the power of its language to display a picture of the world in which we discover something about ourselves and our common humanity”. Bednall (2006), commenting on eliciting personal experiences from research participants, also cites qualitative research's principal advantage as the uncovering of data which is both subjective and non rational. My choice of a phenomenological research approach was derived from a review of the scholarly literature (see for example: Cresswell 1998, Moustakas 1994) and the capacity it afforded me to access the lived experiences of the two respondent groups. Patton (1987) suggests that the choice of research design must be appropriate to the subject under investigation. Central to my research question is the requirement to discover what the experiences of both groups were with strategic planning, as *they* (emphasis added) experienced it in their everyday existence. A phenomenological approach therefore allowed me to access the respondents' life world and to comprehend *their* (emphasis added) human experiences (Husserl 1970). Aaker *et al.* (2001), in elaborating on the advantages conferred by phenomenology upon the researcher, emphasise its flexible relationship with respondents so that the resultant data has more depth and greater richness of context. Cresswell (1994:52) describes the researcher's role in phenomenology as follows: “using intuition, imagination and universal structures to obtain a picture”.

Gall *et al.* (1996:600) define phenomenology thus:

“The study of the world as it appears to individuals when they place themselves in a state of consciousness that reflects an effort to be free of everyday biases and belief.”

Giorgi (2006) suggests that phenomenology is broader than empiricism, because it allows the researcher to analyse conscious phenomena that are not reducible to facts. Natanson (1970) depicts phenomenology as seeking to reveal how human awareness is implicated in the production of social action, social situations and social worlds. Cresswell (1998) contends that phenomenology confers the greatest interpretive legitimacy on the researcher. Schweitzer (2002) and Moustakas (1994) identify the salient characteristics of phenomenological research as emphasising the lived experience to obtain comprehensive descriptions of the essence of that experience. The issue of the generalisability of findings from phenomenological research is however the subject of some contestation (see for example: Giorgi 2006, Miller and Glassner 1997). Orleans (2008) views phenomenology as a reaction to the objectivism of the natural sciences and its lack of comprehension of the social world. Darroch and Silvers (1992:54) characterise phenomenology along three dimensions:

Phenomenology is a theoretical orientation so it does not generate deductions from propositions that can be empirically tested.

Phenomenology operates on a meta-sociological level, demonstrating its premises through descriptive analyses of the procedures of self-situational and social construction.

Phenomenology attempts to apprehend the means by which phenomena, originating in human consciousness, come to be experienced as features of the world.

Holyrood (2001) contends there is no single phenomenological research design, but that the phenomenological approach is flexible and adaptable to the phenomena under investigation. This flexible ontological and epistemological base of phenomenological research is also attested to by others; most notably Giorgi (1985) and Embree (2001), who characterise phenomenology as representing a departure from epistemological representationalism to one where all immediate objects of our awareness become directly accessible. In empirical phenomenology the most distinguishing feature is the meaning human beings make of their experiences (Schweitzer 2002). Hermeneutic phenomenology on the other hand requires the researcher to contemplate the meanings others make of objects or experiences, requiring a construction and interpretation of those meanings in the cultural, political and historical contexts in which they arise. Smith and Osborn (2003) suggest hermeneutic phenomenology gives experience primacy, and what emerges is not an objective meaning but rather the meaning for people in situations.

Van der Mescht (2004:2) differentiates between phenomenology and ethnography by highlighting the unique characteristics of phenomenological research thus:

- a. Phenomenology recognises that research participants "reality" is not directly accessible to the researcher and that the researcher's focus is thus neither on the phenomenon nor the participants, but rather on the dialogue of individuals with their contexts.

- b. Phenomenology focuses on participants "lived experiences" and interprets this through their language.
- c. Phenomenology draws a firm distinction between interpretation and description, with a firm commitment to stay with description until a holistic picture of the issue emerges.

I have chosen hermeneutic phenomenology as a suitable method for my research because I want to access the personal journeys and experiences of my respondents. Smith (1997:80) describes hermeneutic phenomenology as follows: "a research method aimed at producing rich textual descriptions of the experiencing of selected phenomena in the life-world of individuals". Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) outline the principal advantages of hermeneutic phenomenology as revealing the pre-reflective experiences and feelings of the participants, and then adding the interpretive element of the researcher's personal experiences. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach will allow me to: (a) explore my respondent's experiences with further interpretation by me (Chapters 6 and 7), and (b) then compare the normative and legislative ideals of strategic planning with the realities as practised in selected higher education institutes. A hermeneutic phenomenological approach was also adopted by Gunasekara (2006) in his analysis of academic experiences of regional engagement by Australian universities. The Gunasekara research (op. cit.) has consequently informed my research methodology, both in its attempts to access academics' perceptions and the manner in which these perceptions were accessed in a facilitating yet elaborative manner. Having outlined my broad theoretical research framework I will now elaborate on the sampling, data collection and analysis dimensions of my methodology.

5.4 Data Sampling

The Institute of Technology sector offered numerous information rich cases for the research question under consideration. However the size of the sector, spanning 14 individual institutes, rendered it impractical to conduct research on all campuses. Consequently a sample group of four institutes was chosen, the selection criteria and rationale for which are outlined subsequently. In constructing this sample I adopted a purposive sampling approach, simply to ensure that those institutes included were representative of sectoral diversity. Therefore, in the selection of participating institutes, the purposive sampling strategy I used was critical case sampling, emphasising the relative importance of strategic planning to that particular institute as one of the determining criteria. My sampling criteria in selecting the institutes were as follows:

The sampled Institutes of Technology had to be geographically dispersed and representative of the sector, regional requirements and population distribution.

The sampled Institutes of Technology had to show distinct differences in their product and disciplinary offerings (degree, post graduate and doctoral) and their competitive positioning.

The sampled Institutes of Technology had to have in common proximity of no more than 100 kilometres to larger urban areas, hosting both an Institute of Technology and a University. This location factor serves to highlight further the expediency of having in

place strategic management and planning practices which are properly formulated, robust and participative.

The respective performance of each of the institutes in the number of first preference applications recorded through the Central Applications Office, Ireland's centralised application apparatus for secondary school leavers over the previous five years. (The Central Applications Office in Ireland would serve a similar function to UCAS in England: effectively co-ordinating the processes of application for and allocation of, places on higher education programmes.)

The sampled institutes are subsequently identified using place name descriptors. These descriptors will ensure the confidentiality of the respective institutes and correspond with locations which have impacted upon higher education in the Republic of Ireland. I have labelled the institutes as follows: the Bologna Institute of Technology (site of the Bologna Agreement), the Lisbon Institute of Technology (site of the Lisbon Accord), the Montevideo Institute of Technology (site of the Uruguay Round for the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs) and the Paris Institute of Technology (site of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development). I would have liked to establish a more general descriptor for each institute, similar to Deem's (2003:107) classification of Friendly, Provincial, Community and Growing Universities, but the relatively small size of the academic community in Ireland posed identification risk for participating Institutes of Technology and could potentially impact negatively on the integrity of the research process.

Thumbnail descriptions of the institutes are as follows:

Bologna Institute of Technology: This institute offers internationally recognised degree programmes in Business, Technology, Humanities and Science. The institute is also research active, has close links with industry, and is recognised nationally for the high completion rates of its graduates.

Lisbon Institute of Technology: This institute offers degree programmes in Business, Engineering and Informatics. Its mission is to serve both its students and its region; emphasising a supportive environment for all learners.

Montevideo Institute of Technology: This institute offers a full range of programmes in Business, Engineering, Science and Humanities. It has acquired a reputation for top quality teaching and research innovation which is driven by local, regional and national industry needs.

Paris Institute of Technology: This institute offers degree and post-graduate offerings in Computing, Engineering, Science and Humanities. It is characterised by a strong regional remit and seeks to broaden its research presence in targeted scientific areas.

Eight semi-structured focus group interviews were conducted with academics and manager-academics, spanning the four sampled Institutes of Technology, with a combined interview time across all interviews of ten hours and fifty seven minutes. The schedule for these interviews with both academic and manager-academic groups, indicating date and duration, is outlined in Table 5.1 below:

Table 5.1 Schedule of Conducted Interviews, Dates and Duration

Group	Duration	Date	# of Participants
Academic Group C	79 minutes	June 16 2008	12 Academics
Academic Group G	72 minutes	June 20 2008	8 Academics
Academic Group E	85 minutes	June 18 2008	10 Academics
Academic Group A	101 minutes	June 3 2008	10 Academics
Manager Academic Group F	65 minutes	June 20 2008	3 Manager/Academics
Manager Academic Group B	92 minutes	June 16 2008	8 Manager/Academics
Manager Academic Group H	79 minutes	June 18 2008	6 Manager/Academics
Manager Academic Group D	84 minutes	June 3 2008	10 Manager/Academics

A purposive sampling method was also used in the composition of the two focus groups with which semi-structured interviews were conducted in each institute. I chose a purposive sampling strategy because I wanted to ensure that both groups were simultaneously information rich, yet divergent in career profiles and could provide illumination on my research question. Mason (2002) urges qualitative researchers to be strategic in their sampling approach, by ensuring their sampling strategy is consistent with their research purpose. Because my research is predicated upon accessing the lived experiences of academics and manager-academics, I have sought to access the broadest

relevant range of both contexts and phenomena. The samples I constructed therefore, attempted to accommodate the appropriate characteristics or criteria which were representative of the academic and managerial populations from which they were drawn. Rabiee (2004) suggests purposive sampling strategies, whilst not representative, allows the researcher to choose participants who have something to say on a topic, have similar socio-characteristics and are comfortable talking to the interviewer. Fundamental to purposive sampling, he contends (op. cit.:655), is the concept of “applicability”; where subjects are chosen because of their knowledge of the subject area. I have applied this criteria in the composition and underlying rationale for each focus group, specified below:

Academics: In constructing this group I deliberately ensured representation across all career grades as a threshold requirement. This group comprises those full time institute employees who hold academic posts with the Department of Education and Science and whose contracts specify three principal types of activity; teaching, research and administration. These criteria also conform with the definition of ‘academic’ in the European Union Erasmus Mundus Agreement (2008: Article 2) which defines an academic as: “a person with outstanding academic and/or professional experience who lectures or conducts research in a higher education institution or a research centre established in accordance with national law and practice”. A further requirement in the sampling of this group was that selected academics should have held their full time position for a minimum of five years; ensuring they have experienced at least one iteration of strategic planning for the institute. The group was then further stratified into three sub-groupings, Senior Lecturers, Lecturers and Assistant Lecturers. The rationale behind this stratification is that, typically, holders of these posts can generally be

categorised by the longevity of their tenure within the organisation. This should provide a source of rich comparative data for analysis, especially from a cultural and socialisation perspective. Access to this group was sought through the Teachers Union of Ireland. Representation was made initially to the Regional Co-ordinator, and assurances provided with respect to confidentiality and anonymity. Interviews for this group, across all four participating Institutes of Technology, were conducted on or before June 20, 2008. This date signals the commencement of the summer vacation for the academic community and they therefore would not be available again until September 1, 2008. In total, the experiences of forty academics were recorded, with a maximum interview time of 101 minutes and a minimum interview time of 72 minutes.

Manager-Academics: In constructing this group I deliberately ensured representation across management positions within the respective Institutes of Technology. The grades covered by this include; Heads of Department, Heads of School, Central Services Managers (Information Technology, Finance, Human Resources). Neither the Academic Registrar nor the Institute President is included in this group because the reporting relationships these enjoy tend to be with other managers and not the broader academic community. The manager-academic group also provides opportunities for further stratification, along the following lines:

Manager-Academics (Academic Background): This sub-group comprises Heads of Department and Heads of School, who previously held academic positions and therefore spent considerable parts of their working lives within academia. This group should be familiar with the nuances of the academic profession, and may carry

some of those cultural traits forward with them into their managerial positions. The principal reporting relationships characterising these managers tends to be with academics within their respective departments/schools.

Central Service Managers (Technical/Professional Background):

This sub-group comprises those managers, principally Information Technology, Finance, Human Resources Managers, who have attained these positions through technical or professional accreditation and who need not necessarily have any prior academic (teaching, research, administration) experience. These employees may have previous private sector experience such that their prior professional acculturation and socialisation is not predominantly academic.

Access to the manager-academic group was sought through the respective Presidents of the participating Institutes of Technology, with representation sought across managers (academic backgrounds) and managers (technical/professional backgrounds). Formal approaches, preceded by telephone contact, were made to the four Presidents of the participating Institutes of Technology. A letter of invitation was then sent to all participants, inviting them in the first instance to take part in the interview, outlining the purpose of the research and providing assurances about confidentiality and anonymity. Both letters of invitation sent to academics and manager-academics are reproduced in Appendices 1 and 2. These letters also provided assurances of the codification technique to be used to ensure comments/quotations are not ascribed individually. The need for

this was probably greatest in the academic group in the event that future promotional prospects could conceivably become associated with ascribed comments from the participants. Additionally, prior to the commencement of each interview, all participants were assured of the ethical manner in which the interview would be conducted, together with an outline of the academic scope of the research. Specifically interviewees were informed at the commencement of each interview that their participation was entirely voluntary, were free to leave at any time if they so wished, and could request to have the recording paused, or indeed stopped, if they wished.

The letters of invitation, sent to both groups, did not as a matter of policy identify the principal objective of my research as strategic planning at the individual institute level. This ensured no interviewees attended with any pre-conceptions of strategic planning. Therefore the recorded responses of the interviewees represented their first reaction to that thematic area in the natural setting of their workplace.

5.5 Data Collection

My method of data collection was semi-structured focus group interviews. I chose to use these because I wanted to have a data collection strategy that was consistent with the broad philosophical framework of my research method; accessing the experiences of the respondents with strategic planning. Van Manen (1997) offers numerous reasons for the interview approach in hermeneutic phenomenology (exploratory opportunities, the opportunity to develop conversational relationships), but the principal advantage for my research was to hear my respondents' stories in their own words. Similarly supportive

of the use of focus group interviews are Green *et al.* (2003), who cite the synergy of group interaction in generating data.

Prior to each interview it was important to gather and interpret the various documentation which had informed and shaped the resultant institute-wide plans. This information set consisted of the published plan for each institute, schedules of meetings preceding the preparation of the plans and the over-riding objectives determined for the next five years. It should be emphasised that minutes of these meetings were not sought, as I felt that this could potentially create, or be perceived as, a conflict of interest. This documentation was sought for two reasons. First, an understanding of this documentation was necessary to fully appreciate the organisational and environmental contexts within which these plans emerged. Second, it facilitated a triangulation of data sources, through which the validity and reliability of my research findings could be enhanced.

The usage of focus group interviews in qualitative research has a considerable literature. Powell *et al.* (1996:499) define a focus group as: "a group of individuals selected and assembled by researchers to discuss and comment on, from personal experience, the topic that is the subject of the research". Morgan (1997:12) emphasises the need for social researchers to differentiate clearly between group interviews and focus group interviews, contending that the principal differentiator is the role played by the researcher. He suggests that focus group interviews are based upon topics that are supplied by the researcher as opposed to a mere question and answer format of the group interview. Morgan and Krueger (1993) also extol the benefits of focus group interviews, highlighting two instances in which they prove particularly advantageous:

(1) where the social milieu, or interaction, is likely to enhance interaction, and (2) where power relationships may exist that the researcher wishes to eliminate or neutralise. The removal of power differentials has also been commented by Race *et al.* (1994) and Goss and Leinbach (1996), both of whom cite the negative consequences to the research process of failing to take cognisance of such power differentials. Focus group interviews are however also critiqued within the literature; Morgan (1997) criticises their open ended-ness and unpredictability, whilst Gibbs (2006) cautions that individual contributions can become heavily contextualised in such settings with the individual's view being lost.

Braun and Clark (2008) support Morgan's (1997) assertion that focus group interviews are enhanced by the researcher providing the topics for discussion as opposed to an open-ended approach. They suggest any theoretical framework for discussion carries with it a number of assumptions, and encourage the setting of boundaries to the data set by the construction of interview themes. Therefore, the interview themes which defined the boundaries of my focus group interviews were selected by me from the literature review I conducted. Having established the thematic areas I wanted to explore with the focus groups, I then sought to create an interview framework which would simultaneously satisfy three objectives:

1. The creation of a logical/deductive symmetry between the thematic areas explored, culminating in a consideration of strategic planning.

2. The creation of an interview environment where participants could respond to the various thematic areas in a confidential, raw, unplanned and instantaneous manner.
3. An awareness of my own potential for bias and how this might be suspended at the data collection stage.

Four essential themes were identified from my review of the literature, each of which is subsequently broken down into two accompanying sub-themes. There is some contestation in the literature over whether or not focus group interviews should be pre-existing (Kitzinger 1994) or newly formed (Kreuger 1994). The focus groups I assembled could in all instances be described as new or alternatively *ad hoc*: that is, assembled for the purpose of my research. I structured the focus group interviews to allow me to access the probe, follow-up, main areas of enquiry categorisations (Rubin and Rubin 1995). Prior to exploring the respondent's experiences of strategic planning, managerial, environmental and policy changes in higher education needed to be contextualised and explicitly considered. Conducting the interview in this manner facilitated a four-stage process, which begins by examining the changing environmental context of the interviewees' experiences, progresses through a construction of the idiosyncrasies of managing and being managed in a higher education context, considers the absence or existence of collectivist work cultures in higher education institutes and finally concludes with the interviewees' experiences of strategic planning. This iterative thematic sequencing, which the focus group interviews followed, is outlined in Table 5.2 below.

Table 5.2

<u>Research Themes and Sub-Themes</u>	
Essential Themes	Sub-Themes
Changes that have occurred in higher education over the last two decades and their consequences.	What are the causal factors for these changes? How have these changes affected the individual academic and manager-academic?
Exploration of the appropriateness and relevance of planning and management practices in Institutes of Technology.	Are planning and management intrinsically different in higher education? What are the unique differences between Institutes of Technology and other organisations?
Exploration of the degree of individualism and collectivism in higher education.	What are the necessary conditions for creating a "collectivist" culture? The extent to which academic work hinders or assists collectivism?
Exploration of the Institute wide activities that preceded the preparation of the Institutes of Technology strategic plan(s).	What was the process employed for the generation of the strategic plan? Does the published plan achieve alignment across the various stakeholders in the Institute?

These semi structured focus group interviews then became my main conversational relationship with my respondents. Fielding and Thomas (2001:29) considering the interviewer's task, posit:

"The interviewer's task is to draw out all relevant responses, to encourage the inarticulate or shy, to be neutral towards the topic whilst displaying interest."

Mishler (1986: 23) also cautions against taking the interview for granted:

“A routine, technical practice and a pervasive taken for granted activity in our culture.”

Fontana and Frey (1994) also highlight the non-neutrality of the interview whilst simultaneously heralding the interview's ability to capture interactions that lead to negotiated, textually based results. Conducting focus group interviews also presents challenges, which may be traced to the lack of understanding as to how these differ from individual interviews, and the precise meaning of what constitutes a focus group interview. Patton (1987) advises interviewers not to attempt to reach any form of consensus, but rather to accept as an ultimate objective the goal of getting high quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others. Krueger (1994:16), discussing focus group interviews, also reiterates the importance of detachment on the part of the facilitator:

“...to create a persuasive environment that nurtures different points of view without pressure to vote, plan or reach consensus.”

Marshall and Rossman (1995) highlight the crucial interview requirement in phenomenological research as the relationship between the researcher and the participant, which they advocate as being reflective in its focus. Others (see for example: Paley 1997, Kvale 1996, Wimpenny and Gass 2000:1487) reiterate a requirement of “phenomenological bracketing or reductionism” when conducting the interview, such that the interviewer “can adopt a detached position where prior assumptions can be suspended”.

Seale *et al.* (2004) suggest successful interviewing requires the interviewer to confront one of the central ironies in qualitative researching: interviewees are not merely viewed

as individuals relevant only in a research laden context. More appropriately, interviewees should be viewed as the product of multiple discourses, simultaneously representing thoughtful individuals, feeling individuals and experiencing individuals. In such a scenario the interview then becomes a contextually situated practice (op. cit.:29), with the interviewer assuming both a data gathering and filtering role. Consequently, I saw my role whilst conducting the interviews as threefold: (1) to question interviewees in a group setting, (2) when and where necessary to probe interviewees' responses without the introduction of bias, and (3) to interpret responses critically and reflexively, but not during the interview itself. Extracts or responses which I found particularly illuminating would be entered in my fieldwork log at the end of each interview.

I organised all interviews in terms of their introduction, conduct and conclusion, such that I could create an atmosphere of confidence and trust on behalf of participants to effectively allow a conversation to emerge. Interviewees were given considerable latitude in how they replied to questions. My interviews could be characterised as me seeking the opinions and experiences of those present in a non-intrusive, yet facilitative manner. During each interview, each group was asked for their experience and opinions about predetermined themes and sub-themes which initially sought to contextualise the changes in higher education as experienced by the group, and which ultimately brought the group to the point of recounting their experiences of strategic planning in their respective institutes. Whilst the transcripts can, and indeed often do, present different understandings of the same phenomena, it is not meant to polarise or create conflicting positions.

The technology I used to record the data; a digital voice recorder, allowed me to pause the interview at any point during which respondents wanted to talk privately. After each

interview the recordings were downloaded on to a computer and then sent for transcription by a third party. The resultant written record will, of course, be made available to participants should they request a copy. During some of the interviews references were also made to ongoing collaborative initiatives with other higher education institutes, as part of, or tangential to, strategic initiatives. Once again, primarily to ensure confidentiality, no references to any such collaboration are included in the transcripts reported.

After each interview I would then write up my fieldwork notes, reflecting date and time of interview as well my own impressions as to how the interview went. Burgess (1984:102) recommends the use of such field notes both as an *aide de memoire* and as protection against the frailties of human memory. The transcripts of the interviews were then subjected to content and theme analysis to pick up on recurring issues appearing in respondents answers. Before commencing the fieldwork a thorough piloting process of the research instrument was carried out to ensure its robustness and appropriateness. The institute in which this was conducted proved very successful in terms of both participation, across both groups, and the richness and variety of transcripts received. I had originally intended to conduct focus group interviews in only three institutes. However, such was the information rich data generated in the piloting phase, I then decided to expand the sample size to four institutes. I have therefore included the findings from this pilot test with the sampled data being reported on and believe that the quality of the research findings is considerably enhanced by this addition.

5.6 Data Analysis

Strauss and Corbin (1998) suggest qualitative data analysis attempts to bring meaning to a situation, rather than the search for truth focussed on by quantitative research. Because my research methodology was constructed around hermeneutic phenomenological principles, the data analysis methods developed were sympathetic to these philosophies. My data analysis methodology had to show a commensurate interest for accessing the experiences of the respondents in their own words. Therefore I have adopted a grounded theory research approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967) in the analysis of the data generated. Theory developed in this manner has been described by Strauss and Corbin (1990) as that which emerges inductively from a corpus of data. More explicitly, Borgatti (2009) asserts that grounded theorists focus on making explicit the implicit belief systems of respondents. Mason (2002) suggests this approach to data analysis requires the researcher to scrutinise data such that explanations can develop which appear to fit the data. Most importantly, Mason (op. cit.) suggests that under a grounded theory approach the theory comes last; allowing the researcher to interpret the data and then develop theoretical propositions or explanations. A grounded theory approach has been proposed by both Wolfgram *et al.* (1998) and Van de Ven (1992) when the research subject involves socio-political-organisational issues, and I would contend that the adoption of strategic planning by higher education institutes fits within this categorisation. More specifically, Wolfgram *et al.* (1998) position grounded theory as the optimal method of enquiry into strategic and organisational change, while Van de Ven (1992) propose the adoption of a grounded theory approach where real life contexts are being investigated over a period of time.

Braun and Clarke (2006:79) distinguish between two data types, as follows: (1) data corpus refers to all the data collected for particular research project (in my research this

amounts to the collected recordings from all interviews conducted), and (2) data set refers to all the data from the corpus that are being used for a particular analysis. Whilst my interviews yielded a considerable amount of data (data corpus) the relevant data set for my analysis was to a large extent determined by those thematic areas which I explored with my interview groups. In this manner, my decision to follow a semi-structured focus group interview conferred a pre-determined thematic structure and manageability on my data set. The challenge thereafter for me was to determine an appropriate data analysis framework through which I could analyze the transcripts of the respondents. I did not use any software packages for my data analysis, but chose instead to follow six stages in my analysis. These stages may be specified as follows:

1. Listening and transcribing the recorded interviews into transcripts for each interview conducted.
2. Using content analysis to identify "Who said what, to whom, why and with what effect?" within the predefined themes.
3. Coding of transcript extracts to reflect their linkages with previously researched literature.
4. Identification of first order constructs within selected transcripts, to reflect the participants lived experiences within those theme areas.
5. Collating and comparing these first order constructs both within and across participating institutes.
6. Reporting the final interpretation of the research findings.

Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) describe this six stage approach to data analysis as allowing the text to speak so that the answer is found in the text. Kreuger (1994) also proposes

the analysis of qualitative data through a framework analysis, one which provides a clear series of steps to the researcher culminating in an analysis continuum; raw data, descriptive statements and finally interpretation. Bontekoe (1996) describes the act of interpretation as representing the process of dialogue between the researcher and the text of the research. Babbie (2007) defines content analysis as a methodology in the social sciences for studying the content of communication. I chose to initially immerse myself in the data collected by repeated listening to the recorded interviews. This approach allowed me to determine if the predetermined questions I had posed to my respondents could in fact be used as codification system, or indeed whether or not latent themes had emerged which are relevant to my central research question. Additionally I took notes during this listening, particularly of quotes I felt were important either for content or impact. The interviews were then transcribed, professionally, in an unedited manner and without punctuation alterations. Where I felt sections had not been properly transcribed, or elements missed, I checked the transcripts with the original audio recording.

When I began to codify my transcribed data I applied the thematic areas of questioning identified earlier, such that it could be argued that the respondents' experiences I highlight were more "theory driven" than "data driven" (Braun and Clarke 2006). Glaser (1998) suggests data selection in this manner effectively delimits the study but also allows the researcher to selectively concentrate on data which is central to the core of the research: strategic planning experiences, whilst not bothering with concepts of little importance or relevance to the core. Whilst this may have sacrificed some of the unsolicited raw data that emerged, I feel a reasonable trade off for this was the manageability it conferred on my research. Once again the coding system was manual,

involving numeric codes and highlight markers. Ajjawi and Higgs (2007:624) refer to the data collected and correlated with principal themes as “first order constructs”; the respondents’ ideas about the research phenomenon in their own words and ideas. The final stage of my analysis then involved me linking these first order constructs with the literature reviewed earlier and interpreting this in a methodologically and theoretically sound manner.

5.7 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for this research was received from the University of Leicester in advance of commencing my fieldwork. This research presented numerous ethical dilemmas; retaining objectivity despite my previous experiences with academic strategic planning, establishing relationships of trust and confidentiality with my target respondent groups, and inspiring confidence to assure respondents that their professional integrity would not be damaged by participation. If I did not substantively deal with these at the design stage, then the veracity and objectivity of my findings would suffer. Prior experiences of the researcher within the context of the proposed research area are not uncommon in the area of phenomenological research. Bednall (2006:2) categorises the response of the researcher in addressing such a dilemma as the adoption of what is termed “bracketing”. Quite simply this placed the onus on me to put in place data collection devices which allow the voices of subjectivity to emerge authentically. I am confident that the construction of my enquiry allowed me to bracket or separate any previous knowledge or experience I have had with strategic planning practices. Additionally there was the dilemma that certain influencers within those institutes I chose to form part of my research, could attempt to manipulate my research in a manner that is conducive to their own interests. The power relationship that exists

between them and I would, of course, be a key consideration here, together with my resoluteness to withstand such pressures. My own employer was excluded from my research for this reason.

As already outlined in Chapter 4, tertiary education in Ireland at the moment is characterised by over capacity leading to greater competition. How colleges are planning their futures is therefore a very sensitive area. The ethical challenge here was to simultaneously prevent my research and individual college's competitive positions being compromised in any manner. This issue was particularly acute in my attempts to achieve a triangulation of data sources to enhance the validity of my subsequent findings. It was for this reason that I sought not to request minutes from previously held strategic planning meetings on the various campuses, as I did not want to create any impression of exposure on the part of the participating institutes. Equally however I must also accept the potential consequences of this decision for the resultant research: a diminution in the richness of the data available to me as a researcher. In a small country like Ireland, where there is already a real risk of imposed rationalisation of tertiary education, my research could be diluted by veiled participation by colleges who may not want to compromise their competitive positions. Creating an atmosphere of trust, compliance and co-operation was therefore an imperative for my research project. It was important therefore to create an atmosphere of goodwill between respondents and myself. In retrospect I am reasonably confident that I succeeded in observing the required level of ethical compliance whilst conducting this research, through:

- Openness on my part at all stages of the research process about the nature and purpose of the research.

- Ensuring, through the provision of guarantees, that the opinions of respondents were respected and that they were assured confidentiality.
- Devising a timetable for visits and consultations, which was respondent friendly rather than researcher friendly.

The use of semi-structured focus group interviews also forced me, as a researcher, to navigate ethically between detachment and involvement in the interview process. Silverman (in Denzin and Lincoln 2003) cautions that emphatically understanding any phenomenon depends not merely on interview transcripts but additionally requires an understanding of the broader social and cultural *milieu* in which the research takes place. Miller and Glassner (1997) also suggest that respondents' answers from conducted interviews are not in fact a form of realism but rather a "cultural story", where interviewees make their actions explainable and understandable to those who might not otherwise understand. Atkinson and Coffey (1997) highlight the inherent dangers in the construction of reality or meaning from transcribed interviews, and caution interviewers about the inappropriate use of what are socially organised facts.

I designed these considerations into the proposed research approach rather than reactively addressing them. Respondents were not placed in a position where they had to respond to self-serving questions or deal with differing levels of ambiguity. This was achieved through pre-testing of the format and content of focus group questionnaires prior to full adoption. My role as observer in all the interviews conducted, ensured that respondents could engage in a manner that was both facilitative and fully respectful of their opinions in all instances. My role as a researcher was therefore analogous to that of

a cartographer; tasked with the drawing of the map yet mindful that the travellers should plot their own journeys.

5.8 Research Design and Findings: Reliability and Validity Issues

The primary data I generated are the transcripts of the respondents: “the world as it appears to individuals when they place themselves in a state of consciousness that reflects an effort to be free of everyday biases and beliefs” (Ball *et al.* 1996:49). In attempting to render phenomenology more rigorous, Husserl (1983) advocates the phenomenological researcher to adopt phenomenological reduction - the researcher does not make a claim that the object or event really exists in the way that it is appearing, it is seen to be a phenomenon (Giorgi 2006). Using this perspective the researcher is then restricted to the experiential claims of the transcripts, rather than attempting to create a generalizable theory. Thus, epistemological boundaries are established, not by the researcher but by the complexities and richness of the transcripts provided. Notwithstanding this epistemological boundary, the phenomenological research approach adopted must nonetheless meet the twin criteria of validity and reliability - the adoption of Husserl's (1965) philosophical method.

Lincoln and Guba (1985:288) suggest reliability, described alternately as the dependability of results, is achievable through triangulation and audit trail. The issue of triangulation within qualitative research remains a vexed question with some commentators (see for example: Mays and Pope 2000, Richardson 1991) claiming internal validity is unattainable for the qualitative researcher. Instead, they suggest that qualitative researchers should content themselves with completeness and comprehensiveness. Barbour (2001:1119) also questions the requirement for internal

validity in qualitative research and suggests that whilst the production of similar findings provides corroboration or reassurance, the absence of similar findings does not provide grounds for refutation. To achieve triangulation, I collected data from multiple sources including; interviews, observation, and the maintenance of a fieldwork log. Because of the epistemological boundaries already described, the issue of external validity is of lesser importance than internal validity. To ensure that the transcripts of the respondents exactly match the dialogical exchange of the interview, all interviews were simultaneously recorded on two separate recording devices, professionally transcribed, proof read against the recording and participants were invited to seek a copy, written or oral, of their respective interview. To date no such requests have been received.

5.9 Identified Limitations in Research Design and Analysis

Whilst my research approach has emphasised the epistemological imperative of good research and its trustworthiness (Lincoln and Guba 1985), there are nonetheless limitations. First, my research was conducted in the Republic of Ireland; is therefore limited in its scope, and focuses only on those sampled Institutes of Technology. The broader population of the Institute of Technology sector or the university sector within the Republic of Ireland, both major higher education players, are expressly not considered and the research findings should not be extrapolated to these.

Second, my research has not set out to establish a model of strategic planning for higher education institutes or to measure the effectiveness of strategic planning. My research methodology was entirely descriptive, in an ex-post manner, and does not purport to have any predictive validity. Theorising about strategic planning frameworks is

therefore not possible, nor was it intended. The experiences of both groups represent their own reflections on their personal engagements with strategic planning in their own institutes. They are, therefore, context specific; essentially localised. Clegg (2008) highlights this local limitation boundary, cautioning that even within local research, micro levels of difference can, and indeed do, remain.

Third, my data management framework was also limited in a number of ways. One limitation in the analysis of the data that may potentially contain sources of bias includes the potential over-weighted representation of emergent themes. Central to this limitation is the need for me, as a researcher, to evaluate on whether or not I delivered upon the bracketing requirement inherent in phenomenological research? For instance, the irony of investigating alignment with published strategic plans, whilst simultaneously stratifying/segmenting the targeted actors between academics and managers has not been lost upon me as a researcher, and could be construed as the creation of a self fulfilling prophesy. A potential contributory factor here is my personal involvement with previous strategic planning initiatives introducing a selective bias based upon personal experiences. Additionally, given the reasonably small sample size, the findings should not be viewed as either general or transferable to the broader population of Institutes of Technology.

Finally, the key thematic areas upon which the semi-structured focus group interviews were structured were determined by me in advance of the interview. The transcripts recorded may therefore not be as rich or all inclusive as if the focus group interviews were conducted in an entirely open-ended manner. During the eight interviews, whilst I retained both objectivity and independence, I was aware that opportunities for deeper or

wider consideration of issues may indeed have been lost. Thereafter, the transcripts have been analysed in a cross institute manner, without any specific history (individual institute) being subject to rigorous analysis. Here, once again, my attempts to protect individual identities may have impinged on the external validity of the research findings. Miles and Huberman (1998:194) succinctly summarise the danger for researchers of navigating from specific instances of case research to a set of generalisations as follows: "each case has a specific history, which we discard at our peril". Notwithstanding this however it is worth repeating, the goal of my research was to gain an understanding of the overall experiences, and the ensuing alignment, of respondents with strategic planning. I remain confident that this research can provoke meaningful dialogues across all actors concerning the future strategic planning framework for Ireland's Institute of Technology sector.

5.10 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the principal research design considerations which both informed and influenced the research instrument chosen. The choice of a hermeneutic phenomenological research approach, using a semi-structured focus group interview format, was based upon the need to explore the experiences of the two defined focus groups; academics and manager-academics, of strategic planning practices and processes in their respective Institutes of Technology. The rationale for the adoption of this hermeneutic phenomenological method adopted was two-fold: (a) to allow reflexivity on the part of the respondents, and (b) to allow the interviewer witness, but not influence, the respondent's world view of their daily experiences of the phenomena under consideration. An over-arching thematic framework, comprising four themes, each with two further sub-themes, was then outlined describing the principal areas of

investigation. The themes and sub-themes were woven into the interview sequentially, such that the interview itself culminated in an exploration of the respondent's institute-based strategic planning processes. Chapter 6 will present selected transcripts of respondents outlining their experiences of managerial practices and processes in higher education, current changes in higher education and an assessment of the degree of collectivism or individualism within the work environment that is higher education. Because strategic planning is an institutional intervention, it is therefore heavily nuanced in terms of organisational culture, architecture and leadership style. Consequently these research findings, specifically as they relate to the process and implementation elements of strategic planning, are presented separately in Chapter 7.

Chapter 6

Research Findings 1

Higher Education's Changing Contours

CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH FINDINGS 1: HIGHER EDUCATION'S CHANGING CONTOURS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the lived experiences of practising academics and manager-academics in four Institutes of Technology in the Republic of Ireland. The rationale for the identification and composition of these two groups; academics and manager-academics were outlined in Chapter 5. Responses from both academics and manager-academics on the thematic areas of change, higher education management, and the collectivist/individualist nature of academic work are presented in this chapter. The responses from academics and manager-academics on their experiences of strategic planning in their respective Institutes of Technology are then presented in Chapter 7. Presenting the findings in this manner can be rationalised on a number of grounds. First, the combination of both academic and manager-academic responses in a single chapter allows greater opportunity to comparatively assess their respective positions simultaneously rather than iteratively and facilitates greater opportunities for the comparison and contrasting of respective positions. Second, although course provision may differ across sampled Institutes of Technology, they nonetheless represent, both because of the sampling chosen and the regulatory environment, a homogeneous grouping. This is evidenced by:

1. Contracts issued to all lecturing grades within the Institute of Technology sector are nationally agreed across all the respective lecturing grades, thus ensuring comparability and equality.

2. Unlike the United Kingdom, where different institutional arrangements can exist in pre-1992 and post-1992 universities, all Head of Department and Head of School positions are permanent tenured positions within the Institute of Technology sector, effectively allowing for reluctant managers (Bryman 2007) to enjoy managerial responsibility for indefinite durations, if they so wish!
3. The Institute of Technology sector is viewed as a homogeneous tertiary education sector by the Department of Education and Science and the provision and delivery of higher education initiatives is done in a uniform manner, affecting all Institutes of Technology equally, without any scope for derogation.

The decision to report the combined responses of both academics and manager-academics on their experiences of strategic planning in their respective Institutes of Technology in a single chapter (Chapter 7) was based on the specificity of that experience to the individuals interviewed. More particularly, this decision was also informed by:

- A recognition that strategic planning, its preparatory processes and subsequent implementation occur in a specific organisational context, one that is mediated by different (individualised) organisational structures, leadership styles and faculty engagement.
- In view of the fact that all of the sampled Institutes of Technology were now in their second iteration of strategic planning, participants were now in the unique position of being able to reflect on (1) their most recent

experience with strategic planning, and (2) assess the success or otherwise of the first strategic plan published in terms of organisational outcomes.

This chapter will portray, through interview transcripts, a duality of actors' experiences, straddling academics and manager-academics as defined in Chapter 5. The interaction between actor and context, defining context iteratively: commences with the changes that have occurred in higher education and their impact on both the academic profession and academic identities. The academics' interview transcripts were analysed to explore concept of occupational allegiances experienced by academic communities as a result of adopted strategic planning procedures. Chapter 7 will explore the experiences of academics and manager-academics defining context, as mediated by strategic planning practices, more specifically as: "the administrative systems and decision processes, investigating how these are used to shape courses of strategic action over time, in adaptation or response to the environment" (Chakravarthy and Doz, 1992).

In the findings, outlined below, quotes are included but for reasons of confidentiality that source is assigned a gender and the remainder of the reference relates to the interview from which that quotation is taken, referenced alphabetically. Where possible the quotation is contextualised without making it too long.

6.2 Higher Education: Change and Consequences

This section outlines the experiences of the two respondent groups to the two explored sub-themes arising under this theme area, exploring the interviewees' experiences and

understanding of: (1) the principal changes they have witnessed in higher education over the last two decades, and (2) their opinions on how these changes have impinged upon them. Examination of the responses received highlights the manner in which academics tended, in the first instance, to reflect on those changes that impact upon what they perceive as their primary activity, namely lecturing. The manager-academic group, however, adopt a more policy centric approach and identify those changes impacting upon the funding, development and repositioning of higher education in Ireland.

The overriding tone from academics' responses focussed on the increasing influences of marketisation on higher education, the emerging dissonance between administrators and academics, a re-conceptualisation of what education means and the manner in which this is being affected by the "knowledge economy", and the changing perceptions of what academic work actually means. Another recurring concern highlighted by respondents, was the need for their institutions to remain relevant in the *market place*. Frequently the expression *the real world* was also used to refer to this market orientation. No definition was provided, or sought, as to the precise meaning of what is meant by the "real world", but I assume it is a reference to the private sector. Typical responses outlining the changes academics have witnessed in higher education include:

"But I think another thing I suppose is I feel there's an element of competition, you know, we're a college, we're in the market place, all the educational institutions in Ireland are competing for the same group of students, all of the colleges are trying to take on more students."
(Male Academic: Interview A)

"That's palpable, as a lecturer, you know, I don't know how it is that that's impressed on us but I think we all feel it all the time "oh we're in competition with" and "our numbers are down" you know, we are

reminded, constantly reminded "OK we're under pressure for numbers, this is the situation". (Male Academic: Interview A)

The philosophical discussion of what the real purpose of higher education was, and the shifting emphasis from a societal view of education to one predicated on the demands of the knowledge economy was also apparent. Academic respondents recorded their unease that higher education appeared to be gravitating towards an outcome based model, one in which creativity and individuality were seen to be lost, whilst the broader social and philosophical goals of higher education were also being overlooked:

"It always seems to me anyway that the big question is "what is education for?" It seems to me the initial function of the Institute of Technology sector was to turn out workers for jobs, or are we trying to create citizens? Is there some kind of a role we have in shaping people's identities and ways in which they deal with their society? If we're looking about trying to create citizens and people that can work well and creatively why aren't we doing more humanity subjects, why aren't we doing more arts degrees and more performing arts, these sorts of things - that's creativity." (Male Academic: Interview E)

Research cited earlier by Gale (2002) and Stew (2003) has highlighted the increasing interference of administrators in higher education. My findings also highlight the intrusion of administrators into the academic domain, and its impact on their professional identity; described by two academics as follows:

"Absolutely yes. I think there's been a relegation of the role of academics within the college, you know, to almost being secondary to the administration of the college and I don't think the trust is there for us to do.... you know, to have any flexibility in delivery of the courses. You've got to be prescriptive, you've got to do it exactly the way it's in the manual, you know, that's my belief anyway." (Female Academic: Interview C)

"I would differentiate between academic management and administrative functions - I don't call "them" (administrators) management, I refuse to

call them management, they're administrators. I just wanted to throw that in there as well." (Male Academic: Interview E)

My results further indicate that such tensions are exacerbated by the tendency towards a quality audit culture. The emphasis on measuring and assessing academic workload whilst not applying the same metrics to other functional areas, including administration, has created for the following participant, a perception of unequal treatment:

"And the other thing, as part of this quality control procedure, we're the ones always getting measured. The Admin, the management, the computer services all the things that we would have issues with don't get measured every year the way we're measured. They're measuring us but we don't measure them, you know, which we've objected to and they keep saying they're going to do something about it but we're still limping along with what we say is substandard services where they're continually measuring us." (Male Academic: Interview C)

This administration-academic tension is also evident in the United Kingdom as noted by Fearn (2008). Its consequences for the ethos of the academy, was also highlighted by Fearn (op. cit.) citing Furedi, Professor of Sociology at the University of Kent, as follows: "I'm not against professional administration, but I think administrative and managerial practices are more successful when they are organic to the institution." This viewpoint contrasts with my results, which indicate a resistance to administrative interference, organic or otherwise.

The recognition of the primacy of the teaching and learning in higher education institutes with the role of administrators viewed in a purely supportive role is commented upon by one academic as follows:

"What they don't realise is that....and they should maybe think about this now and again, that if all the admin people were taken away, everyone was taken away, the only people here were the lecturers and the students,

this college would probably trundle on for a few months, work fine, you know. But if you took the lecturers out of it there would be nothing. But they seem to think that they're driving the whole operation but they're not, you know." (Male Academic: Interview C)

Both academic and manager-academic responses are characterised by the continued re-appearance of key watchwords such as "performance", "quality", "competitiveness", "efficiency" and "accountability". This conforms with Ender's (2000) depiction of the historical evolution of various conceptual frameworks of academic work, wherein academics are increasingly been viewed as staff members rather than independent professionals. My findings also highlight this influx of commercially rooted language and values, with reference being made to:

"the shaping of educational output by the marketplace" (Male Manager: Interview D).

Additionally, in response to whether or not a market does exist in higher education in Ireland, one manager commented:

"Of course there's a market, because education is choice driven, and if that is the case the market will decide and that market is your students." (Female Manager: Interview B).

This market-oriented output model of higher education creates disquiet across both groups, evidenced by concern that the ever increasing quest for numbers impinges negatively upon the learners' educational experience. Particularly noteworthy about the following comment is its source: a manager with previous private sector experience, therefore theoretically devoid of any prior academic socialisation:

"What strikes me, the one thing as I was listening, since I'm only here 6 years and the big change I see since I came in was we have brought commercial language steadily in each year. And that commercial

language actually has been driven by the need to survive and get student numbers and excess capacity and increase in competition. So to my mind education is becoming commercialised for some reason and that.....we are responding to the market forces and that's how we're responding. I'm not sure....I think there's a balance there that has to be struck. I think that can devalue the educational experience and there's a struggle there in that." (Female Manager: Interview A)

The above comment preceded a lengthy debate during which the Presidents of the Institutes of Technology were castigated for slavishly following this market-oriented agenda, without adequately defending the principles and ideals of what third level education represents. The following two comments indicate the views of managers of the negative potential inherent in overly embracing the mantra of the market:

"You know, and sometimes I listen to Presidents *spiel* this stuff forward, and it gets a bit depressing. Even if they were to recognise that they have to act within these forces but at least put a counterbalance in that said 'look there is another side to this, that third level education just doesn't only have a utilitarian role, you know, that's not just our sole purpose and reason for existing and never was' ". (Male Manager: Interview D)

"So my conclusion is that education is now as much as part of the problem as it is the solution because all we're doing is reproducing a system that went before. Whereas the ultimate goal of education has been to transform, to bring about transformation. I'm not suggesting we don't produce engineers for jobs, but what type of engineers are we producing? We're producing engineers that are contributing to the extinction of the planet. We're producing IT graduates that have no concept whatsoever of ensuring their technology is accessible to everybody. We're producing doctors that couldn't give a toss about patients. Lawyers that are more interested in making money than enforcing the law. So really when I stood back and looked at it, the conclusion I come to is the education system has gone off the rails a little bit." (Male Manager: Interview D)

6.3 Management in Higher Education, Relevance and Appropriateness

This section outlines selected responses from interviewed academics and manager-academics on how appropriate and relevant managerial practices and processes are in

their respective institutes. This section contextualises one dimension of the emerging academic workplace; managerial practices and procedures, against the concepts of academic professionalism and identity. Responses from the academic group suggest that whilst the language of new managerialism has indeed been imported into Ireland's Institute of Technology sector, ideological commitment to it has not yet been secured. When questioned on the appropriateness of managerial practices and processes in higher education, one academic responded thus:

“Microsoft is a soft organisation in so far as people go off and do weird and creative things and whatever but they don't....it is not a 9 to 5 sit at your desk, clock in. Now if you want to try and create an organisation where you've got creativity, which lecturing is, then the command and control structure will not work.” (Male Academic: Interview E)

This response highlights the perception of academic work as being creative and non-routine, with an inference that excessive managerial involvement could in fact stifle such creativity. This issue of creativity and innovation, how it can best be managed, cultivated and sustained, was also explored with the manager-academic groups, and the responses indicate a resonance across both groups. One manager identified an underlying issue facing manager-academics as follows:

“We're going back comparing and copying-management and planning with older industries-instead of the emerging industries of ten years time.” (Interview A: Male Manager)

Responses received from academics also reveal a belief that their academic freedom has been surreptitiously chipped away at over the last two decades. Similar viewpoints are also evident in the academic literature; Martin (1999:7), quoting Halsey (1992:99), suggests that the life of the academic thirty or so years ago was “undoubtedly a pleasant one”. More specifically, Halsey (1992:99) continues:

“The profession was prestigious and confident. Neither society nor government seriously questioned their standards and values. Once appointed to an academic position, an academic staff member was there for life.”

Whilst all staff interviewed in this research are public servants with nationally regulated provisions for salary, job security and pension provisions, the last two decades has seen significant changes in their work practices. Chapter 2 has already identified the convergence of these changes internationally (Burgess and Strachan 1996) and the manner in which they are becoming visible in academic institutes: the commercialisation of knowledge (Gibbons *et al.* 1994) and the demands for greater accountability (Ziman 2000). Burgess and Strachan (1996), undertaking an international comparison of changes in higher education work practices, identify a convergence of changes across jurisdictions; Gibbons *et al.* (1994) the commercialisation of knowledge (see also: Gibbons *et al.* 1994); and demands from funding authorities for greater accountability (see also: Ziman 2000). Underpinning these changes are the demands for performance and quality, competitiveness, efficiency and accountability and an increasing emphasis on higher education institutes as engines of economic growth. Changes like these highlight, often unflatteringly, the academic profession, its underlying identity and the sometimes contradictory demands of outcome assessed education and contracting exchequer support (see for example: Bryman 2007, Barrett and Barrett 2007). My findings reveal similar misgivings amongst those academics interviewed, but unquestionably their greatest ire focussed on the cumulative impact of such changes; the increasing dilution of their professional independence.

One academic interviewed, decrying this erosion of academic freedom, advocated a minimalist role for the academic manager and highlighted the extent to which

academics effectively network amongst themselves in resolving problems. The respondent, when further probed, characterises the manager as a choice of last resort; an individual to whom academics resort only when they have resource requirements. Of particular interest in the following quote is the comparison of academic work with another “profession” and the implicit imputation of professional status to academic work:

“If I work in an accountancy practice and if I have a problem, this tax problem, I won’t go to the debt office manager who is controlling it, I will go to a colleague. And exactly the same thing applies here. If I have a problem with coursework I won’t go to the Head of Department <Named>. Similarly if I want to create an accounting course I won’t go to Head of Department, I’ll have a chat with <named colleague> maybe over coffee, or the water cooler, I’ll go and talk to my other peers. It’s my peers I’ll turn to for advice and guidance. I don’t want command and control, I want advice and guidance and I will go to my peers for advice and guidance.” (Male Academic: Interview E)

This view of higher education institutes as professional repositories of knowledge also accords with both Perkins (1969) and McDonald (1995). Perkins (1969) characterised the work of academics as the “key profession”, whilst McDonald (1995) defines professionalism, thus:

“Professionalism is a property on the organisational level usually meaning some kind of occupational control (i.e. knowledge development and formal education in a specialised area, and knowledge application in the exercise of a certain occupation, possibly secured by governmental legal regulations).”

My findings here concur with Perkins (1969) and McDonald’s (1995) description of academic workplaces representing professional repositories of knowledge. My findings also are consistent with those of Clegg’s (2008), who suggests a particular delineation amongst academics in the construction of academic self identity; creating both an

“intellectual self” and the “academic job” (op. cit.:334). Whilst the above response invariably relates to the job element, it also highlights the liberating aspect of academic identity, where solutions are sought in the first instance within the immediate family of academics or relevant professionals. This cultivated and valued academic self sufficiency and the status of person of last resort afforded to managers by implication, begs the question of what exactly is the attitude of academics towards managers within their respective departments? It should be emphasised here that the majority of subsequent comments refer to Heads of Department; typically the first point of managerial contact for academics.

These findings highlight a significant disjoint between the expectations held by academics of manager-academics and the institute's expectation of manager-academics. These responses also find resonance with Bryman (2007) and Tahir (2008) of the oft invidious position of reluctant managers in which manager-academics find themselves. Middle management are occasionally caught in the middle of this misunderstanding - filling roles as “reluctant managers” (Bryman 2007:4), still clinging to whatever residue remains of their formative academic careers, and reliant on persuasion as the principal means of moving their departments or units towards an ever expanding list of objectives. Tahir (2008) has recounted similar experiences from the United Kingdom and explains the dilemma as follows:

“I think we are in an odd transitional phase in higher education where your line manager isn't actually your line manager, so we're occupying two cultures: one that is supposed to be collegiate, where everyone pitches in, but also another, where there is a set of targets and expectations, planning statements and strategies.”

The focus-group interviews identified two principal reasons for this disjoint: first an understanding of what is important to academics in a work context, and second an understanding that there are certain higher education organisational characteristics which effectively “neutralise” the impact of leadership and management. As we saw in Chapter 2, Kerr and Jermier (1978) identified three dominant organisational traits, which tend to be representative of such organisations; a strong professional orientation, a strong need for independence and a work environment where tasks are intrinsically satisfying. My research suggests a preference amongst academics interviewed for a type of leadership appropriate to academic organisations differing substantially from other *milieux*; explaining in part, at least, the noted ambivalence amongst academics surveyed.

One manager interviewed emphasised the ever present requirement of navigating between collegiality and performance measures, to ensure that consensus is created as a necessary condition for change and decision making:

“Planning and management in an academic organisation has to be different to anything in the private sector. I’ve used the term before, that when you work with groups of academics it’s different again, and the term I’ve heard used, that you manufacture consensus that’s what you are there to do, and that’s what a community of scholars are all about.”
(Male Manager: Interview D)

Sympathy is evident amongst academics for individuals, very often former colleagues recently promoted, now holding management positions in the Institute of Technology sector. Such sympathy was based on the perceived hopelessness of the tasks facing these managers, or the inability to manage effectively in a higher education

environment. The continual need for managers to resort to persuasion and personal inducement was also a recurring theme across managerial comments received:

“To get people to change is very difficult. But simple things like we change Lecturer A from doing that subject this year to this subject next year. I mean telling them to do it was OK, it would be done but it creates disharmony and so on and so on....a lot of persuasion has to be done in many cases to achieve that and to make the person comfortable and willing to do it and so on. So managing people in an institute like this is certainly, I'd imagine, far more difficult than other types of organisations.” (Male Manager: Interview F)

This emphasis on persuasion evident in my findings should not however be seen as unique to Ireland's Institute of Technology sector. Chait (1995) also recounts similar experiences of academic managers and leaders in American Universities, and the amused disdain with which they are treated by academics. Those managers I interviewed were also critical of the assumption that upon assuming their positions, they would somehow *evolve* (emphasis added) into their new roles. One manager commented as follows:

“I used to be the head of engineering and when you're managing academics everything you say is called into question automatically as a matter of course, I could get emotional about it. And I have the unfortunate position, my academic background is mathematics so I'm actually useless. I never read a module on personal professional development. Particularly in project management, I wouldn't have a clue.” (Male Manager: Interview D)

Academic respondents pointedly expressed their disquiet at the appearance of the language of new managerialism into their everyday work environments. The following quotation questions the appropriateness of the term “manager”, and highlights that respondent's misgivings about this emerging role:

“Well the interesting point is that we’re all so comfortable now talking about them as managers. I mean that term has really only come in since I’ve been here. Now they’re line managers, right, and they operate like line managers, they do everything like....It wasn’t always the case as far as I am aware, and certainly in universities and so on, head of department, when people take the position, where your responsibilities are really a certain level of coordination and collegiality, it’s done on a collegiate basis. Whereas here head of department see their role and act on their role as “I’m your boss, you do what I say” and there’s a certain amount of micro management goes on. I don’t know where that came from.”(Male Academic: Interview A)

This theme is further developed in another interview when a parallel is drawn between the usage of the term “line manager” (typically used within the Institute of Technology sector to refer to Heads of Department/School/Functional Area Managers) and its industrial revolution, production oriented, background. I detected that the three bulwarks of the academic profession; collegiality, trust and collective decision making sit rather uncomfortably with this concept of being “line managed”. This inappropriateness of industrially derived language to describe managerial positions within the Institute of Technology sector also arises in the following extract. Here, comment is passed on what has become another salient feature of the Institute of Technology sector over the last five years, namely the decision across all Institutes of Technology to employ consultants in either the preparation of team development plans (as part of the Performance Management and Development System) or to assist in the strategic planning process. Unease amongst academics with the importation of well established industrial practices directly into higher education, and without due cognisance or recognition to the nature of the academy, merited the following criticism from one academic:

“...again it’s like the stuff on the Team Development Plans, it’s lifted directly from industry with no thought to whether it’s appropriate or not. So they lift a lot of stuff in the context of industrial relations and in the

context of developing strategic plans and developing mission, vision, and goals and they just think “well this is the standard” and it’s a standard for industry, for a private sector, maybe a manufacturing organisation or some kind of....and it’s just whoosh...” and they plonk it down and nobody seems to give much thought to “is this the right term” or “is this the right way to use it”. Because the role of the line managers is pretty well defined in all our minds as to what this person is and it has a historical almost kind of feel to it where it’s a line, it’s a factory line, and the line is....this is the line, you’re all working on the line.” (Male Academic: Interview A)

Academic respondents typically saw the Head of Department as being a facilitator and provider of resources and a servant of the academic community that they serve. One academic respondent outlined his view of the Head of Department’s role more succinctly:

“Like I said before, a Head of Department I see as somebody who acts as a channel for the collective opinions of the academic community that they serve, you know, not as someone who dictates policy.” (Male Academic: Interview A)

A recurring issue was the question of what, if not acting in a directional manner, the actual role of Head of School or Head of Department should then in fact involve. The following two responses offer some insight of the perceived role and *modus operandi*, amongst academics, for Heads of School and Heads of Department. The role envisioned by academics for them is effectively to act as a conduit through which the strategic plan for the Institute as a whole may be interpreted, simplified and operationalised at the school/departmental level:

“So therefore it seems to me that the Heads of Department and the Heads of School have a huge role in interpreting this strategy and ensuring that in what we do it complies with the strategy, but in our day to day work we’re really not very conscious of it.” (Female Academic: Interview G)

Chapter 7 will probe more deeply why in fact this may amount to a reasonable expectation, or why it may be viewed as some sort of self-fulfilling prophesy which effectively allows academics to detach themselves from the principal procedural and preparatory aspects of the preparation of the plan and indeed to remain free of responsibility, or culpability, when the plan fails to meet its articulated objectives.

My findings also reveal that academics feel that the degree of control that may be exerted over them is at best minimal. This distancing of the core activity, principally lecturing, from the functional manager, is therefore perceived as one which if the activity is to be professionally conducted, becomes dependent on two simultaneously present conditions: (a) trust on the part of the Head of School/Department in the professionalism of their staff, and (b) reciprocated professionalism from academic staff.

“The big thing you’re (reference made to interviewer) missing is when we walk into the classroom the door closes behind us, we are in charge and the Head of School can only trust that we do our job in a professional manner.... So the Head of School can’t give you instructions because you’ve got to realise he has no control. His control, his monitoring doesn’t extend that far.” (Male Academic: Interview C)

The academic group also criticised the in-built rigidity in the promotional system within Institutes of Technology, which effectively means that management appointees become tenured for life, and more worryingly for some of the respondents that promotion to these positions often arises despite the absence of any previous managerial experience or training. Upon reflection it would have been instructive to further probe the question of whether or not academics would be interested in applying for managerial positions if indeed the positions were rotating rather than permanent. Respondents did volunteer

however that rotating positions could create a degree of freshness in thinking and approach:

“I think one of the problems is that in the Institute of Technology sector when you become a manager you're a manager for life, you know, unlike the university sector where they may roll over those jobs, you know, they take them every three or four years you know, and that keeps people in it fresh, you know, so they don't become institutionalised.”
(Male Academic: Interview C)

In addition to the cited disadvantages of appointing and retaining managers in this way, academics interviewed also highlighted the propensity of manager-academics within the sector to resort to the inappropriate selection of models developed in the private sector. My findings identify this source of angst amongst those academics interviewed who argued that industrially developed models were neither supportive of, nor sympathetic to, the academic workplace:

“I think it's a very specialist job to be an academic manager and that nobody is trained up to be an academic manager and they fall back on sort of well known industrial sort of corporate ways of managing. I've done those in industry, in corporate industry and private industry and they barely work there, you know, they're just about working.” (Male Academic: Interview C)

6.4 Collectivism and Individualism

My research findings here are generally supportive of the literature reviewed earlier. Henkel (2000) contends that academic identities do not represent a homogeneous whole but rather display a congruence of values around teaching and research, whilst remaining differentiated by disciplines and departmental loyalties. The gestation period for such identity construction in academic communities has therefore been considerably longer than other institutions given their longevity. Svensson (2007) suggests the heterogeneity of academic identity is further facilitated by organisational structures;

units of working life in higher education institutes are typically departments with separate administrations, populated by professionals who are bearers of individual competences oriented towards operations in relation to users or recipients - be they called students or whatever.

For example, in response to the question "Do you think <named institute> displays a high degree of collectivism or individualism?" respondents across both groups were unanimous that the dominant trait undoubtedly veered towards a culture characterised by individualistic goal setting and priorities. One academic characterised this individualist culture as best depicted by departmental behaviour and politics, one which emphasises the contestation often apparent over limited resources and the political behaviours that this inevitably breeds:

"I think we're definitely not collectivist in the sense of multi-disciplinary activities. I think the schools don't work together, don't communicate with each other, and don't share resources effectively. So for instance you might have in one school empty classrooms, empty tables, and empty chairs and in another school no space to run the courses that are in demand. So there's definitely not collectivism between schools in the sense of multi-disciplinary collaboration and cooperation." (Female Academic: Interview E)

The literature on professional organisations in Chapter 2 indicates similar findings. Svensson (2007) suggests professional organisations display multiple levels of allegiances, from the professional organisational level down to the individual level, and identifies the essential determinant of professionalism as professional knowledge, represented by formal qualifications or credentials. As we also saw in Chapter 2, other theorists have proposed various reasons and contributory causes for such individualism: the ascendancy of tacit knowledge in academic organisations (Lam 2000; Ellstrom

1992) and the desire amongst professionals for occupational independence (Freidson 2001, Frenkel *et al.* 1999). One manager however, suggested that such individualism could be negated where appropriate managerial action and communication were instigated in an appropriate top-down organisationally wide manner:

“We’re all working towards the same goals but it’s from our own viewpoint if you know what I mean. If we all converge then that’s great but I think what’s missing is from the very top, down, a regular communication and a statement of “this is where we’re going and this is where we are now on this journey” and I think that people would be much more easily moved along as one unit, as one organisation, if there was more of that, if they had a sense of “we are one organisation”. (Male Manager: Interview D)

When queried about the hierarchy of allegiances or priorities which guided their professional behaviour, it was apparent that the planning entity, namely the respective institute in which both groups worked, did not enjoy primary position. My findings are again supportive of the literature reviewed earlier and further illustrate: higher education institutes as lacking collective identities (Brunson and Sahlin-Anderson 2000, Yanow 2007, Liimets 2005); the guardianship of academic freedom being foremost in the academic mindset (Abowd *et al.* 2006, Baumeister 1997) and higher education institutes as sites of practice where academic and organisational identities frequently sit uncomfortably alongside each other (James 2007). My findings here also highlight the dilemma of academics aspiring to multiple identities, frequently prioritised in a manner that confuses manager-academics. These multiple identities and loyalties, albeit of different strength, as public servants, lecturers and employees are captured in the following response from one academic:

“I personally see myself in terms of my responsibilities first and foremost to the student and then beyond that, you know, if I think of myself as a public servant then I have a responsibility to the tax payer

maybe but I always think of my responsibility to the student. And my responsibility in the broader sense to the community, in the academic community, to maintain a standard, and that's ahead as well of being an employee of <named institute>. Everything's ahead of being an employee of <named institute>.” (Male Academic: Interview A)

Similar sentiments are also evident within the literature, where institutional loyalty frequently ranks of lesser importance than other academically determined priorities, such as: academic freedom (Abowd *et al.* 2006), academic self identity (2007) and a preference for self-autonomy (Brunson and Sahlin-Anderson 2000). My findings do however reveal particularly strong feelings amongst academics of a strong public servant ethos, where the academic displays a strong sense of civic pride, measured by the maintenance of academic standards:

“I'd rather the institute go down the hill rather than we just sell degrees to people, and I think that's part of the academic public servant, we're here to do something well in society. So certainly I'd rather fail a bunch of students rather than let them through. Maybe the course is going to die, but I would prefer that rather than let the standard drop.” (Male Academic: Interview A)

This individualistic academic-centric position was however not shared across all participating institutes. When probing this issue in a particular institute, one which has been subject to recent intense competition in attracting a student cohort, a stronger sense of collectivism was apparent as indicated in the following comment. Interestingly, credit is attributed by the respondent to the role played by management in the creation of this “all in this together” mentality, which may suggest that collectivism may also be contingent upon imminent external threats.

“I think there's a sense that we're all in this together. I think that has been quite effectively created for us by management. And you know it's a back against the wall kind of feeling. And that comes a little bit from having seen courses that people have worked hard on slip away from due

to the fact that we didn't get the students this year and that course has just gone, it's going to die." (Male Academic: Interview A)

6.5 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter, the first of two dedicated to research findings, was to position the changes occurring in higher education against the respective experiences and opinions of two defined focus groups in the academic workplace: academics and manager-academics. The interview transcripts presented in this chapter highlight very significant differences in opinion and experiences across the two groups to the three themes explored: (1) investigating the views and experiences of both respondent groups on the changes they have witnessed in higher education, (2) the appropriateness and relevance of managerial approaches in higher education, and (3) the extent to which the respondents felt higher education institutes demonstrate collectivist or individualist attributes. The academic responses tended in the first instance to specify, and indeed criticise, the short term expediency of excessive marketisation in higher education and their attendant negative consequences for course provision, learning and academic values. Conversely, the manager-academic group highlighted the extent to which transparency and accountability measures demanded by both funding agencies and other regulatory bodies now impinge upon their work requirements. Of particular concern to the manager-academic group was the extent to which persuasion was still the most effective means through which any change or alignment agenda had to be implemented. What emerged also however was a sympathetic understanding amongst some manager-academics of the current difficulties facing the academy. It could be concluded from this demonstration of understanding that the formative socialisation of this manager-academic group, initially as academics, has indeed influenced their assessment on these matters. This finding again finds resonance in the wider academic literature, notably

Clegg (2008) and James (2007). Chapter 7 will further explore the experiences and opinions of these two groups, but in the more specifically contextualised area of strategic planning, its underlying rationale, the preparatory processes pursued and the extent of institute-wide alignment arising.

Chapter 7

Strategic Planning Experiences: Alignment or Alienation?

CHAPTER 7: STRATEGIC PLANNING EXPERIENCES: ALIGNMENT OR ALIENATION?

“As somebody who has been in management and in private industry I obviously see strategic planning at its most simplest. You’ve got to have something that says where you are now, where you need to go, how you’re going to get there, that’s a very simplistic way to put it. It’s the buy-in I suppose that actually means something so that it’s not something just done once and put on the shelf back there and “we’ll drag that out when we have to put in a research submission, other than that just leave it there”. I think to get some sort of buy-in really means something, that’s the central idea that will make it a success.”

(Comments from Male Manager: Bologna Institute of Technology)

7.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore strategic planning practices across the sampled institutes and contextualise the research findings against two fundamental considerations: (a) an investigation of the strategic planning processes adopted, and (b) an investigation of the degree of institute wide alignment with published strategic plans. The transcripts will also allow the broad research questions presented above to be further explored in the context of my earlier literature review. Specifically this chapter will examine whether or not strategic plans from participating Institutes of Technology may be viewed as: (1) strategic expressions of institutional priorities, enjoying the support, participation and alignment of all surveyed staff, or (2) normative necessities, legislatively driven, and formulated in a manner not conducive to enjoying the participation and support of all surveyed staff. Chapter 6 will remain a key reference point to both elaborate on, or further develop, the interview transcripts in this chapter. Whilst these transcripts can, and indeed often do, present different understandings of the same phenomena, it is not meant to polarise or create conflicting positions. The hermeneutic phenomenological approach adopted here (see for example: Natanson 1970, Orleans 2008, Paley 1997)

merely positions these divergent opinions in the subjective domain in which they have been formed.

7.2 Research Findings: Not another Strategic Planning Process!

Initially respondents' views were sought on the merits or demerits of strategic planning within their respective institutes. My findings reveal a dissonance, amongst academics and manager-academics, of a pronounced normative-utilitarian divide, wherein academics perceived strategic planning as a bureaucratic imposition with little or no practical benefits. Responses however from manager-academics as to the merits of their strategic planning processes differ significantly from their academic colleagues, and include:

“I think that the whole process around our strategic plan was probably the beginning of <named institute> moving out of its infancy and into a more structured planning and a more strongly managed organisation..... It was probably the first success story that I felt that we had as a management group. There were many iterations of the plan but the plan that was finally produced was a coherent plan and I believe that everybody has agreed to and signed up to in terms of where <named institute> is going. So I think from that point it has been extremely successful, the staff can see benefits of it, they can see how they are contributing to it and it imbues the sense of ownership in the organisation.” (Male Manager: Lisbon Institute of Technology)

Another manager proved equally praiseworthy of both the organisational outcomes and the process pursued in their delivery:

“So there was something much unified about the outcome and a huge level of agreement about what we were about and where we were going... But it was quite an extraordinary process. I had been through many, many strategic planning processes and that's the first time I have ever seen agreement come naturally almost, you know, there was something....we didn't engineer it.” (Female Manager: Lisbon Institute of Technology)

These experiences of manager-academics in the Lisbon Institute of Technology contradict the views espoused by Pritchard (2006) of near hostility between academics and manager-academics in the application of managerial practices in the United Kingdom. In the Paris Institute of Technology a more sanguine approach to the strategic planning process became apparent: one which re-enforced the unique peculiarities of managing in a higher education environment, emphasising the need to constantly bring the academic community along with the published plan as opposed to pushing them towards its attainment. This group of manager-academics highlighted the inevitable frustration that they saw as inherently built into the strategic planning process; the imperative of creating a win-win situation such that the academic community can be brought on board:

“You did not mention carrots, carrots only, no mention of sticks, nor would we use sticks in these organisations. It's important to bring people with you, become winners of hearts and minds and convince people to move forward. That's what I see as critical in any process.” (Female Manager: Paris Institute of Technology)

Additionally, the necessity to cascade strategic objectives down to departmental goals also featured prominently in the feedback, both as a motivational device and a means of ensuring the plans relevance and connectedness across the two broad churches of academics and manager-academics:

“Within one year we're getting to the stage where we're seeing progress in each of our own operational areas and linking them back to the strategic plan. To me that's a great outcome and to continue that process and to make sure that that's kept live and to make sure that it continues on, that it doesn't become just an annual chore, an annual school report or something like that, it's critical for the success of the strategic plan.” (Male Manager: Paris Institute of Technology)

These managerial reflections are interesting when viewed alongside the reactions from academics in that institute. When asked to comment on those areas which the management group had been previously probed upon, an array of comments, predominantly negative and critical, were received from academics including; “the process did not allow us as academics to put things in that are important to us”. Developing this point further the respondent instanced apparent disinterest in academic standards and its subsequent non appearance in the published plan. Another academic, identified amongst the academic community: “a big disconnect from the strategic plan”. He then likened the document to “something that’s stuck in a box and if somebody is making an application for funding then they find bits in the strategic plan that might relate to what they are doing”.

In the Lisbon Institute of Technology I also discovered academic misgivings concerning the preparation of the strategic plan and the absence thereafter of the requisite leadership potential to implement that plan. My findings here are not peculiar to this institute, and are supportive of other research on this topic most notably by Bryson and Barnes (2000), Henkel (2000) and Lindholm (2003). Academic misgivings in my research concerning the merits of strategic planning processes, without the requisite leadership potential and supportive culture to successfully implement such plans, include:

“I have only limited faith in the concept. I mean I think strategic plans are important but I think great progress, you know, in <named institute> could happen as a result of great culture, and I think great culture would happen as a result of great leadership. And if we had those things, the strategic plan, all those things would fall into place. But if we don’t have great leadership and as a result we have poor culture then no strategic plan is going to help.” (Male Academic: Lisbon Institute of Technology)

Another academic in the same institute, re-iterated the inherent dislike amongst academics of excessive “*dirigisme*” in their professional lives and the inevitable resistance this engenders against strategic planning and its implementation:

“I think one of the main problems is that I suppose implementing the strategic plan is sort of a top-down approach, at least in industry, and we don't like that top-down approach as we have indicated earlier, we don't like to be managed, we don't like to be dictated to as academics I suppose.” (Male Academic: Lisbon Institute of Technology)

Another academic, when questioned on his experiences of strategic planning, was altogether unflattering in his assessment:

“not another bloody mission statement, not another strategic plan, I've got no expectation of anything decent coming out of this....just another pretend document that the Institutes of Technology Top Management Team have already written.” (Male Academic: Lisbon Institute of Technology)

These leadership, engagement and implementation difficulties highlighted by my research are also identifiable within the literature. Van der Mescht (2004:10), for example, when considering educational leadership in the United States, attributed the inability of educational leaders to give meaning to educational and organisational processes to what he describes as “complexity of context”, where the organisational actors each have very different senses of the world. The issue of disengagement by academic staff has also been identified as a major impediment to strategic planning in a recent Institutes of Technology Ireland Report (2008). Exploration with the academic group in the Bologna Institute of Technology probed the depth of apathy towards their strategic plan, revealing numerous causal factors. One female academic, distrustful of the *bona fides* of management in gathering the inputs of the academic community, articulated her misgivings thus:

“...in theory we know these things should be organic and bottom up but in the end I think that top management in our organisation will call it one way or another.” (Female Academic: Bologna Institute of Technology)

Another male academic described the process as something of a “false purchase” by both groups. Another colleague conceded that what he termed the academic community’s “tuppence worth” is indeed sought, but that tactical disengagement by the academic community was inevitable for two reasons. First, because they perceive the plan “as having little practical application from our day to day working point of view” and second, “because it is easier to keep my head down and put all my energies into my own class and what I see as being important to me”. This latter preference of academics focussing their energies on their teaching responsibilities first and foremost, will also re-emerge subsequently in other institutes.

The Bologna Institute of Technology was the only Institute in which the casualisation of the academic workforce was actually raised. Respondents made some interesting contributions on this point, alluding initially to the need for the Institute to “regenerate the ageing cadre of academic staff with new blood”. Interestingly, the academic group here also identified the increasing cadre of part-time faculty as serving only to further undermine their faith in the strategic planning process; instancing the lack of affinity and involvement of part-time faculty with the strategic planning process.

My findings reveal an interesting phenomenon in the Paris Institute of Technology with manager-academics displaying understanding, as opposed to sympathy, for the disengagement by the academic community from the strategic planning process. The unique nature and culture of the public sector is commented on by two managers in this

institute for this disengagement by the academic community from the strategic planning process:

“I think there also is a perception though that for a lot of academics why would they participate, because they only draw more work on themselves and there is no extra reward for it, and how do you incentivise someone to be able to go that extra mile. People are happy to kind of fulfil their duties, but you don't ask them to step beyond that”. (Male Manager: Paris Institute of Technology)

“One of the things that struck me was in terms of the public sector mentality that we were talking about earlier on and getting greater buy-in to the plan. If people realise that without a document that's going to help bring an organisation into a new space, that ultimately their livelihoods could be in jeopardy. Because we are public sector that reality doesn't strike home a huge amount. And that was a major factor that strikes me as a difference with private industry.” (Male Manager: Paris Institute of Technology)

A further interesting phenomenon that emerged in this institute is the risk, evidenced in the subsequent extract of a female manager, of “*negative re-enforcement*” (own emphasis) i.e. where a process that does not enjoy full support is subsequently used in a resource depriving manner.

“It's very much a live document I think, certainly with the people that I work with on a daily basis, it's a live document. If a request comes to me as manager for anything, it's almost always considered within the context of the strategic plan. On a formal level, training and development, but even initiatives that people start, a new course proposal or an idea, it's always within the context of “well this is in our strategic plan?” so it's very much of a live document I think.” (Female Manager: Paris Institute of Technology)

The focus group interviews with the manager-academic group in the Lisbon Institute of Technology raised another misgiving: a strongly articulated view that the strategic planning process had become devalued by a proliferation of similar language, and indeed strategic objectives, across the Institute of Technology sector. This unease with

the sameness of language evident in published strategic plans is described by one manager:

“I wasn't involved in the strategic plan at all and I suppose from my personal perspective I don't see a huge difference between the strategic plan here and the strategic plan at any other Institute of Technology, reading through the strategic plans they all had the exact same thematic areas, right, economic development, economic growth, students numbers. We're all jumping on the same labels and I wonder whether in fact we are any different here at all.” (Male Manager: Lisbon Institute of Technology)

Negative comments were also forthcoming amongst managers in the Paris Institute of Technology who identified the principal driver to their strategic plan as concentrating on meeting a legislative requirement. Pre-occupation with adhering to this legislative agenda, solicited the following rueful comment from one manager:

“Our plan was legislatively phrased...but in contrast to private industry where a vision statement or a mission statement set out a particular position or whatever that you would occupy, ours didn't. I think that was reflected elsewhere from what I've seen from other colleges.” (Male Manager: Lisbon Institute of Technology)

My research findings here are consistent with other literature, particularly Gillen (2007), who has identified evidence of mission convergence across the sector, and Gonzalez-Perez *et al.* (2007) who identified language convergence across both published University and Institute of Technology mission statements in the Republic of Ireland.

7.3 “We're just trying to bring people with us”

This section will present the experiences of academic and manager-academic respondents to the strategic planning experiences in their respective institutes. The responses presented below arose from my probing of two defined areas: (1) the

respondents' perceptions of the processes and procedures followed in the preparation of the most recently published strategic plan, and (2) the extent to which the respondents felt the resultant plan has created a strong degree of collectivism and alignment across their institutes. For the purpose of clarity, where recurring issues arose across institutes then these are not individually reported on. Rather, individual institute specific issues are highlighted, serving to present a holistic analysis of the principal issues emerging.

In the Montevideo Institute of Technology I identified divergent views across both groups on whether the strategic planning process was "bottom up" or "top down" in its approach. One manager described the difficulty of making organisation wide decisions in a bottom up manner in a public sector environment. He attributes this difficulty to the absence of meaningful incentivisation measures and an organisation culture and structure emphasising local priorities over institute priorities:

"I've been here 9 years now and before that I worked in private industry for 14 years. The situation here I feel has improved over the 9 years but when I came here first I did find quite a confrontational environment having come from private industry where it's easier to get decisions made and, as speaker number 5 pointed out earlier, there are incentives of performance related pay etc. I didn't expect....I had worked in the public service in Ireland before but it was way, way back, in the university sector. I didn't expect it to be as confrontational as I found it to be. I do think that has improved over the years but I think there is still a problem with information silos and maybe some groups within the institute..." (Male Manager: Montevideo Institute of Technology)

Another manager also instanced the typical Institute of Technology organisational structure, based upon academic schools and departments, as impeding the creation of a strong sense of institute wide collectivism. He also highlighted the scope within such organisational structures for potential disengagement, by academics, from the strategic planning process:

“I worked in the health service for nigh on 20 years I would say before I came here, maybe even more. Two public sector organisations, yeah, and indeed I think within the context of where I worked in the health service there was a very strong sense of “we” in that we were engaged in teams of maybe 12 or 13 people working towards a common goal. So the units within the structure that I used to work were smaller, even though they contributed to a larger organisation. The contrast for me here is that the units, you know, the academic units are department size contribute then to a school and to the organisation as a whole. And by virtue of the fact that the size of the unit, I think those who don't want to be part of the “we” can survive better than they would have done in the former situation where the units, i.e. the ward or the clinical area, would have been a smaller unit of about 13 people. So I think there is scope - that's what I'm trying to say - there is scope within our organisation for people to position themselves from that collective “we” by virtue of the units or the structure within our organisation.” (Male Manager: Montevideo Institute of Technology)

Other research in this area (see for example: Bould 1999, Marginson 1993) on situational aspects of academic strategic planning developments, and the need for such developments to navigate more toward the delivery of institutional as opposed to departmental objectives support my findings in this area.

Overall the dominant feeling amongst the manager-academics in the Montevideo Institute of Technology was that their strategic planning processes could be described as following a “bottom up approach”. One manager supported this assertion as follows:

“Maybe 10 years ago in the institute sector if somebody presented a strategic plan and it was written by one individual then everyone was told “there is the plan, you're all going to implement and off you go”. Whereas in the last 8 or 9 years most Institutes of Technology I know, this institute in particular, the strategic plan was developed by the bottom up really sort of thing, it came from staff and said “these are the goals and this is what we're going to do and this is where we're going to go forward”. Not everybody's going to agree to it actually though, because if everybody did then there's something wrong with the plan but it meant that at least there was consultation and there was communication and there was a two-way feeding system feeding into it, it wasn't the old way of “here's the plan and off you go and implement

that” and everybody’s going to be happy with it.” (Female Manager: Montevideo Institute of Technology)

Similar experiences are recounted by another manager, although qualified by the respondent’s assertion that his views were offered not as a manager but rather as a member of the organisation:

“I’ve got to come in again because I was involved in the strategic planning process here, not as part of any formal group as such but as part of a member of the organisation and this was my first time to be involved in this by virtue of being here. I certainly would be very clearly of the view I think that the opportunity was there when our strategic plan was put together for me to make a contribution to that process as an organisation....not particularly as a manager now but as a member of the organisation. I’ve sat in *fora* recently where people have denied having that opportunity, which I find surprising, because I had it.” (Male Manager: Montevideo Institute of Technology)

Academic responses on these same issues within the Montevideo Institute of Technology diverge significantly from those of the manager-academic group recounted above. Academic disquiet focuses upon what the academics deemed to be “*token consultation*” (own emphasis) such that the published plan was perceived to be disproportionately influenced by the desires and preferences of management. Evidence of this, claimed the academics, was the appearance of priorities within the published plan, which the academic community suggest were neither endorsed, nor informed by them:

“And there were a range of other issues which appeared in the plan and you sat round a table and said “where did this come from? We never discussed this”.” (Male Academic: Montevideo Institute of Technology)

Further criticism, warning of the gradual erosion of goodwill that may be caused by poor consultation, was cited by another academic:

“The first process wasn’t an extremely hopeful process. A great deal of goodwill, very high level of participation was received from academics: “we’re all in this together” it was our first chance to participate.....I think our experience of the outcome was disappointing and that reflected itself then in the second plan in 2006, or when that process started which would have been before 2006. There was a lot of negativity, disappointment with the outcome of the first plan. I well remember that one-day review I had in “named location” and what I noted very much that day was those who were not there. I consciously looked round the list of who was supposed to be there and I noted who was not there.” (Male Academic: Montevideo Institute of Technology)

Interjecting, another colleague outlined the future implications of these shortcomings for subsequent strategic planning iterations within that Institute:

“And I think for the third plan, people will be even further removed from.” (Male Academic: Montevideo Institute of Technology)

My findings in this institute also highlight the innate discrepancy between strategic planning’s medium to long term focus, and the immediacy of day to day academic activities. This dichotomy was outlined by one academic respondent:

“Come September most of us are only interested in “what am I teaching at the operational level”. That is our immediate concern. And then something comes about that says “in 10 years time this is where the college sees itself” and we can complain all we want about not being involved in those processes. So unless here and now we see something that is going to specifically impact on us, as academics, the vast majority do not really care.” (Male Academic: Montevideo Institute of Technology)

In the Montevideo Institute of Technology I discovered a recurring justification for the disengagement of academics from strategic planning processes: the necessity to focus on their role of teaching and learning:

“It comes down to lack of time basically. Our teaching loads are so heavy that it’s all you can do to get your lectures prepared for next week unless you have remission of hours for other responsibilities and

whatever, and even then you're going to have extra responsibilities so even then you won't have time. I'm quite happy to focus on my teaching and learning." (Female Academic: Montevideo Institute of Technology)

Barrett and Barrett (2007) similarly report such disengagement by academics where cited teaching loads prevent the engagement of academics with other institute wide activities. Academics in the Paris Institute of Technology reiterated the importance of securing academic alignment with the published strategic plan through both effective consultation and identifiable deliverables. This is evidenced in the following comment:

"Yeah. I didn't engage at all in the strategic plan because I had engaged previously in the quality assurance one and, as I said before, there was no real consultation there. And the implementation of it didn't improve my life in the college, didn't improve my student's experience in the college in any way at all. So I'd just like to say that I'm not going to have anything to do with this because my voice isn't going to be heard and it's not really going to alter....it's not going to affect my relationship with my students or it's not going to affect how well they do in the college, so I deliberately disengaged from it." (Male Academic: Paris Institute of Technology)

This academic position of disengagement runs contrary to the position advocated by Leavy (2004) who highlights the contribution effective organisation-wide strategic planning practices can make to organisational culture and the creation of learning organisations. Shore (2007) identified similar misgivings amongst academics in New Zealand concerning their detachment and alienation from decision making. He criticises the attitude of neo-liberal governance to consultation with academic staff; highlighting where academic staff are listed as just another group among twenty stakeholders identified by the University of Auckland.

My research also identified other negative academic sentiments attributable to factors such as the inability of the plan itself to fully reflect the realities of the challenges

currently facing the Paris Institute of Technology, preferring instead to concentrate on buzz words and the replication of both objectives and terminology apparent in other Institutes of Technology strategic plans. This academic for instance, disputes the motivational ability of his institute's strategic plan, because he could identify no differentiating factors between it and other published plans across the sector:

“We shouldn't have a strategic plan which is more or less the same as Institute X, Y or Z. But if you search these documents you come up with these words, these buzz words which are repeated over and over again. So you almost get the sense that they went round everybody else's strategic plan first, come up with a template and “let's follow the template and let's be conservative, let's be totally safe”. (Male Academic: Paris Institute of Technology)

This perpetuation of sameness across published strategic plans was also commented upon in the Bologna Institute of Technology. One academic here was particularly critical of the tendency to establish multiple objectives, whilst ignoring the resource implications of such specification; effectively rendering the plan unattainable and ultimately de-motivational:

“There are just a couple of points. One is that I meant to say it at some stage and I forgot, but I think this institute and all Institutes of Technology operate with a shotgun approach rather than the precision, that we try and be all things to everybody and we don't say if we're going to put resources into A that means we're not going to be able to do B and C. I don't think we do that very well, I think we want to touch all bases.” (Male Academic: Bologna Institute of Technology)

In the Paris Institute of Technology the excessively aspirational feature of their strategic plan, together with the neutral language used therein, as well as the absence of specific measurable deliverables, also warranted criticism:

“We don't actually need that strong a strategic plan, what we do need is a plan with two or three major initiatives which will have an effect on the college. It's all very, very wonderful but it's never going to happen and, you know, it hasn't actually happened in a lot of places that has that same strategic plan. But it's all very aspirational stuff, it's all very good, it's all very clinical and it's all very....you know. Even the people who write it don't have that much confidence in it.” (Male Academic: Paris Institute of Technology)

The views of the manager-academic group in the Paris Institute of Technology do not however accord with the academic group on the extent to which institute wide alignment and collectivism has been achieved. What became apparent was agreement within that manager-academic group that consultation in the strategic planning process could be described as “top down”. Subsequent probing of this by me did not however seem to alter this group's view that the strategic plan had in fact resulted in an organisation aligned with the strategic plan and characterised by a strong sense of collectivism. The following dialogue is interesting in that regard:

Interviewer: OK. Now the second part of the question I want to ask is, if I were to pose my second question to a group of academics here - and remember I'm talking now about academics and I were to ask them in terms of the process of preparing the plan, could I characterise it as being bottom-up or top-down. What type of response do you think I'd get to that question?

Female: They'd say it was top-down.

Interviewer: They would say it was top-down?

Female: Even though people had been consulted. But the form of consultation let's say for the larger group as a whole, the collective college, was to meet a number of times in a lecture theatre and listened to “Institute

President” describing the strategic plan and then there was also input from the UK higher education people, HEFCE.

Interviewer: It's interesting to note that as a group, as collective, you all said to me they would be characterised at top-down.

Male: Yes

Male: Top-down but with consultation, but top-down in terms of it being driven from the top....

Bryman (2007) and Deem's (2003) research also demonstrated the importance of consultation and trust for effective higher education management. Interviewing higher education leaders in the United Kingdom for instance, Deem (2003:113) recounts a response from a post-1992 Dean on how trusting relationships between academics and managers may be forged, as follows:

“It's important for people to know that you're not going to, you know, do the dirty on them (laugh) and that they know they can trust you”.

The academic group in the Lisbon Institute of Technology identified similar issues, but with greater vehemence and disquiet, particularly in relation to the perceived absence of meaningful consultation, poor strategic leadership and the ensuing disconnect between the academic community and their institute's strategic plan. The leadership concerns manifested themselves in two distinct manners: first, as an outright criticism, and second, as a rueful comment on a lost opportunity to differentiate the institute in an increasingly complex and competitive environment. Academic responses in the Lisbon Institute of Technology revealed three principal areas of disquiet: (1) a strongly articulated resistance to the manner in which the idea-generation aspect of the plan had

marginalised the academic community, (2) the inappropriate use of external consultants displaying little or no empathy with academic work practices, and (3) a cumulative corrosion of trust amongst the academic community towards the entire process. These findings concur with the literature, most notably Lynch (2006), Mintzberg (1989) and David (2007:19), who cautioned against planning processes that were: “stilted, ritualistic and orchestrated”.

Examples of academics' comments received here include:

“There was no clear articulation of the process of going through strategic planning. There wasn't even a big hairy audacious goal at the end of it that said “guys, this is what we're going to do over the next five years, this is the real goal, and we're going to for example beat <named other Institute> into the Sunday Times.” (Male Academic: Lisbon Institute of Technology)

Criticising the manner in which the strategic priorities were developed and the role and appropriateness of the external consultant, other academics recollected as follows:

Male: And I remember going along to the senior development plan meetings and expressing grave dissatisfaction and concerns about the way it was being run, particularly because I felt that the external consultant from the private sector that had been hired to do it has, as I say, lifted a pile of stuff from the previous project. That was my impression, this project they'd been working on, and applied it directly without any real consideration as to “why is this organisation different to the previous one”. And it was pretty clear to me that the previous one probably wasn't an educational organisation.

Male: It was the Strathclyde Water Company.

Male: And the whole thing was, I felt, just a rush job and it was pretty poor, and I said as much, I registered my disaffection and probably frustrated the hell out of the facilitator that was there, and then I went along for the rest of it because it had to be done. (Male Academics: Lisbon Institute of Technology)

The corrosive effects of this process and its implications for the distancing of the academic community from the published strategic plan are further elaborated upon by two academics:

“I think the style of how priorities are established makes a big difference about how members in the department feel. I think it's how they feel about the institute as well, if you feel you're being dictatorially managed then you're not feeling great about the place where you work, whereas if you feel your voice and opinion are valued.....you know I'm still shocked about the whole thing.” (Male Academic: Lisbon Institute of Technology)

“If you feel your voice and opinion is being taken seriously and listened to that makes just a huge difference, whereas if you feel your voice and opinion is not asked for, or is listened to and then just forgotten about, well then you feel that disconnect.” (Male Academic: Lisbon Institute of Technology)

Paradoxically I discovered that the manager-academics in the Lisbon Institute of Technology, despite their resoluteness about the all inclusiveness of the strategic planning processes, were equally resolute in their assertion that the plan had not engendered any sense of collectivism. The Human Resource Manager expressed surprise that a degree of collectivism could be expected at all, and rationalised that institute's highly individualised culture as follows:

"I think that "collectivism" probably described this institute when it started up. From an HR perspective, when we are interviewing, when we are looking for new staff, one of things that I see as extremely important is motivation: "why do you want to work at <named institute>. And increasingly what I see at interview in terms of the reasons why people apply to work here is convenience, "it's around the corner, across the road and they don't have to go to town; the hours are very good from an academic point of view; good summer holidays; and it suits me". So I see much more about "me" than.... you know, what <named institute> can do for me as opposed to "what I can do for <named institute>. I see a big change there. And then to get back to the original question in terms of us as managers moving people towards a goal, a common goal, I think everybody at <named institute> knows what the mission is, everybody at <named institute> knows the strategic priorities - we talk about it at interview, we talk about it at team meetings and that sort of thing. But I still feel that people move from their own silos, you know, so it's from the IT department and it's from the HR department and it's from Finance or whatever, I'm not sure that we all work together. We're all working towards the same goals but it's from our own viewpoint if you know what I mean. If we all converge then that's great but I think what's missing is from the very top, down, a regular communication and a statement of "this is where we're going and this is where we are now on this journey" and I think that people would be much more easily moved along as one unit, as one organisation, if there was more of that, if they had a sense of "we are one organisation". Does that make any sense?" (Female Manager: Lisbon Institute of Technology)

Subsequent discussion with this group of managers yielded observations that whilst collectivism may not be attained across the entire organisation, it is attainable at departmental or school level, thus rendering most or all of the strategic plan deliverable. These managers were also uneasy with the extent to which academic values had become marginalised in the process. One manager expressed his misgivings thus:

"I'd probably go with a different process. Even though we'd a huge amount of consultation. But having said that, we are essentially an academic teaching organisation and it seemed to me that the genesis of this strategy had to start there. Where it did start with was in terms of an overall organisational plan, you know, in terms of "how do we bring <named institute> forward in terms of strategic goals". And in terms of dealing with the Department of Education and in terms of dealing with the Higher Education Authority. But the main players in an organisation like this are the academic community and if they're not absolutely sort of.....you know, involved and driving the agenda you're always going to

get this sort of situation where they're almost starting to say almost anything to accommodate the strategic plan. But I still would have probably gone about it differently" (Male Manager: Lisbon Institute of Technology)

Another managerial colleague, also advocating broader engagement as a means of ensuring greater emotional commitment, stated:

"I'm just sort of saying if I were to do it again that's where I would tweak it. It's just really in terms of the genesis of it. You'd probably come out with the same plan by the way, it's just really the level of emotional commitment to it, you know, the extent to which people....I mean I'm sure we'd come out with the same plan." (Male Manager: Lisbon Institute of Technology)

In the Bologna Institute of Technology, in attempting to drill down into the experiences of academics, I enquired whether as academics they felt collectively linked to their institute's strategic plan. The overwhelming majority responded negatively, identifying a range of possible causes for this; lack of adequate consultation, disaffection with the strategic planning process itself, negative residual feelings from the previous iteration of strategic planning and an inability to directly link any benefits from the process with their stated priority: the student experience. Hayward and Ncayiyama (2003:13) have also identified similar findings amongst South African academics, citing a loss of shared identity and sense of community amongst academics. Other evidence of this disconnectedness of academics, albeit in different jurisdictions, also appears in the literature from Nixon *et al.* (2001), Enders (2000) and Bryman (2007).

The academics also expressed a surprising degree of antagonism towards the de-motivational aspects of the strategic plan. When queried directly as to whether or not the current strategic plan motivated academics across the Institute, responses included

“no” (twice) to a more lukewarm “the headings are nice but you know its not going to change much. For this to work you’ve got to have a positive manager”. This scepticism abated somewhat when their opinions were sought on how the planning process, and its ability to motivate and unify, might be improved. What quickly became apparent, and which resonates in the following response, was a preference for strategic planning embedded at the School or Departmental level through which institute planning may then be informed:

“I think the planning process should happen in the schools, you know, and it doesn’t happen now. And that’s where we should be....we could all widely consult in our own schools for our own plans for the year, for the next two years, three years, and then the head of school should feed that into the overall strategic plan, so this is what I think we should do on the ground, you know, and then some of those good ideas....” (Male Academic: Bologna Institute of Technology)

Whilst the academic community in the Bologna Institute of Technology could on the whole be described as non-complimentary, they remained adamant that a different process involving meaningful consultation producing positive outcomes both work and learner related, and “de-emphasising PhD’s and other top end stuff”, would be enthusiastically embraced by them. The latter reference to PhD’s had as its source a degree of frustration amongst this group of academics with the extent to which the Institute of Technology sector was becoming increasingly involved in traditional university activities. These sentiments are at the core of the following two responses:

“But extensive consulting and being part of something relevant, not a generic plan would mean that it would impact on our jobs, hopefully in a positive way, so therefore we’d see it as something good.” (Female Academic: Bologna Institute of Technology)

“Yeah and it would allow us to move everything towards the student.” (Male Academic: Bologna Institute of Technology)

The focus group interviews with the manager-academic grouping in the Bologna Institute of Technology were distinguishable from other groupings because of the very real connection established between strategic planning and operational delivery at the School and Departmental level. This pre-occupation with deliverables was evident, almost tangible, across the entire group. One manager emphasised that requirement as follows:

“The vision and mission is important when we are writing strategic plans and we’re doing strategic planning of course. But we think it’s very important for on the ground people to see deliverables.....I mean that’s why it has to cascade down from the strategic issues to the operational issues, and within each area then from those into very real things on the ground. I think that’s what most people think. And even from our own point of view, if you were to talk to a group of 25 managers at Executive Council for example, I think most people will think in terms of the operational issues first and then over-arching strategic themes.” (Male Manager: Bologna Institute of Technology)

When I queried this manager-academic group on to the merits of strategic planning a very clear mindset was apparent of what they perceived as their managerial role, and the precise function of strategic planning:

“I recognise strategic planning isn’t something that’s going to impact on you tomorrow as a lecturer or whatever. And the other thing about it you see is surely it’s our responsibility as managers to shape the future, that’s all I can see in the strategic plan. It’s not dictatorial, it’s not prescriptive, and it’s to try to make some sense out of what’s an extraordinary turbulent environment.... But I think it’s done in a way to create a possibility but it’s required within that that people will embrace it and work with it, but it’s not in a bad way, it’s to try to give some guidance and some sense of directions, one possible way to go forward.” (Male Manager: Bologna Institute of Technology)

I also explored with these manager-academics the issue of consultation, its appropriateness and their assessment of whether or not the organisation could be described as aligned with the published plan. What emerged was overwhelming

agreement amongst those managers that their institute's Executive Council had traded off timely decisions for frequent consultation and the revisiting of decisions with the broad academic community. The prize for doing this, as envisaged by that institute's Executive Council, was an organisation aligned with the published strategic plan. I should emphasise once again however, that the opinions expressed by the academic group were not at all supportive of this proposition. The benefits of sacrificing expediency for broad based academic support were summarised by one manager as follows:

“But I don't think....I can't see where it's disadvantaged us hugely. It has slowed up on certain things and I know it can be a source of frustration to professional members of the executive council who just want....they know the right thing to do and they just want to get on with it, but we're constantly kind of looping back and trying to regularise and bring people with us.” (Male Manager: Bologna Institute of Technology)

7.4 Conclusion

This chapter explored the lived experiences of both academics and manager academics to the organisational practice of strategic planning. The practices and processes relevant to the preparation of each Institute of Technology's strategic plan were explored to determine both groups' experiences, and their opinions were also sought on whether or not the resultant plan had in fact aligned the respective stakeholders with that plan. The responses received, expressed in the rich natural language of the respondents; demonstrate a high level of dissonance across both groups. An organisational practice which should theoretically articulate a clear vision of where each institute sees its respective future, elicited responses from the academic group which in the main could be described as critical. The major criticisms identified by the academic group were: (1) procedural criticisms: a perception amongst academics that their values were not

accorded the same degree of importance as those of their institute's management group, (2) substantive criticisms: an inability amongst the academic staff interviewed to feel motivated by a plan which substantially was no different from plans emanating in other Institutes of Technology, (3) alignment criticisms: a professional misgiving on the part of academics interviewed to engage fully in the plan's preparatory processes because of its irrelevance to their primary responsibility, teaching, and (4) leadership criticisms: an articulated lack of confidence on the part of academics interviewed in their respective management teams to either effectively lead, or deliver upon, a strategic planning process. The manager-academic groups expressed views which portray a different set of experiences. Some sympathies were evident towards the academic group, especially with regard to the non prioritisation of academic values. A defined difference of opinion was however apparent across both groups on whether consultation had in fact taken place in the plan's preparation, and its adequacy. The manager-academic group were also unconvinced on whether the plan had engendered a strong sense of collectivism in their respective Institutes of Technology, with some suggesting that the most likely manner in which this will arise is if strategic planning is initiated at the departmental/school level.

Chapter 8

Conclusions and Recommendations

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 Introduction

Change within global higher education systems has now become almost ubiquitous. Nonetheless, the issue of strategic planning within Ireland's Institute of Technology sector remains relatively unexplored, and engagement with participants in academic strategic planning practices is, to my knowledge, even more limited. My research investigated the degree of alignment amongst academics and manager-academics with their Institute's strategic plans by reviewing their lived experiences. My research methodology sought to access the lived experiences of respondents through a hermeneutic phenomenological lens; semi-structured focus group interviews.

This chapter will outline the principal conclusions and recommendations arising from my research. Initially, I will present the general conclusions of my research and consider their implications for the theory and practice of strategic planning in higher education institutes. Next, I will outline the principal policy and practical implications of these conclusions, and identify opportunities for related research within the field of higher education. Finally, I will outline a proposed strategic planning framework which draws together my research findings and the literature I have reviewed. By opening up this debate on strategic planning within higher education, respective policy makers and other higher education actors might draw upon my research with the objective of improving or altering future policy.

8.2 General Conclusions

The most significant research finding to emerge is that there is no evidence in any of the selected institutes of a strong alignment amongst academic staff interviewed with published strategic plans. The legislative requirement to conduct strategic planning as an organisational co-ordination and rationalisation measure has therefore not been widely endorsed. My research further highlights that strategic planning is not a natural academic adaptation; rather it creates confusion and resentment amongst academics. My research revealed that academic respondents perceived themselves as objects rather than subjects in the entire process; affected by, but unable to influence, the strategic planning process. The ensuing isolation and disaffection has generated amongst academics a detachment from, and resentment of, the strategic planning process. The over-riding feeling amongst academics interviewed was one of disconnectedness from the entire planning process.

A number of ambiguities emerged between academics and manager-academics concerning the strategic planning framework in those institutes surveyed. Academic staff in general were dubious, even suspicious, about the merits of strategic planning. This suspicion emanated from their inability to see any meaningful difference between their institute's plan and that of other institutes; with academics claiming a duplication and proliferation of both mission and vision statements within Ireland's higher education sector. My research further highlighted a feeling amongst academics that the planning process was excessively mechanistic, and driven predominantly by the need to meet a bureaucratic document producing requirement. These concerns were not shared by the manager-academics interviewed to the same degree. These ambiguities, upon

exploration, appear to be rooted in the uniqueness of higher education institutes as work organisations and the professional self-perception of the academic staff.

The academic interviews also reveal an acceptance of the encroachment of competitive pressures within higher education. Interestingly, in the academic's mindset, the focus of these competitive pressures centred predominantly on the programmes upon which they taught rather than the institute in which they were employed. Academic staff interviewed revealed a far stronger commitment toward their respective disciplinary areas and academic sub-units than to the institute itself. Amongst academics, an inability also emerged to make any meaningful correlation between strategic planning, its processes and outcomes, and what they perceive to be their primary activity: teaching and the enhancement of student learning. Also discernible amongst academics was a sense of exclusion from those preparatory processes which had informed and generated their respective plans. This sense of exclusion was frequently cited by academics, who felt that even where consultation did exist it could be characterised as mere tokenism, masking a top-down approach by management. My research here reveals a significant dissonance between academics and manager-academics; creating disconnected entities on this issue. Manager-academics in all institutes, unlike the academic group, expressed themselves to be happy with both the breadth and intentionality of engagement. Central to this dissonance there appears to be a strong misunderstanding of what constitutes effective consultation. Because of this consultation deficit, academics did not feel any strong sense of collectivism in an organisationally wide context; one which conjoined the future direction, functions or aspirations of their respective institutes with their careers. In those institutes where collectivism and commitment were evident; the primary focus of this was generally

directed towards either a discipline or organisational unit, typically a department to which academics are assigned.

My research shows that the incursion, adoption and implementation of a new public management philosophy, has created a very strong degree of unease and disquiet amongst academic communities. Academics categorised strategic planning as being symptomatic of this incursion. Consequently, what emerged was both a social and material disengagement by academics from the strategic planning process. The social dimension of this disengagement accords well with other literature in this area, particularly that of James (2007), Lucas (2004) and Barrett and Barrett (2007), and is professionally rooted. Academics were unhappy that the new management practices first introduced with the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992 had altered the social relations within their work environments. The depth of unease however did vary across institutes and was either mitigated or compounded by different managerial styles. The material disengagement is however noteworthy, because setting aside philosophical or professionally rooted reservations, those academics interviewed still felt little or no positive outcomes emerged from the strategic planning process. They could not identify any major outcomes arising to justify the organisational effort expended. Also evident was a feeling that the business ideology driving contemporaneous higher education management, together with a restructuring and reorganisation of their academic workloads, is becoming unpalatable to academics.

I discovered disquiet amongst academics in philosophically accepting the appropriateness of new managerialism within higher education. My research also reveals a further consequence of this academic disquiet; that where other organisational

units (particularly administrative functional areas) were not perceived by academics to be subject to the same planning requirements, then this created a deeper sense of disquiet. Central to this disquiet was a perceived uneven handed application of the output model of higher education (Clark (2004) referred to this as the rational purposive approach), where the organisational units being most commonly audited were academics rather than their administrative counterparts. Evidence from academics interviewed indicates a very significant divide emerging between academic and administration elements within the respective campuses. The traditional view amongst academics of administrators acting as service providers to the core activity of teaching has now been replaced by one of administrators acting as enforcers of priorities and auditors.

Fundamentally different perspectives also emerged across both groups on the role of management in higher education. Ideological commitment amongst academics to academic line managers is not evident, and the concept of being 'line managed' generated considerable resistance. What emerges is that academics see their work practices as being characterised by pre-dominantly tacit knowledge, with a preference for the resolution of any work based difficulties to be sought in the first instance from within the professional academic cohort. Interlinked with this concept of tacit knowledge was a self perception amongst academics of their status as professionals rather than employees; substantiating earlier work by both Mintzberg (1989) and Kerr and Jermier (1978) on professional organisations. This professionally focussed self identity amongst academics contributed to a pronounced expectation deficit across both groups on the nature of management in higher education. Academics envisage a minimalist role for managers, preferring instead the self-regulation of professional

colleagues as a form of quasi-management system. In general, academics expressed high autonomy preferences, wherein *their* (emphasis added) professional identities determined their individual goal setting and priorities. Interestingly in one institute, what also emerged was a powerful fusion of this professional identity with a particularly strong public servant ethos, such that the stated hierarchy of academic allegiances placed the institute last, ranking after the academic profession, the student and society!

Paradoxically, whilst academics questioned the necessity for managers; they simultaneously recognised the role of departmental heads as crucial if the strategic plan is to become relevant and operational at their respective organisational levels. What also emerged was an acceptance amongst manager-academics of the invidious position which this created for them. This finding supports evidence by Clegg (2008) highlighting the extent to which academics become socialised, much of which is early career, pre-promotion, informal socialising. Regarding their role, the manager-academics recognise the anomalous situation in which they find themselves; expected to manage, yet devoid of the resolve, professional *nous* or wherewithal. Increasingly this group found themselves resorting to both goodwill and persuasion in order to deliver organisational objectives. Commonly cited, and criticised by both groups, is the evolutionary fallacy; whereby former academics are expected to progress seamlessly to managerial positions, without adequate training in a work environment ill suited to conventional management styles or approaches. James (2007) has also highlighted the extent to which academics have become socialised, and perhaps more tellingly, view promotion to a managerial grade with scepticism and distrust.

8.3 Research Implications for Practice

My research suggests that strategic planning requirements in successive legislation (Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992, Institute of Technology Act 2006) are neither indicative of, nor supportive of, the emergence and adoption of effective planning practices, enjoying institute-wide acceptance. Because the planning requirement remains periodic; every five years, it is seen to be removed from the core academic work of lecturers and is therefore treated by academics as a localised eruption of bureaucracy, relevant only to managerial grades. The practical implication of this is that unless supportive changes are made, then the process of strategic planning in Ireland's Institutes of Technology will become dispossessed of relevance. My research findings should, therefore, assist Institutes of Technology in understanding the role and importance of properly devised and implemented planning procedures. Strategic planning can only become mainstreamed and relevant, as opposed to being a non-concept, when its importance and connectedness to academic values and organisational life become mediated throughout the institutes.

8.4 Research Implications for Policy

For higher education policy analysts my research findings highlight two countervailing factors. Evidently, governmental agencies are attaching even greater significance to the preparation, and delivery, of strategic priorities. Conversely however, my research indicates growing scepticism within the sector about the entire process. Failure to address this issue now will only accentuate the problem, causing even greater polarisation. Continuing with the *status quo ante* also carries significant risks; most particularly of disengagement, disenchantment and scepticism amongst academics. I

would argue that the issues raised by my research can generate focussed reconsideration in a number of policy and operational spheres. Specifically, I would contend a re-drafting of the legislation is necessary to offer a revised strategic planning framework for Ireland's Institute of Technology sector; accommodating more meaningfully their respective stakeholders. This issue will be revisited more thoroughly in the recommendations section of this chapter.

8.5 Scope for Further Research

Notwithstanding existing research (see Lynch 2006: higher education and neo-liberalism, Bartlett 2007: strategic development of research within the Institute of Technology sector, Lillis 2005: strategic planning, and Gillen 2007: developmental trajectories of Ireland's Institutes of Technology), research on higher education in Ireland is relatively limited. My research has identified areas meriting further research, offering potential to both explore and improve Ireland's higher education system. First amongst these is the need to address the socio-professional factors which contribute to disengagement by academics from their institute's planning activities. Second, if the emerging debate on higher education in the Republic of Ireland is to progress then undoubtedly worthy of further research is the role of Head of Department (or equivalent) within the Institute of Technology sector, and the potential he/she presents for the mediation, localisation and adoption of strategic initiatives.

Third, it would also be beneficial to investigate the phenomenon of academic sites of practice as being essentially social organisations; displaying unique cultures, social processes and work practices. Strategic planning, from inception to document generation, offers a wonderful microcosm in which to locate, perhaps in an

ethnographic context, this research paradigm. A related potentially information-rich research area, which to my knowledge remains unexplored in the Republic of Ireland, is the existence of psychological contract dimensions to current work practices within higher education institutes.

Finally, it would appear that a longitudinal study recording organisational outcomes arising/delivered from strategic planning would also be worthy of consideration. A corollary to this would of course be an investigation of the correlation between successful strategy delivery and the leadership style exercised within a particular academic community. The difference and similarities that may be revealed by such research could well provide a useful starting point for exploring the concept of educational leadership, nationally and cross nationally.

8.6 Recommendations

The structures, functioning and legal framework governing higher education within any jurisdiction should facilitate rather than impede responses to higher education's perpetual change agenda. The current legal framework under which Institutes of Technology operate appears to create structural rigidities and fragmentation, which are non facilitative of effective strategic planning. Central to this is the legal framework governing Ireland's Institutes of Technology, principally Section 10 of the Regional Technical Colleges Act 1992 (and the amended Section 11 of the Institutes of Technology Act 2006), and the limiting role they envisage for Academic Councils in the strategic planning framework. I would argue that the current legislation must therefore be reconsidered, such that the weak federations of academics and manager-

academics are replaced by the development of new strategic planning practices, outlined in a more facilitative and inclusive legislative framework.

Second, this resultant framework should no longer merely satisfy its internal communities, policy makers and funding agencies by the mere production of a strategic plan. It must, in my opinion, go considerably beyond this. Structures at a minimum need to be specified, ensuring the cyclical planning process also involves regular monitoring and review, and the involvement of designated key professionals across the entire institute. The current legislation specifically places responsibility on the President of each institute to submit to their respective Governing Bodies a strategic development plan for the forthcoming five years. The 1992 Regional Technical Colleges Act, whilst introducing new managerial roles into the then Regional Technical Colleges, made no specific provision for a designated strategic planning role. Equally deficient is the Institutes of Technology Act 2006. What has emerged to fill this void is a cadre of senior managers working in tandem with their academic colleagues to produce a strategic planning document. The inappropriate use of consultants, without educational backgrounds but with strategic planning experiences, only serves to complicate this experience deficit and cause even greater confusion. I would argue that there is therefore a need within the current management systems for the creation of a dedicated Strategic Planning Officer role; the appointment of whom would ensure that strategic planning is subsequently seen as a critical institute-wide relevant process, as opposed to a periodic bureaucratic imposition. In this respect I would strongly support the adoption of a model similar to that employed in the Netherlands, where educational technologists are assigned to higher education institutes.

Prioritisation must also be given to the optimal means through which each institute's strategic plan become embedded in the day to day plans and operations of the respective academic units, principally schools and departments. The direction setting validity of any strategic plan is strengthened only when it is consultatively prepared, effectively communicated and operationalised. The disconnect between any institute's strategic plan and its academic staff only becomes navigable when higher level strategic priorities become translated into relevant, deliverable and supportive departmental goals. The specification of indicators and rolling plans for units must be drawn from the global strategic plan; the legitimacy of the former is essentially determined by the latter. This will only be achieved where roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and understood and point to a critical role for respective Heads of Department. A parallel requirement arising from this must be the need for the Institute of Technology sector to put in place a training and development framework for both existing and future managers.

8.7 A Proposed Framework

Systemic resistance amongst academics to current planning practices, I believe, compels the consideration of a new framework. In this section, utilising my earlier theoretical analysis and research findings, I will outline a framework for aligning academics and manager-academics in a strategic planning process and outcome context. This framework adopts the Chakravarthy and Doz (1992) depiction of strategic planning practices as comprising both administrative systems and decision processes, identifying both process and organisational design recommendations. The framework contends that academics must be accommodated in moving from a position of isolation to one of engaging with their managerial colleagues in creating a collective strategic planning

enterprise (Gumport 2001). The framework also recognises: (1) that alignment is both an essential end-state and process feature in strategic planning, and (2) that appropriately designed organisational structures facilitate strategic alignment.

Two distinct, yet related considerations, are central to the proposed framework:

- (a) Organisational Considerations: Moving Beyond Episodic to Continuous Planning.
- (b) Process Considerations: Converting “The Plan” to “Our Plan”.

8.7.1 Organisational Considerations: Moving Beyond Episodic to Continuous Planning

Interestingly in those institutes surveyed what was noticeable was the absence of a dedicated Strategic Planning Committee; organisationally visible and tasked with an investigative, assessment and advisory role. Instead what I discovered were essentially ad-hoc groups, convened every five years (ideally before the expiry of the previous plan), ostensibly tasked with the preparation of the next strategic plan and disdainfully drawing another “here we go again” retort from the academic community. Alienation and disaffection amongst academics resonate throughout my interviews, reinforcing previously cited literature; Peach (2005) cited poorly devised strategic planning frameworks as depriving higher education institutes of the opportunity to interpret their own logic, whilst Mantere and Sillince (2007) suggest differentiation opportunities are jeopardised by poorly devised frameworks. Rather than being socialised into the process of strategic planning, academics feel instead they are being coerced, reducing further the already low level of solidarity they feel with their institutions (Goffee and Jones 1998).

Reactionary and divisive strategic planning models like these, I believe, re-enforce the episodic misconception of what strategic planning is, overlooking the complexity of

higher education systems (see: Brown *et al.* 2008: globalisation; Antunes 2006: regionalisation and Europeanization; Haynal 2007: increasing accountability). For strategic planning to be a truly reflective and organisation-wide process, then I envision the establishment of a Strategic Planning Committee as a necessary pre-condition. I see this Strategic Planning Committee in terms of Janus in Roman mythology; the god of gates and doorways, gifted with an ability to see the past and the future. Given the diversity of institutional social and cultural interactions, prescribing a precise organisational accommodation for such a committee is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Earlier cited literature (see: Burgess and Strachan 1996, Ziman 2000, Bryman 2007, Barrett and Barrett 2007) has identified academics as viewing both their professional identities and work practices as being threatened by New Managerialism and Neo-Liberal perspectives. Therefore as a threshold requirement I feel this committee, its composition, role, function and visibility must recognise the broad social and professional capital within institutes, navigating between and accommodating, the narrative of Neo-Liberalism (Kezar and Eckel 2004, Giroux 2002) and the ideological concerns of faculty (Lynch 2006, De Angelis and Harvie 2007). Van der Heijden (1997) similarly extols the social process advantages of such committees; facilitating strategic conversations between academics and management.

The terms of reference of such a committee should include, amongst others:

1. Analysis of policy statements and discussion documents on higher education, and a consideration of how these might impinge on the institute, its profile and programmes.
2. Monitoring of data on enrolments and applications.
3. Consideration of broader social changes and how these might impinge globally on higher education, and more specifically the institute.

This formalisation of policy analysis will strengthen and democratise strategic planning initiatives, and helps refute the perception of the asymmetric distribution of information and power which recurred throughout my interviews. The Institutes of Technology Act (2006) requires the preparation of a strategic plan, yet makes no provision for strategic planning responsibilities: a rather anomalous position. In Chapter 3 I outlined the rational-purposive model of strategic planning (See: Slaughter and Rhoades 2004, Denman 2005), where senior managers interpret complex operating environments and then chart their organisation's future state. Encumbering Institute Presidents and their senior managers periodically with this task has evidentially not worked, and gives rise to assertions of politicised decision making. A dedicated Strategic Planning Officer role must be established within each institute, ideally with no over-lapping duties. I see two principal functions attaching to this position. First, at an institute level, the facilitation of reflection, anticipation and responsiveness through the systematic analysis of change in the institute's operating environment. Second, at the school and departmental level, liaising with faculty management to ensure connectedness between departmental strategies and those of the institute.

8.7.2 Process Considerations: Converting “The Plan” to “Our Plan”

Given my research findings a very real risk exists that bad policy and procedures across institutes may now become institutionalised. Watson and Maddison (2005:94) suggest good planning processes proceed in the context of “institutional history”. Strategic planning within Ireland's Institute of Technology sector must become a continuous reflective approach; wherein good practices are embedded throughout each institute. Differing academic and managerial agendas mean some degree of tension is inevitable. Presently this tension facilitates the detachment of the academic community from

planning practices and procedures, and must be replaced by a more constructive tension. To engender such creative tension, one maxim is imperative: strategic planning must become a collective enterprise. Central to transitioning successfully to this collective enterprise model is the role I envision for management in the proposed framework (See: Clegg 2008, Deem and Brehony 2005, Mc Conachie 2001).

The Head of Department role, I believe, must become more firmly cast in the role of both principal implementation and alignment agent. Both Bryman (2007) and Tahir (2008) advocate similar roles in earlier cited research. I envision the Head of Department as interpreting the Institute plan and then translating this into consensually derived departmental plans. Properly crafted institute plans must therefore allow the appropriate degree of developmental space for each departmental head and their academic teams. In this manner the linkage between departmental and Institute plans becomes one of mutual dependency; they effectively inform each other. Subsequently, academic ownership will arise when departmental goals are further re-enforced through both team development and personal development plans. By cascading down plans in this manner to the level of the individual academic, it will establish both the currency and relevance of the Institute's plan within the core operating unit: the academic department. I do not however subscribe to the notion of rotating Departmental Heads as a means of invigorating or challenging thinking. Indeed, my resistance here is firmly based upon my experiences of such practices in the German *Fachhochschulen*; revealing a marked reluctance on the part of departmental heads to grapple with major issues in the knowledge of their imminent return to academia.

Institute Presidents must also take upon themselves wider responsibilities, to both initiate strategic conversations within their institutes and to attempt consultatively to interpret the “complexity of context” (van der Mescht 2004) within higher education. The Strategic Planning Committee should provide an adequate opportunity for doing this, but I do not necessarily anticipate the President *de-facto* leading this committee. Where Institute Presidents locate themselves within their planning processes I feel should be informed by Chelimsky's (1982) duality perspective; they too are both actors and subjects in the process. The plan should never be construed as “their plan”; the repository of intellectual capital within higher education institutes is simultaneously too valuable and too risky to ignore. I remember quite clearly the first ever strategic plan prepared by my current employer the Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology, and the position adopted by our then President Dr Gay Corr, to a policy paper presentation; there was no top table presence, no over identification with him or his office, he was just another member of the audience, part of the institutional collective. My students in Strategy lectures are often regaled with the question posed of the Duke of Wellington as to whether or not he was great leader. His answer, an appropriate one with which to conclude this section, was simple: “show me my troops, so that I can follow them”.

8.8 Concluding Remarks

Starbuck (1982) provides a cameo with which I would like to conclude my doctoral research. He tells of a 13th century experiment by Parisian professors who were interested in whether oil would congeal if exposed to extremely cold temperatures. In classical academic fashion they decided to conduct some research, only to conclude after some time that the research question was in fact unanswerable, having failed to find anything written on this topic in the writings of Aristotle! Starbuck (op. cit.:24)

lauds these Parisians on making the correct decision, commenting wryly: “the question was unanswerable in their ideological frame of reference”. Ideological frameworks have never been far from the surface in this examination of strategic planning practices within Ireland's Institute of Technology sector. These differing frameworks, informing both academics and manager-academics beliefs and experiences, and those of higher education managers and policy agents, have been demonstrated at times to be frequently polar opposites, and only rarely convergent. Unlike our Parisian counterparts however I would not counsel the abandonment of strategic planning. My research has highlighted the increasingly complex and uncertain environment facing tertiary level providers. It has also highlighted the consequences of pernicious ideologies for the adoption of strategic planning within higher education institutes, and the necessity to navigate across and between competing ideologies. The past can no longer be assumed to be prologue. Therefore, the challenge Ireland's higher education policy makers must address is whether the existing legal frameworks, governance structures and institutional management are truly facilitative of strategic planning exercises that can advantageously position the Institute of Technology sector. The challenge facing both academics and manager-academics across the sector is to use my research, and others, to find a strategic planning approach that fits: one that is not excessively directional, covertly engineered, or overly representative of vested interests. My research findings have indicated the sense of detachment that can arise from proceeding with the current practices and procedures; creating a very distinct possibility of strategic planning processes within the Institute of Technology sector that become dispossessed of relevance. Thankfully the search for such a model will be centred within educational institutes: environments which historically have been characterised by enlightenment and creative thinking.

Appendix 1

Mr Laurence P. Elwood
14 Grangemore,
Galway.

Dear Sir/Madam,

As part of my Doctoral studies of the University of Leicester, England I will be conducting fieldwork in selected Institutes of Technology aimed primarily at researching management practices and procedures. This research, which will involve me working with an interview group comprising representatives of the various lecturing grades should take no longer than two hours and will be conducted on site at your institute.

I am therefore writing to invite you to take part in this research. I should however point out, at the outset; that;

- a) Your participation is of course entirely voluntary, and you should feel free to drop out of the process at any time you deem to be appropriate.
- b) The interview will be tape-recorded. Thereafter it is my intention to have the resultant proceedings professionally transcribed. This is done solely to allow me to access the rich data which I am hopeful will emerge from such interviews. Transcripts of these interviews can be made available to all participants and will be codified to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the process.
- c) The interview may only be conducted by me once the Ethical Guidelines for Researchers at the University of Leicester have been adhered to both in writing and to the satisfaction of my appointed supervisor(s). The required documentation and verbal assurances have both been supplied by me to the University of Leicester in this regard.

I sincerely hope that you find the purpose of this research, together with the assurances I have provided, sufficiently interesting and assuring for you to become part of the target interview group. I am proposing to visit your Institute in early June 2008, and would therefore ask you to confirm your willingness or unwillingness to partake by contacting me on email at: larry.elwood@gmit.ie, or alternatively on either of the following numbers; 091 742221(work) or 085 1766663(mobile). I look forward to hearing from you and once dates and venues have been finalised with your institute, I will provide a minimum **of seven days notice** of the arranged date, time and venue. I look forward to hearing from you, and invite you to contact me should you have any further questions or queries concerning this research.

Yours sincerely,

Appendix 2

Mr Laurence P. Elwood
14 Grangemore,
Galway.

Dear Sir/Madam,

As part of my Doctoral studies at the University of Leicester, England I will be conducting fieldwork in selected Institutes of Technology aimed primarily at researching management practices and procedures. I have already spoken with both the President of your Institute and he is agreeable to facilitating my research in your Institute. This research, which will involve me working with an interview group comprising of heads of department, heads of school and central service managers, should take no longer than two hours and will be conducted on site at your institute. I am therefore writing to invite you to take part in this research, I should however point out, at the outset; that;

1. Your participation is of course entirely voluntary, and you should feel free to drop out of the process at any time you deem to be appropriate.
2. The interview will be tape-recorded. Thereafter it is my intention to have the resultant proceedings professionally transcribed. This is done solely to allow me to access the rich data which I am hopeful will emerge from such interviews. Transcripts of these interview can be made available to all participants and will be codified to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of the process.
3. The interview may only be conducted by me once the Ethical Guidelines for Researchers at the University of Leicester have been adhered to both in writing and to the satisfaction of my appointed supervisor(s). The required documentation and verbal assurances have both been supplied by me to the University of Leicester in this regard.

I sincerely hope that you find the purpose of this research, together with the assurances I have provided, sufficiently interesting and assuring for you to become part of the target interview group. I am proposing to visit your Institute in early June 2008, and would therefore ask you to confirm your willingness or unwillingness to partake by contacting me on email at: larry.elwood@gmit.ie, or alternatively on either of the following numbers; 091 742221(work) or 085 1766663(mobile). I look forward to hearing from you and once dates and venues have been finalised with your institute, will provide a minimum **of seven days notice** of the arranged date, time and venue. I look forward to hearing from you, and invite you to contact me should you have any further questions or queries concerning this research.

Yours sincerely,

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